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By email:
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Re: Discussion Paper for the Next Regional Transportation Plan

Dear Ms. Salsberg,

We are writing to provide feedback on the Discussion Paper for the Next Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) released in August 2016. Our comments are specific to the active transportation components of the Discussion Paper. We appreciate the efforts of Metrolinx to review and update The Big Move, adopted in 2008, while continuing to maintain the primary goal of creating a multi-modal regional transportation system that prioritizes the movement of people over motor vehicles, and that makes walking and cycling attractive and realistic choices for most trips.

Who We Are

- The Toronto Centre for Active Transportation (TCAT) is a project of the registered charity Clean Air Partnership. TCAT's mission is to advance knowledge and evidence to build support for safe and inclusive streets for walking and cycling. TCAT was an invited member of the Ontario Ministry of Transportation's 2013 Working Group on Ontario's Cycling Strategy.
- Dr. Raktim Mitra is an Assistant Professor at the School of Urban and Regional Planning at Ryerson University and co-director of Transform: The Transportation and Land Use Planning Research Lab at Ryerson University. His teaching and research focuses on the neighbourhood environment - travel behavior - health interaction, particularly in the GGH region.

In our work together we have produced the following reports:

- *Cycling Patterns and Potential in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area* (2016). With funding from Metrolinx, TCAT and Dr. Mitra worked together on a research report that quantifies potential for cycling growth, and identifies areas with high and low cycling potential across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA).
- With funding from the Places to Grow Implementation Fund, TCAT, Dr. Mitra and Dr. Hess produced a series of publications to understand Complete Streets in the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region.



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- *Complete Streets Catalogue: Understanding Complete Streets in the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region* (2014). Using examples from 19 municipalities, the catalogue features the diversity of Complete Streets approaches across the region.
- *Complete Streets Evaluation: Understanding Complete Streets in the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region* (2015). This audit tool provides 21 performance indicators to assess the effectiveness of Complete Streets projects.
- *Complete Street Transformations in the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region* (2016). This book features nine projects from municipalities throughout the region looking at evidence from before and after changes were made to each street to determine how effective they were in meeting four key goals: 1) increasing sustainable and active transportation, 2) improving safety, 3) improving level of service for users of all modes, and 4) improving the surrounding environment.

1. Vision, Goals and Objectives

Overall, we support the vision of an integrated transportation system that offers a variety of options for getting around and makes it easy to choose walking and cycling, as the best modes of travel for reducing our environmental impact and contributing to a high quality of life.

However, the proposed consolidation of the original 13 goals into six results in some lost clarity. For example the original goals of “Transportation Choices” and “Multi-Modal Integration” are now proposed to be combined with other goals into “Connectivity, Convenience and Integration.” The clear intent of the original goals was understandable just by reading the title. The new proposed goals are much more oblique. Similarly “Active and Healthy Lifestyles” is now proposed to be combined with other goals into “Health, Comfort and Safety”. Again, the original intent was clear that we want to get people moving in an active and healthy way (i.e. walking and cycling). This is lost in the new proposed goal. While we are supportive of consolidation of goals, the new goals should provide increased, not decreased, clarity.

The 19 objectives are high-level, but overall do a good job of capturing what needs to be achieved. There is one objective we would recommend adding, under “Goal D: A Well-Planned Region”, which is to set and achieve mode share targets, and to implement an evaluation plan to monitor and measure changes over time.

2. Opportunities for better transit & transportation

The GO Regional Express Rail plan is described as a “critical catalyst” for the next RTP, including the addition of new stations. However, there are several problems with how GO stations are being developed that runs counter to the goals of the RTP. Specifically these problems are:

- 2.1 The massive free parking lots at GO stations provide both an incentive to customers to travel there by car and a disincentive to making those trips by walking and cycling. While the Discussion Paper speaks to the need to make it easier to reach stations by other modes (3.2 “All Mode Access to Stations”), there is no acknowledgement that the huge parking lots themselves may discourage the use of other modes. In fact the Discussion Paper refers to these parking facilities as an “important aspect for the systems success” and with a notable absence of regret, claims “Since 2008, parking at GO stations has grown by 19,000 spaces to a total of 72,000 spaces system-wide, making Metrolinx the largest parking provider in North America.” (3.2 “New and Existing Stations”) This emphasis on free parking facilities is a missed opportunity to encourage walking and cycling to/from GO stations, in a context where 66% of current GO users live within 5 km from a station, which is an easily walkable and/or bikeable distance (Mitra, Smith Lea, Cantello & Hanson, 2016). The negative impact of free parking on

travel behavior is well understood and is addressed further on in the report in a parking strategies section directed at municipalities with guidance to charge drivers to park in public places. “Behavioural research has shown that the provision of free or heavily discounted parking at the workplace is one of the key factors in commuters deciding to drive to work, even when transit alternatives are available.” (3.3 “Parking Strategies) We recommend that the practice of offering free parking at GO be discontinued, or at minimum, that those who arrive by other modes receive a discounted ticket price.

