

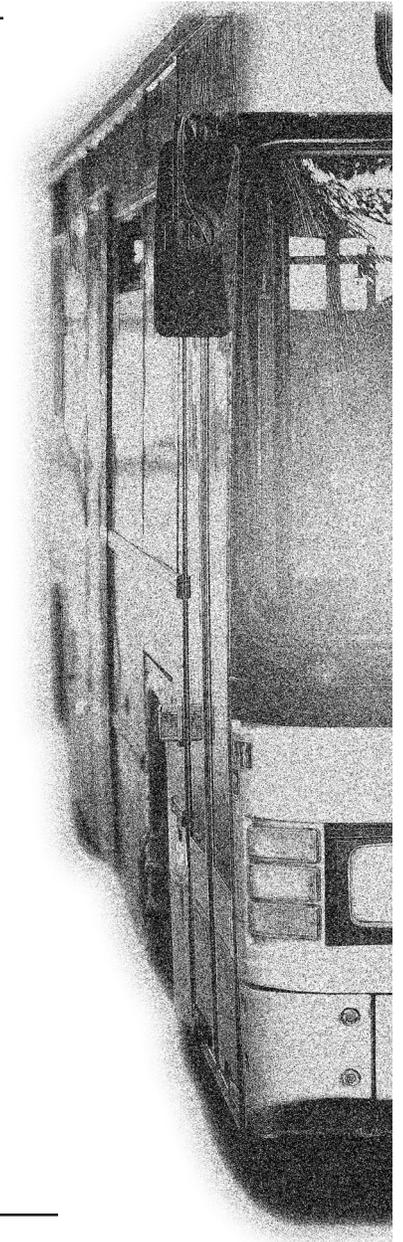
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# **TRANSIT FUNDING IN BURLINGTON**

# **GETTING OUR MOVE ON**

**PRESENTATION TO THE CITY OF  
BURLINGTON COMMITTEE OF THE  
WHOLE MEETING ON THE 2018  
BUDGET, JANUARY 18, 2018**

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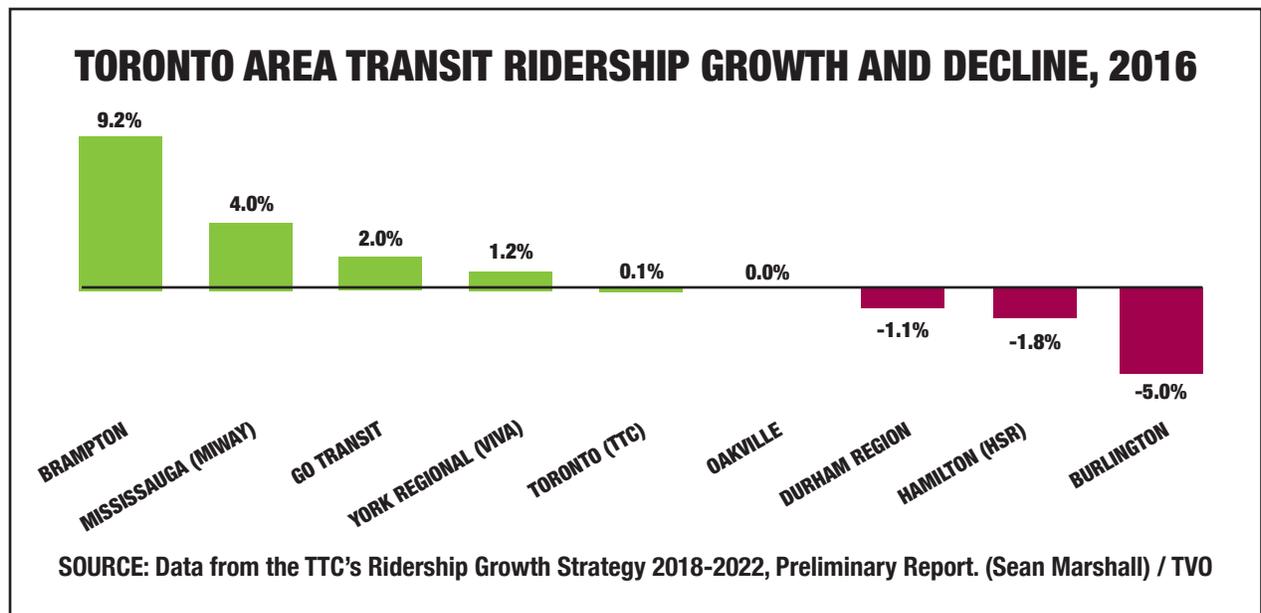
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## **TRANSIT FUNDING IN BURLINGTON: GETTING OUR MOVE ON**

