



Ontario Progressive Conservative election platform a good start but more needed for transit, transportation

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Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario

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VAUGHAN, ON, Nov. 27, 2017 /CNW/ - The Ontario Progressive Conservative Party deserves credit for issuing its platform in the lead-up to the June 2018 provincial election. This encourages debate on critical mobility issues, says non-partisan infrastructure advocacy group, the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance (RCCAO).

While the party is rightly concerned about traffic congestion, the PCs' "People's Guarantee" is insufficiently forward-looking. For example, there is no mention of:

- the role of ride-hailing services provided by Uber and Lyft on our road and transit systems.
- the shift from combustion engines to alternate propulsion systems.
- the growing need for new revenue tools to finance transportation systems.

RCCAO recently released its second report on how the move to automated vehicles will impact transit and congestion across Ontario. Written by systems engineer and futurist Bern Grush, "Ontario Must Prepare for Vehicle Automation: How Skilled Governance Can Influence its Outcome" proposes analytics that incorporate digital tools to manage a subsidy and pricing system, optimize distribution, and regulate social performance of commercial fleets.

Grush also predicts that advances in vehicle automation, incorporated in massive automated taxi fleets, will have significant consequences for public transit and traditional taxi systems. Consider that the Town of Innisfil chose to subsidize Uber fares for its residents rather than build a bus system. Grush says this presages jeopardy for public bus services across Ontario in the 2020s, as ride-hailing costs drop due to automation. However, rail systems should be safe from this transit shift if they are supported by government engagement with micro-transit services. For example, robo-taxis and robo-shuttles connecting riders to our rail stations.

Under the PC proposal, the TTC would be responsible only for operating heavy rail, streetcar and bus services, with provincial capital for building subways, provided there is additional

support from Ottawa. Cost-sharing arrangements for these major projects already exist, such as the soon-to-be-opened Spadina subway extension. Already, the under-construction Eglinton Crosstown is being delivered by provincial agencies Infrastructure Ontario and Metrolinx; once built, those operations will be turned over to the TTC.

RCCAO report author David Crowley, a transportation consultant and planner with 40 years of experience with the TTC and other transit agencies, reacted to the PCs' proposal: "My sense is that you leave the TTC alone as an operator of an integrated system within Toronto where the vast majority of GTA transit riders live and give it the operating and capital funds it needs to do that job better."

Currently, gas taxes provide municipalities with revenue infrastructure including roads. RCCAO-commissioned research in 2014 and 2015 by Prof. Harry Kitchen concluded that gas tax revenues have not increased in more than 20 years and are likely to decline due to an increase in fuel-efficiency, an increasing reliance on electric and hybrid vehicles and people simply driving less. In terms of mitigating congestion, he concluded that "fuel taxes to pay for transportation infrastructure is a 'second best' option when compared to road and parking pricing." While road tolls are a third rail in politics, any forward-looking party must be open to pilot projects such as the HOT lanes being studied now on the QEW.

Report author Grush adds that "Ontario could mitigate traffic congestion through the regulated deployment of driverless taxis and shuttles to become a global leader in the deployment of automated vehicles."

RCCAO encourages the Ontario PC Party to more fully investigate disruptive technologies ahead of the election.

WHAT IS RCCAO?

This labour-management construction alliance has advocated for infrastructure investment for 12 years, commissioning 46 independent, solutions-based reports to help inform decision-makers.

SOURCE Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario

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