- 2.2 Also notably absent in 3.2 “New and Existing Stations” is the need to implement the Mobility Hub guidelines in creating attractive, convenient and safe access for people on foot and on bike, and to remove physical barriers to accessing transit stations. Particularly lacking are any specific recommendations for improved bicycle facilities. Presently, in order to accommodate the thousands of cars driving to GO, access at many stations for cyclists and pedestrians is unsafe, unpleasant and inconvenient. Our report *Cycling Patterns and Potential in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area* (Mitra, Smith Lea, et al, 2016), found 43% of GO transit riders drive to/from stations, even though 66% of them lived within 5 km of a station (an easy bike ride). Our research also found that some GO stations have a very high potential for a shift from car trips to cycling for access and egress trips; one in five (22%) of transit access/egress trips relating to the use of GO Transit could potentially be cycled. Our report provides a methodology that Metrolinx can use to identify high-priority station areas for strategic investment in improve cycling facilities. We recommend that this methodology be applied and that improved access for cycling to GO stations be provided, with an immediate focus on those stations with the highest potential for cycling.
- 2.3 A predictable portion of every regional transit capital project should be dedicated to active transportation. A good plan for how people will access transit on foot or on bicycle needs to be integrated into each and every capital transit project. For example, the GO Regional Express Rail program is a \$13.5 billion capital investment. Has any of this, and if so how much, been set aside for active transportation improvements? A clear identification of a dedicated portion to active transportation in capital transit projects was also missing from The Big Move, and is still absent. An active transportation/transit integration plan is needed along with a dedicated fund set aside for regional active transportation infrastructure expansion.

3. Opportunities for regional integration & collaboration

The bulk of the planned actions for active transportation described in section 3.3 “A Connected and Aligned Region” are directed at the municipalities or at other levels of government (e.g. MTO). While we acknowledge that development of cycling and walking networks are typically under municipal jurisdiction, Metrolinx can play an increased leadership role in this regard. Specifically:

- 3.1 There is untapped potential for increasing walking and cycling trips that is currently absent from the modeling predictions (described in 3.3 “Capturing More Short Trips” and Appendix 1 “Profile of the Region”), particularly outside of Toronto. “By 2013, walking and cycling mode shares are expected to grow within Toronto (even representing a majority of trips within downtown Toronto), but not elsewhere.” Our research (Raktim, Smith Lea et al, 2016) found that one-third of all trips in the GTHA are potentially cyclable trips. More than half (53%) of these are short trips, between 1 and 3 km in length. We also found that there is very little geographical variation for these short trips; all regional municipalities produce very high volumes of short trips that could potentially be cycled. While growth projections can be useful, they also need to be put in context with visionary goals, and with actions to achieve those goals. The growth projections are presented as inevitable, and as such they are very dismal indeed with an anticipated increase in car trips from 2.4 million trips in 2011 to 3.2 million trips in 2031. We recommend that Metrolinx provide parallel projections, based on different

scenarios that have more aggressive targets and increased capital investment, to provide incentive and hope for turning our regional transportation patterns around.