**Presentation to the City of Burlington Committee of the Whole Meeting on the  
2018 Budget, January 18, 2018**

This is the sixth consecutive year that Burlington for Accessible Sustainable Transit (BFAST) has commented on the City budget. BFAST was created in 2012 in response to the City's continued under-funding of transit and the further cuts made to both the capital and operating budgets in 2013. We have watched in frustration while transit service, despite the best efforts of Burlington Transit's drivers and staff, has continued to experience a series of service cuts and fare increases.

These service cuts and fare increases have resulted in a 15% loss of ridership with a corresponding loss of fare box revenue and provincial grant money. Over the past year, as the accompanying graph shows, Burlington had by some distance the largest decline in transit ridership of any municipality in the GTA, if not Ontario. It is no coincidence that Burlington also boasts one of the lowest levels of per-capita municipal transit funding.



Throughout this period, BT staff, particularly its drivers, have tried hard to keep the system running despite the totally inadequate budget. In the case of management, continued reliance on “robbing Peter to pay Paul” tactics had lead to a dangerous

situation where labour-standards law was being broken, preventive maintenance was not being done and schedules were not being met. This was finally brought to a head when the City Manager James Ridge, new Transit Director Sue Connor and new BT financial analyst Colm Lynn outlined the system's deficiencies in great detail at a Committee of the Whole meeting on September 7, 2017.

As a result of this presentation, City Council asked BT to prepare a list of immediate corrective measures. Despite the urgency of the situation, BFAST was dismayed that the urgent funding for Burlington Transit was not provided immediately, but delayed almost four months until the new budget year. Nonetheless, BFAST is pleased to see this urgent funding has been included in the transit budget for 2018.

It is important to recognize that this new funding does not go to significant service improvements. Rather, it simply gets Burlington Transit back to the point where it can operate its fleet safely and within the law. We were disappointed to see that there are no other transit expansion measures in the budget, no firm plans, as yet, to increase service and grow ridership in the system, and no announcement of any intention to do so in future.

## **PROVINCIAL DEVELOPMENTS**

In **The Big Move**, adopted by the Metrolinx Board in 2008, 25% of funding was allocated to Greater Toronto Hamilton Area (GTHA) municipalities. Of this 25%, 15% was to support local transit improvements. This funding could have resulted in an infusion of \$300 million annually to local transit systems. Such a commitment would have resulted in large improvements to local transit.

However, this commitment has quietly disappeared from The Big Move and from the 2041 draft Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). Instead, Metrolinx is proposing to spend at least \$1.2 billion on creating 30,000 additional parking spaces at GO stations. It would be far more cost-effective to invest much, if not all, of this money in local transit.

For Burlington, this shift in strategy would mean more stress on the local road system, leading to higher maintenance costs. And it defeats the City's objective of creating mobility hubs around each GO station: huge parking lots and garages create barren zones hostile to pedestrians and are a major barrier to walkability.

Does the City have a role to play in this issue? We believe the answer is a firm yes. Citizens' advocacy groups like BFAST can play some role in speaking to policy directions, but a municipal intervention is of another order of significance. We therefore urge Council to work with the provincial government to ensure that funding for local transit to and from GO stations is not sacrificed to more and bigger parking lots.

