

Time for courage in transit crossroads

City builders beyond our politicians are focused on a much-needed solution



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A key platform point for mayoralty candidates in Toronto is the public transit dilemma

By: [Bryan Tuckey](#) Special to the Star, Published on Fri Oct 10 2014

Watching this municipal election season unfold is exciting and it's peaking just as the leaves hit their heights of orange, gold and red.

We're all very interested to see who the next leaders will be at city halls across Ontario. And the 177,500 people who are employed by the building and land development industry in the GTA want to know who will represent our municipal government partners as we continue to work together to build great cities and towns.

The most important challenge that our industry focuses upon during election season is how our incoming officials can help us continue to build the homes and businesses that are needed to accommodate the 100,000 people and 50,000 jobs that arrive in the GTA every year.

That influx of people — many of them first-time home buyers and new Canadians who are looking to make their way onto the housing ladder — and jobs puts a lot of pressure on the building and development industry to meet the targets of the provincial growth plan, Places to Grow. The province wants our industry to focus on intensification around transit lines and downtown areas.

That means higher-density housing is a priority along subway, LRT and bus lines to make transit viable — to ensure that transit has sufficient ridership to meet operational costs so that our children aren't left subsidizing the transit lines we use today.

Viable transit requires a strategy that results in every platform is being busy. Ridership improves when a density plan is made that focuses on transit “for the evolution of the community.” That's what development expert Barry Lyon, of N. Barry Lyon Consulting, told us not so long ago.

Our industry is prepared to do its fair share to contribute to the transit plan that Toronto city council approves — whether it is that of mayoral candidates Olivia Chow, Doug Ford ([open Doug Ford's policard](#)) or John Tory.

We understand that growth must pay for growth, and the building industry is committed to helping the city with its long-term economic viability.

But raising funds through increased development charges cannot be the only solution. Development charges (DCs) must be reasonable and fair because they have a direct impact on the increased cost of a new home, which can price first-time buyers out of the market.

New neighbours in the GTA — the people who are buying new homes and businesses — already do their fair share, paying about \$1 billion in DCs each year.

All applicable sources of revenue must be considered, and that includes property taxes. A recent study by the Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance says that the average Toronto resident pays low property taxes compared with other Ontario cities. It also says the city relies heavily on fees and charges, which have all increased significantly over the past decade.

This trend makes it more difficult for new neighbours to find newly built homes or businesses that they can afford to purchase.

We can't take on this issue alone. We must all work together: the industry, municipal partners and the public. Toronto is at a crossroads in its transit crisis, and this is not a time for small plans — it's a time for courage when every vote counts.

Our friends at the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario have entered the transit dialogue with a four-part video series that I think you'll find educational. Visit rccao.com to see it.

I hope that you'll exercise your right to cast a ballot on Oct. 27. We're lucky we have the right to vote, and make a difference.

See you at the polls!