- 3.2 Encouraging municipalities to adopt active transportation plan with targets (3.3 “Improving Active Transportation Plans”) is important, so too is adopting a good *regional* active transportation plan with targets. Dedicated staff to lead the development of this regional active transportation strategy is lacking. Currently active transportation within Metrolinx is distributed into various portfolios, most notably Smart Commute.
- 3.3 We are in agreement that one of the key missing pieces in facilitating more walking and cycling is lack of safe infrastructure (3.3 “Overcoming Barriers Through Infrastructure”). Our research (Mitra, Smith Lea et al, 2016) found that only 2% of GTHA roads have bike infrastructure. We are also in agreement that “regional coordination could make active transportation more attractive to people who travel around the region and want to cycle or walk...” There needs to be more specificity on how this regional coordination will be achieved, and dedicated staff and funding set aside to facilitate it. (see 2.3 and 3.2 above)
- 3.4 We are in agreement that it is a priority to make it “easier for GO customers to connect into and out of the regional transit network – using a variety of transportation modes” and to improve “‘first-mile/last-mile’ connections at GO stations” (3.3 “Land Use Planning and Design”). However there is currently a lack of specificity within the Discussion Paper about how this issue will be tackled, and there does not seem to be a full understanding of the negative impacts of other parts of the plan on this issue. (see 2.1 and 2.2 above)
- 3.5 We are in agreement that the reduction in children walking and cycling to school “is detrimental to the health and development of young people” (3.3 “Promoting Active Travel by Children and Youth”) However, there is a lack of specificity regarding the role Metrolinx will play to address this critical issue. In the US for example, policy emphasis on capital investment in improved sidewalks and cycling facilities (through the Safe Routes to School programs) have produced positive results. Unfortunately, sustainable funding aimed at improved active transportation environments near school locations are absent in the proposed RTP. However, to address children and youths’ health and well being, the RTP can focus more broadly on their daily mobility. Our research (Mitra, Smith Lea et al, 2016) suggests that three-fourths (74%) of all trips by 11-16 years olds are less than 3 km in length, and also determined that at least 27.5% of trips to school or work by 11-16 year olds can potentially be cycled. It appears that other than for trips to/from school, the importance of active transportation to a child’s other daily activities are not adequately emphasized in the proposed RTP.
- 3.6 We are in agreement that adopting a Complete Streets policy approach (3.3 “A Complete Streets Approach”) is important for creating streets that are safer for all, particularly for vulnerable road users. It is not clear within the Discussion Paper how Metrolinx plans to incorporate this approach into the next RTP. We recommend that a Complete Streets policy approach be adopted within the next RTP.
- 3.7 We are in agreement that the Vision Zero movement (3.3 “Vision Zero”) is an important initiative to promote safety. We also believe it to be a moral imperative for all transportation plans. We recommend that the next RTP adopt the goal of achieving zero traffic fatalities and serious injuries within the GTHA.
- 3.8 We are in agreement that while there has been a focus on Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies throughout the GTHA that their “true potential has not yet been realized.” (3.3 “Increasing Effectiveness”) In the past Metrolinx has facilitated walking and cycling among children through the Active and Sustainable School Travel initiative and has played a role in school travel planning and Bike to Work and School days. However these programs, particularly the school initiatives, have not received sustained funding. We encourage Metrolinx to establish a stable funding base for promoting and facilitating walking and cycling to school.

- 3.9 We are in agreement that “the next RTP could be enhanced by creating an overarching policy framework that clarifies roles and improves coordination among all partners and stakeholders” and to help support the delivery of major infrastructure investments. (3.3 “A Look Ahead”) However, in addition to a TDM Coordinating Committee comprised of experts in programming, we suggest that Metrolinx establish a parallel regional committee dedicated to infrastructure planning and implementation, as previously recommended by TCAT in the report “The Other 25%: The Big Move & Active Transportation Investment” (Craig, 2013). While complementary, a TDM committee and an active transportation infrastructure committee have different constituencies.
- 3.10 We are in agreement that providing free parking is a key factor in commuters deciding to drive and that municipalities should find ways to reduce the impact of parking structures themselves and charge drivers to park in public places (3.3 “Parking Strategies). Additionally, we see an important role for GO Transit to play in this regard. See our recommendation above (2.1) to discontinue the policy of offering free parking, or at minimum, to provide those arriving at GO by other modes to receive a reduced ticket price.
- 3.11 A missing issue in the Discussion Paper that addresses regional equity is gender. Our research (Mitra, Smith Lea et al, 2016) found that less than 30% of cyclists in the GTHA are female. We also found that considerable geographical variability exists. For example, women constitute less than 20% of all cyclists in Durham, York, Peel and Halton, compared to 33% in Toronto. As cycling is one of the healthiest, most economical, environmentally friendly transportation options available, there is a planning imperative to understand why women more than men in the GTHA are less likely to be choosing this healthy form of transportation and how to best address this gender gap. The development of policy and evidence-based programming is needed to strategically address barriers to cycling, which are more prevalent for women. Addressing this equity issue could have a significant impact on travel behavior as our research also found that women in the GTHA make more short trips compared to men and there is a strong potential for increasing women’s cycling mode share.

4. Opportunities for new mobility

While emerging mobility options (e.g. autonomous vehicles, car-sharing, etc.) are providing some excitement about new possibilities, it is important to proceed with caution in embracing them, and to ensure that their use is regulated so that they help, not hinder, regional progress in meeting policy objectives (i.e. to reduce trips by motor vehicle and increase walking, cycling and public transit trips)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important topic.

Sincerely,



Nancy Smith Lea, Director
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