**CONCLUSION**

We believe Burlington Council can take two immediate steps to support local transit:

- 1) Make a clear statement of intent that Council's goal is to allocate per-capita funding to Burlington Transit that measures up to the levels provided by other Ontario cities, and
- 2) That Council join BFAST and other groups in an effort to maintain the \$300 million allocated to municipal transit improvements in **The Big Move.**

All of which is respectfully submitted.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **EXCERPT FROM BFAST'S DELEGATION TO COUNCIL ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2017:**

For the past three years, BFAST has been recommending the development of a long term **transportation plan** to increase transit service. We continue to be troubled that the current Integrated Transit Mobility Study, led by Walker and Associates, is looking at transit in isolation of other transportation modes. Transportation planning cannot be done in silos. A transportation plan should look at all aspects of transportation including roads, motor vehicles, cycling, pedestrians, parking, and accessibility for all members of our community.

We know that a sound transportation plan should be based on the development of potential alternatives and that the selection of the best alternative should be based on an analysis of the economic, social, and environmental costs and benefits. This approach was used by The Region of Waterloo in the development of their long-term transportation master plan.<sup>1</sup>

When transit is looked at in isolation, there is a tendency to look only at costs versus farebox revenue, rather than including all the economic, social and environmental benefits of transit. A study commissioned by the Canadian Urban Transit Association, CUTA, determined that municipalities could make no better investment than transit. Transit investments produced economic returns of “at least 12% - probably more”<sup>2</sup>. A recent study of transit benefits in Hamilton also found very good economic returns on transit investment<sup>3</sup>.

So the question for municipalities is not whether they can afford to fund transit – but whether they can afford not to fund transit.

The transit options study is not only ignoring the overall benefits of transit, it has been based on an assumption that the transit budget cannot be increased and that all alternatives are based on the same inadequate transit budget. Mr. Walker frames this in a coverage versus ridership paradigm. His claim is that by removing service from some areas and concentrating high frequency service on just a few major routes, significant ridership gains will occur. Although he says the choice is Council's, the ridership oriented scenarios seem to be favoured over the coverage scenario.

We have the following concerns with this approach:

1. **Transit planning cannot continue to occur in a silo:** A comprehensive transportation plan provides opportunities to better design a more balanced system. Renown urban planner, Brent Toderian, told us that we must prioritize spending on pedestrian, cycling and transit over motor vehicles (roads, parking)<sup>4</sup>. A modest shift in budget priority could provide significant additional funds for transit.
2. **Transit Planning should not be a zero-sum game:** It is very clear that Burlington trails other municipalities in per capita transit funding<sup>5</sup>. Burlington should be increasing transit funding to levels of other similar communities. The ridership versus coverage trade-off with the current low budget will definitely adversely affect many of our transit users.
3. **Where's the evidence?** Is there evidence that reducing coverage to improve frequency on some major routes will actually result in a significant increase in ridership? The ridership figures from Houston, which has implemented a ridership oriented plan, have so far shown a drop in ridership<sup>6</sup>.

We do agree with Mr. Walker's statement that several years are needed to see the long-term effect. However, even if Houston ridership eventually rises, it is hard to imagine large increases (100% or more) occurring without significantly increasing the transit budget.

4. **Transformative change needed:** This limited approach will not provide the transformative changes required in our Official Plan<sup>7</sup>. Our Official Plan requires a 500% increase in ridership by 2030 (current 2% to 11% by 2031). Even to recover the 16% drop in ridership over the past 4 years will require significant new investment.
5. **An Inclusive, Accessible City:** Burlington has declared itself to be an inclusive City. Access to transportation is a key feature of an inclusive community, The City has developed a service standard<sup>6</sup> to ensure that most of its citizens have access to transit. The first requirement of a transit plan should be to meet our service standards. Once these standards are met, additional resources can be focused on the high usage routes.

