

THE TORONTO OBSERVER

Road tolls could help Toronto, transport consultants say

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Transport Futures director Marty Collier hosts the Road Pricing & Smart Growth Forum last Thursday. The transportation consultant supports charging drivers based on the roads they use, something he says will benefit drivers in the long run.

The message was clear inside the Metropolitan Hotel basement last Thursday: It's time to get things done in Toronto.

"I don't know anybody else in the world that builds plans," transportation consultant Richard Soberman said. "For many years, we did build things incrementally, then we came to a dead stop."

Transportation planners representing many countries gathered for the Road Pricing Smart Growth Forum hosted by Transport Futures. The conference focused on complex solutions for Toronto's ever-increasing gridlock.

Whether it's building a new subway line or charging tolls for highways, the panelist agreed customer satisfaction is important for growth.

"If you're going to sell something, get your story straight," says Sue Flack, managing director for McLean Hazel, a consulting company based in Edinburgh, Scotland. "(Road pricing) is very

difficult to sell politically because people don't see roads like that. They see roads as having been free in the past."

She spoke about road pricing in Europe at the conference. Flack said London's congestion charge is not a good model because of the city's uniqueness.

Her group researched traffic-solving pilot projects in the Netherlands. Examples include paying drivers three to four Euros a day for public transit use, and informing drivers the financial and environmental impact they're making. She says the Dutch pilot projects have so far seen success.

Transport Futures director Marty Collier sees long-term benefits from road pricing.

"Once people start paying for it, they're going to have more time with their families because they're getting to work on time," Collier said. "That's where road pricing comes in, to capture those costs."

New TTC chair Karen Stinz attended the conference. She says the discussions weren't surprising, as she'll prioritize customer service at TTC.

Transit plans were also a hot topic at the Smart Growth Forum.

The panelists agreed Toronto transportation projects need long-term funding. Jamie Kirkpatrick of the Toronto Environmental Alliance says the city plays financial guessing games with the provincial government.

"That's a real problem: you can't build an excellent transit system that way," he said. "We only get money from the federal government on pet projects."

Soberman compares Canada's three largest cities and their public transit history. Montreal started subway planning in 1966 and Vancouver in the 1980s. He says both cities have 72 kilometres of rapid transit (subway and other trains). Soberman says while Toronto has 69 kilometres, the city's been planning since 1948, much longer than Montreal and Vancouver.

"The history of transit planning in Toronto is littered with a wreckage of proposals," he said. "What's taken us 45 years, other guys have done it in 20 years. So there is a lot of catch up."