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Backgrounder

New transit plan for Toronto

Summary of Pembina Institute analysis and recommendations

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Mayor Ford and the province have agreed on a new transit plan for Toronto, combining a revision of the provincially-funded light rail transit plan with a privately-financed Sheppard subway. This is the Pembina Institute's analysis of this proposed plan and our recommendations to improve the plan.

Key Findings

Benefits

- The plan prioritizes provincial funding to two rapid transit lines for which environmental assessments and other groundwork have been completed (under Transit City) and on which construction can begin. This means we can avoid continued delays and get on with building transit.
- The plan prioritizes Eglinton, which has the highest ridership and serves a community that has waited decades for rapid transit.
- The plan proposes light rail to replace the ageing Scarborough rapid transit, which is the more cost-effective option.

Shortcomings

- Compared to the original four LRT lines (Phase One of Transit City), the new plan:
 - brings rapid transit to less than half as many Torontonians as the former LRT plan per dollar invested;
 - serves 30 per cent fewer low-income residents despite costing 40 per cent more;
 - removes fewer vehicles from traffic congestion per dollar invested;
 - does not include Finch, currently the busiest bus route in Toronto;
 - leaves out the north-west region of Toronto, which has the highest low-income population and the poorest access to rapid transit.
- The plan leaves out a guaranteed rapid transit line for Sheppard. The Sheppard LRT (which was part of Transit City) is no longer included in the provincial budget; the private financing strategy being pursued for the line cannot guarantee success.

- Constructing the entire Eglinton line underground makes it as costly as the proposed Sheppard subway per kilometre and precludes an LRT for Finch.
- Mayor Ford’s full \$12.4 billion plan, which includes the Sheppard subway, will cost about \$4 billion more than the original LRT plan and serve 25 per cent fewer Torontonians.

The table below compares the costs and benefits of the provincially-funded portion of the new plan (“Metrolinx-City plan”) to the four LRT priority projects (Phase One of Transit City). It also presents the mayor’s larger \$12.4 billion transit plan, which includes a Sheppard subway.

| | Metrolinx-City plan | 4 LRT Priority Projects Phase One | Mayor Ford’s full plan (including Sheppard subway) |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Length (km) | 25 | 52 | 37 |
| Cost (\$2010) | \$8.2 billion | \$8.7 billion | \$12.4 billion |
| Cost/km | \$328 million | \$167 million | \$335 million |
| Torontonians served * | 216,400 | 460,000 | 339,000 |
| Low income population served | 15,500 | 33,000 | 22,700 |
| GHGs removed annually ** | 86,000-112,000 | 132,000 | 134,000-160,000 |
| Rapid transit lines | 2 Eglinton; Scarborough SRT | 4 Eglinton; Scarborough SRT; Sheppard E; Finch E | 3 Eglinton; Scarborough SRT; Sheppard (E and W) |
| Vehicles out of daily traffic ** | 50,000-80,000 | 80,000-100,000 | 90,000-130,000 |

* Within 500 metres of rapid transit

**Larger ranges for Ford’s new proposal reflect likelihood of higher ridership calculated for Eglinton fully underground

Mapping it out

Metrolinx-City plan

Cost: \$8.2 billion

Length: 25 km



The original 4 LRT Priority Projects (Phase One) funded by the province

Cost: \$8.7 billion

Length: 52 km



Mayor Ford's larger plan

Cost: \$12.4 billion

Length: 37 km

Committed provincial funds for LRT (in blue): 25 km for \$8.2 billion

Unsecured funds for Sheppard Subway (in red): 12 km for \$4.0 billion



Considerations

Reconsidering Finch West

Finch is the busiest bus route and ridership is increasing. An “express bus” will not provide adequate capacity and it will still be in traffic, blocked by traffic and blocking traffic.

A Finch LRT is the most affordable of all transit lines being proposed by the former LRT plan or the new plan. Compare the following:

- 11 kilometres Finch LRT: \$0.9 billion
- 12 kilometres Sheppard Subway: \$4.2 billion
- 19 kilometres of Eglinton underground: \$6.9 billion

Finch is the highest and fastest-growing population of low-income, immigrant, single-parent and youth populations in the city. Many of these residents cannot afford vehicles and have to travel further to find employment. They are currently the most underserved by rapid transit, and lack of transit access is a main cause of increasing poverty in these areas. Providing rapid transit would help to reverse this trend.

Rethinking surface rapid transit

With such compelling reasons to include Finch in the budget (including its cost effectiveness), the exclusion of Finch is likely a decision to exclude *any* surface rapid transit that is not fully segregated (like the SRT) from the scope of the plan.

Here are a few reasons to rethink surface LRT and re-scope the plan to include Finch:

- Underground rapid transit is appealing, but it is more than three times the cost of surface LRT to construct.
- Surface LRT also costs less to maintain, light and keep safe, secure and clean.
- Surface LRT can be built faster. Some lines could open in as little as two years, while the existing Sheppard subway extension took a decade.
- It is a myth that light rail transit increases congestion; congestion is reduced by getting more people on transit. Spreading the budget over a broader area results in greater ridership and less congestion. Per dollar invested, the new provincial plan will remove between 20 to 40 per cent fewer vehicles from congestion than Phase One of Transit City would have.
- It is also false to assume that right-of-way surface LRT always takes lanes away from cars. Except for 300 metres at the CPR bridge, the Finch LRT would not require any lanes to be removed from traffic.

Recommendations

- 1. Commence work, avoid delays, and revisit the plan and budget in four to five years.**
 - Work should commence on the 11 km of original underground for Eglinton Cross-town and the Scarborough SRT, but the plan and budget to bury the other 8 km of Eglinton should be revisited and examined in four to five years.
- 2. Re-engineer budget to include a Finch LRT.**
 - The scope of the plan should be changed to include Finch, and the budget can be re-examined and re-engineered accordingly.
 - The high cost of full Eglinton underground should be re-examined, options considered, and funds re-directed towards a Finch West line.
- 3. Examine all cost-effective options for a Sheppard rapid transit line.**
 - The City should examine all cost-effective capital and operating options for a Sheppard rapid transit line in conjunction with private investors.
 - The provincial contribution to a Sheppard subway should be held back until a comprehensive examination of options for Sheppard is conducted in consultation with the community.
- 4. Consult with the public.**
 - Conduct a broad and transparent public consultation process of the proposed plan, clearly presenting to the public what the options are, in particular the details and implications for the elements of the formerly-approved LRT transit plan that have been changed.
- 5. Let City Council decide.**
 - The final plan should be brought to City Council for approval to ensure that all Torontonians have their voices heard.