

The Big Move review

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

By Geordie Gordon

Working towards an updated regional transportation plan in 2017, **Metrolinx** has released a discussion [paper](#) as part of its provincially-mandated review of the 2008 regional transportation plan. Planning and transportation experts are encouraged by the directions outlined in the paper, but remain cautious as to the plans relationship with the Growth Plan and the realities of project prioritization.

Neptis executive director **Marcy Burchfield** told *NRU* that the desire to align the regional transportation plan with the Growth Plan is a positive one. This didn't happen with the current plan, as Neptis research pointed out.

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However, Burchfield said it is still not clear how the legislation governing the plans—*Metrolinx Act* and *Places to Grow Act*—interact. While the transportation plan is required to follow the Growth Plan, the relationship is not always clear. For example, she said that Neptis research has shown that only three or four of the provincial Urban Growth Centres are actually attracting growth, so they shouldn't be targets for transit investment.

"So why align your land use and transit policy around those when there are other places, like the suburban employment mega zone [around Pearson Airport] that are attracting key growth and economic activity, but they aren't actually identified in the Growth Plan. But they are huge generators of congestion, so who's following who is not necessarily clear," she said.

The Big Move Projects

Projects partially or fully operational, since 2008
 York Region VivaNext rapidways (first major segment opened 2013)
 Mississauga Transitway (first segment opened 2014)
 UP Express (opened 2015)
 GO Transit rail service expansion (on-going)

Projects currently being planned, designed or built
 Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension (planned opening late 2017)
 Eglinton Crosstown LRT (planned opening 2021)
 Finch West LRT (planned opening 2021)
 Sheppard East LRT (to be determined)

Scarborough Rapid Transit (to be determined)

Projects with full funding commitments
 GO Regional Express Rail (phased implementation 2014–2024)
 Hurontario LRT (planned opening 2022)
 Hamilton LRT (planned opening 2024)

Projects with no funding commitments but planning and design underway
 Toronto Relief Line
 Yonge North Subway Extension
 Dundas Street BRT
 Durham-Scarborough BRT

SOURCE: METROLINX

As another example, Burchfield says that the Growth Plan never conceived of Regional Express Rail service. As a result, there wasn't much emphasis on growth in the areas around the stations. These areas were slated for less than 10 per cent of overall growth between 2001 and 2011, yet they are getting huge investment and transit service over the next 10 years.

"So the Growth Plan was not even contemplating them as major focus areas for development and intensification. Instead it was the Urban Growth Centres, which, with the exception of Union Station, don't coincide with the GO stations," she said.

Similar to the prioritized transportation projects that are part of The Big Move, the updated plan will feature priority transportation projects, which will be selected as it is drafted. Consideration will be given to projects that have not yet been implemented, suggestions from provincial

SYSTEM-WIDE APPROACH

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more efficient, effective and focused in ensuring that [different areas of the city] have healthy food options and [food-related] community infrastructure.”

The strategy outlines 46 actions to improve the food system, including three priority actions that can be achieved in the next three years without additional resources. The first will create a formal and transparent process to address requests for municipal funding for community food programs. Staff intends to report back on the funding process by the end of the year.

The other two priority actions will be implemented by the end of 2017. One will tap into the success of Hamilton’s existing food sector and community organizations by facilitating the creation of food networks. The other will expand municipal marketing efforts to focus on the local food and farming sectors.

Staff also will be developing a food skills and employability program and adding food-related infrastructure such as community kitchens and community gardens in recreation centres as they are build or retro-fit. Implementation of these initiatives will likely require additional funding.

Tran said the strategy was developed to facilitate the community taking ownership of many of the actions.

“This really should be a community-owned food strategy,” said Tran. While there is an important role for the city to play, given the history of food programming and the size of the local food industry, there are other community players to move the strategy forward.

Staff will update council annually on the progress made in implementing the strategy, with a report card created every two years. [nru](#)

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and municipal stakeholders and the public, and projects identified through internal research undertaken by Metrolinx.

UofT associate professor **Matti Siemiatycki** told *NRU* that while it may not always feel like transportation projects are moving ahead, there are in fact a lot of shovels in the ground on various projects.

“When you go through the list of what has been planned and put under construction, and in some cases opened, over the last eight years, it’s quite a long list,” he said.

Siemiatycki said that there are two challenges in moving forward, one of them is how projects are prioritized in the region. He said that picking between priorities has proven to be extremely difficult, time consuming and costly.

The second challenge is how to pay for the projects. He said that while the current focus is on capital expansion, the operation and maintenance challenges faced by operators today are only going to increase.

“As we go forward, we need to have a hard look at how we prioritize and choose projects based on sound evidence, and then how we’re actually going to pay for all of this investment,

both the capital and maintenance costs,” he said.

Siemiatycki thinks that Metrolinx is looking at the right issues when considering the next generation of investment projects, such as integrating land use planning and incorporating new mobility opportunities, such as ridesharing, and other emerging technologies that have the potential to change the transportation landscape.

Stakeholder comments on the discussion paper, due by October 31, will help Metrolinx formulate an updated regional transportation plan. A draft is expected by mid-2017 and the final plan completed by end of the year. [nru](#)

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