On a final positive note, we are heartened by the increased cooperation BFAST has received in the past eighteen month from the City – particularly from City Manager James Ridge, former interim Burlington Transit Director Jeff Black and current Transit Director Sue Connor. We look forward to continued cooperation in the development of transit in the City.

Doug Brown, M.Sc., P.Eng

Chair, Burlington for Accessible, Sustainable Transit

**References:**

<sup>1</sup> Region of Waterloo Transportation Master Plan, 2009 [www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/regionalGovernment/.../RTMP\\_FINAL\\_REPORT\\_PDF..](http://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/regionalGovernment/.../RTMP_FINAL_REPORT_PDF..)

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Urban Transit Association, The Economic Impact of Transit Investment: A National Survey 2010. [cutaactu.ca/sites/default/.../final\\_cuta-economicbenefitsoftransit-finalreportsept2010.pdf](http://cutaactu.ca/sites/default/.../final_cuta-economicbenefitsoftransit-finalreportsept2010.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Regional and Local Economic Impacts of Local Climate Change Plans, Dr. Atif Kurbusi, Econometric Research Ltd. Presented at Hamilton Upwind Downwind Conference 2016

<sup>4</sup> Brent Toderian presentation to Burlington Council, September, 2016

<sup>5</sup> Municipal per capita spending on transit – Burlington and peer communities. Colm Lynn. Presentation to Committee of the Whole, September 07, 2017

<sup>6</sup> Ridership Report. American Public Transit Association. [www.apta.com](http://www.apta.com) > Home > Resource Library > Statistics

<sup>7</sup> Halton Regional Official Plan – ROPA 38 “172(8) To achieve a level of public transit usage that averages at least 20 per cent of all daily trips made by Halton residents by year 2031.” [www.halton.ca/planning.../plans.../haltons\\_regional\\_official\\_plan/regional\\_official\\_pl..](http://www.halton.ca/planning.../plans.../haltons_regional_official_plan/regional_official_pl..)

<sup>8</sup> Inclusive Cities – Canada – Burlington Community Voices Perspectives and Priorities. March 2005.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **“MORE TRANSIT - LESS PARKING”**

#### **BFAST’S RESPONSE TO METROLINX’S DRAFT 2041 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

In **The Big Move**, 25% of funding was to go to the Greater Toronto Hamilton area (GTHA) municipalities. Of this 25%, 15% was to support local transit improvements. This funding should have resulted in an infusion of \$300 million annually to local transit systems. Such a commitment would have resulted in large improvements to local transit.

However, this commitment has quietly disappeared from the Big Move and from the 2041 draft Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

Instead, we have more parking planned at GO stations! It looks like the first mile/last mile will be by car for most GO users.

Even using the lower parking scenario, GO will be creating 30,000 additional spaces. Using the estimate of \$40,000/space (the Clarkson parking facility cost \$40 million to create 1000 spaces) means that these additional spaces will cost will more \$1.2 Billion!

It would be far more cost effective to invest this money in local transit.

In addition, the large parking lots and parking garages surrounding suburban stations will create large barren parking zones. This will make it more difficult to develop pedestrian-friendly mobility hubs around each station.

Also, Metrolinx should be charging for parking at GO Stations. A recent study in Hamilton clearly showed that paid parking will greatly increase the transit modal share<sup>1</sup>. Metrolinx needs to review the extensive research on parking strategies carried out by Shoup et al<sup>2</sup>.

#### **REFERENCES**

<sup>1</sup> Pinder, Matt: By the Numbers: Impacts of Paid Parking at Work on Commuter Modal Share, Published July 08, 2015 in “Raise the Hammer” [https://www.raisethehammer.org/article/2647/by\\_the\\_numbers:\\_impacts\\_of\\_paid\\_parking\\_at\\_work\\_on\\_commuter\\_mod](https://www.raisethehammer.org/article/2647/by_the_numbers:_impacts_of_paid_parking_at_work_on_commuter_mod)

<sup>2</sup> Shoup, Donald: The High Cost of Free Parking: Updated Edition Paperback– Apr 1 2011