

# **COALITION OF WARD 33 COMMUNITIES**

Saturday, April 06, 2013

To: Mr. McCuaig, Metrolinx CEO  
Mr. Michael Coteau, MPP  
Ms. Shelley Carroll, Ward 33 Councillor

CC: Mr. Steve Forrester, City Planning

Dear Mr. McCuaig, Mr. Coteau and Ms. Carroll

The Coalition of Ward 33 Communities would like to thank Mr. McCuaig for the time he took on the evening of March 26 to explain to the residents of Ward 33 the future plans Metrolinx has in store for the City and for our Ward. It was heart-warming to see that something is finally being done about the atrocious state of transit and traffic in our City. We want to also thank our Councillor Shelley Carroll for organizing this meeting, and we noted that Mr. Coteau's staff was also in attendance.

From the comments that were made by the residents of Ward 33 after Mr. McCuaig's presentation, I believe it should be evident to all of you that our community is opposed to the construction of the so-called LRT in the middle of Sheppard Avenue. The reasons are numerous. They are enumerated below, with the sincere hope that Metrolinx, the Province and the City will take due note of them and will work together to make the appropriate changes to Metrolinx' plans as they relate to rapid transit. To be very clear, our community is not opposed in principle to more transit; the community is opposed to the wrong transit solution. There is still time to make the right decision on this particular segment of Metrolinx's plan before detailed planning and construction starts. We urge you to make good use of this time respite and move away from streetcars in the middle of Sheppard.

Let us first make the point that the term LRT is misleading. What we are really talking about are streetcars. These vehicles are essentially the same as the new streetcars with which the TTC will be replacing the existing fleet of streetcars (Bombardier Flexity Outlook), albeit with more cars in the train and a few minor modifications (Bombardier Flexity Freedom). These streetcars operating in the middle of Sheppard do not meet any accepted definition of what an LRT is. For starters, the R in LRT cannot mean "rapid" based on the performance of the St. Clair and Spadina "LRT". So let's not fool ourselves.

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The reasons we believe the so-called LRT is the wrong answer for Sheppard are as follows:

- Sheppard Avenue, East of the Don Valley Parkway, with 3 lanes in each direction and a middle left turn lane, is already at capacity, particularly during rush hours. We invite all three of you to come observe that by yourself at peak hours. The so-called LRT will reduce capacity by the equivalent of 2 lanes (we estimate the right of way will use 7 to 8m, out of a total width of 20m, excluding the passengers on/off stations), which will make the current traffic situation, absent any other change, absolutely untenable.
- The section of Sheppard between the DVP and Victoria Park is the subject of rezoning applications, from "employment" lands to "mixed-use" per the Ontario "intensification" strategy. This means the construction over the next few years of a very large number of high-density condominium towers fronting on Sheppard Avenue. Take the current Heron Hills development on the south east of Sheppard and the DVP and replicate it all the way east to Victoria Park (and beyond). We estimate that this will add 10,000 new residents over that stretch of Sheppard. It is foolish to assume that all of these new residents will only use transit, simply because they need to go where transit does not go, or because transit is just not practical or not fast enough. An example is parents taking their children to daycare or school and then racing to work. Another example is residents working in Markham. So the automotive traffic load on Sheppard will go up substantially, and with a reduced road capacity.
- Mr. McCuaig mentioned in his presentation that Metrolinx will maintain 3 lanes in each direction by taking away sidewalk space. If that is the case, this is at odds with the promises made by the City and the developers of the towers along Sheppard to in fact step their buildings back from the street, widen the existing sidewalks and plant trees in order to create the feel of an "avenue". Obviously that can't happen together with what Metrolinx has in mind. We subsequently learned that Metrolinx' plans are still in the embryonic stage, and that we may end up with only 2 lanes in each direction – back to the previous points.
- If bicycles lanes are added, this will further reduce the amount of room available for vehicular traffic, especially if bicycle lanes are physically separated from vehicular lanes. Without this safeguard (and reduced road capacity), the addition of bike lanes would be a safety hazard.
- An additional 10,000 new residents are very likely to have children who need to go to school. We understand that one of the schools in the neighborhood is already now at capacity. The plan for the additional children is to be directed to other schools where there is capacity. How this will be done is not clear to us. Busing? Require parents to drive them there (more traffic!)?

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- All the above points leads us to the observation that various government agencies are apparently working in silos, and not coordinating with each other, leaving the residents and taxpayers deal with the resulting mess and cost.
- Turning right or left from Sheppard is also an issue that will get worse with streetcars in the middle. In both cases, turning lanes will be required, i.e. more lane capacity. And furthermore, since the streetcars will be on a low-rise podium, the only way to turn left, is to drive to the next major intersection and do a U-turn. More congestion. This will also pose a challenge to emergency response vehicles which would not be able to make left turns to take the shortest route to the emergency location.
- In summary, streetcars in the middle of Sheppard will take away road capacity that is already now in short supply, and that would need to be expanded in the base case with the influx of another 10,000 residents. In other words the so-called LRT will not relieve congestion as claimed in your brochure.
- From a strategic perspective, streetcars on Sheppard are the wrong long-term answer. It is an expensive short-term expedient that will become obsolete on completion because of the intensification that is being planned. Intensification and a reduction of road capacity just don't make sense together. Intensification makes sense only as long as new transit is built "out of the way", either underground or elsewhere.

We are told that streetcars are the right transit solution for Sheppard Avenue because the City/the Province cannot afford the cost of a subway. Let's not be penny wise and pound foolish. Let's have the vision to build the right solution for the long-term. Recall the example of the Bloor Viaduct that was mentioned by one of the residents. From the surveys Metrolinx conducted and that Mr. McCuaig shared with us, it is evident that Toronto residents are willing to pay new taxes for transit. People are not stupid; they recognize that the transportation mess needs to be fixed and also that nothing is for free. They would be willing to do that only for the right long-term solution, not for waste. Streetcars along Sheppard are wasted money.

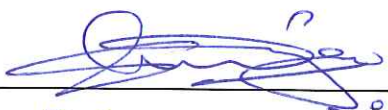
If building a complete line under Sheppard is too much to swallow financially all at once, we propose to build it in stages and spread the construction over more years, adding stations only as justified by intensification and governed by fiscal affordability. The first stage could be to extend the subway from Don Mills to Kennedy or to the Agincourt Go-Train station, and integrate it with Go-Train lines. If subway can't be justified on Sheppard on the basis of estimated traffic, then the Ward 33 residents we represent prefer to continue with the existing buses until such time as a subway line can be justified. No "LRT"


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Another suggestion is to build a true LRT in the Hydro right of way between Finch and Steeles instead of the streetcars in the middle of Finch (as per the current plan); no road capacity is lost. That line could run from Hwy 400 to the zoo with very little traffic disruption and could feed into the Finch Subway and Spadina line and Go-Train lines where appropriate.


Another observation about the Metrolinx plan, is the lack of proper integration with the Go-Train network. For example, in our ward, we have the Leslie subway station that is 300m away from the Oriole Go-Train station. Why has nothing been done to link the two? A obvious and cheap solution would be to move the Go Station 300m north to just west of the upper exit of the Leslie subway station. This will create an inter-modal connection and a true and wonderful relief line to downtown - for almost free. When one examines the Go-Train network, one can see an amazing number of integration opportunities that do not appear on the Metrolinx plan. Is this again the silo mentality at work in government agencies?

We hope you will take all of the above opinions, observations and suggestions to heart and do something about them. We expect decisions from Metrolinx, the City and the Province that are consistent with logic, with integration and with the wishes of the people affected, and we hope that you will be sharing these decisions with us in the not too distant future. We also believe that we do not need to remind you that, in the final analysis, we the taxpayers will foot the ultimate bill for Metrolinx's plans and therefore our voice must be heard.

  
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