

PART 4: TRANSIT INVESTMENT IN THE GTA

4.1 HISTORICAL TRENDS

Transit investment has not kept up with the needs of the GTA population growth over the past 25 years. The City of Toronto has generally been acknowledged as having good transit infrastructure in place. Until recently Toronto has been heralded by many with having the highest per capita transit ridership in North America, the second highest modal split in favour of transit for commuters into the downtown core (after New York) and the highest recovery from fares towards operating cost of any system in North America.

There are a number of factors that come together to explain the past success of Toronto's transit system. Toronto's densities are high by North American standards; high enough to support the type of transit infrastructure built up by the TTC. As already discussed, during the 1960's and the 1970's, as Toronto was growing there were Federal programs in place to encourage high density apartment construction in the newly developing suburban areas. As a result, Toronto's inner suburbs contain many more pockets of high density development than other North American cities.

In addition the TTC has created a system of services based on a "grid pattern" where many lines serve as feeder routes to rapid transit services, resulting in a transit web that facilitates travel from place to place without having to go to the centre, as in many other cities. It also provides regular service along arterials within easy walking distance to most of the population. This type of service, as opposed to a radial service pattern, has been identified by Australian author Paul Mees in his recently published book, *A Very Public Solution* as one of the keys to the success of the transit system in Toronto.

But perhaps most importantly, Toronto's transit system was built up and added to with a steady stream of investment that until the 1970's kept pace with population growth and the changing needs in the area. In 1976 when the last parts of the subway system in Toronto were being built, the per capita expenditure on transit infrastructure, was \$196 per person in Metropolitan Toronto in 2000 dollars. In order to match the previous level of funding (which has served Toronto very well) it would be necessary to spend \$980 million in the Toronto Region for transit in 2000, an increase of \$446 million or 83 percent higher than was actually spent. However, the funding requirements for capital infrastructure in the future are even higher. According to the report *Funding Transportation in The Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton Wentworth* to meet minimal future requirements for transit infrastructure it will be necessary to spend \$870 million, annually in 1998 dollars.²⁶



Source: Go Transit

²⁶ IBI Group and Hemson Consulting Ltd., *Funding Transportation in the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton Wentworth*, Report to the Funding Opportunities Task Force (Toronto: IBI Consulting, April 1999).

Year	Expenditure (operating plus Capital)	Expenditure (Capital)	Population	Total Expenditure per person (2000 dollars)	Capital Expenditure per person (2000 dollars)
1966 (Toronto)	\$92,040,754	\$31,885,072	1,884,842	\$669	\$232
1976 (Toronto)	\$265,800,00	\$98,100,000	2,124,291	\$530	\$196
1986 (Toronto)	\$629,300,000	\$168,300,000	2,192,721	\$444	\$119
1996 (GTA)	\$1,444,776,887	\$414,767,628	4,628,883	\$338	\$97
2000 (GTA)	\$1,667,975,541	\$533,985,271	5,009,033	\$333	\$107

Sources: TTC Annual Reports; Statistics Canada Census; Canadian Urban Transit Association. 1966, 1976, 1986 and 1996 (Toronto) figures are for Metropolitan Toronto and the TTC. 1996 and 2000 (GTA) figures are for the GTA and all transit authorities in the Region including GO.

One of the key factors in the future success of growth management initiatives across the GTA will be to at least restore the investment in transit to previous levels so that the type of transit infrastructure that allows people in the City of Toronto to travel with ease from one place to another without necessarily going through the central area, can be built throughout the GTA. In fact, given the more spread out nature of urbanization at the fringes of the GTA, somewhat higher than historical levels of investment in transit will be needed in the future. This, together with a better managed and designed pattern of development along transit corridors and in centres, as well as improvements in transportation demand management could assist in reducing, road congestion, air pollution, wasteful land consumption and improve the overall quality of life for all present and future residents of the Greater Toronto Area.

4.2 TRANSIT AND EQUITY ISSUES

Restoring investment in transit to previous levels will also improve accessibility and mobility options for those who do not own a car: the young, the elderly, low income residents and people with disabilities. Some recent studies on transit in the Greater Toronto Area reveal these links between transit availability and equity issues. Some of the population groups most affected by transit services include:

New immigrants - While the GTA has roughly 16 percent of Canada's population, it has roughly 43 percent of Canada's recent immigrants. New immigrants settle, work and attend school in areas throughout the GTA that are often not frequently serviced by transit. For new immigrants who must wait up to one year to obtain a driver's

license, and/or may not have the money to purchase and maintain a vehicle, transit is crucial for mobility.²⁷

When transit service is sporadic and hours of operation limited, a range of repercussions can take place. Recent focus groups with immigrant services organizations in the GTA uncover how, in some regions, it takes some newcomers three hours to commute to a one hour ESL class as students are assigned to schools serviced with minimal transit service. These focus groups also highlight how inadequate transit reduces job opportunities, but also curtail activities such as attending religious and social gatherings on weekends and evenings.

People with limited access to cars - Inadequate transit service affects people who cannot afford to maintain a vehicle or cannot drive due to age and/or restricted mobility. This population includes a large proportion of new immigrants, lone parent families, youth and seniors. Many affordable neighbourhoods exist in post-war, car-oriented areas where pedestrian access to education, recreational facilities and retail areas is limited. In order to participate in their communities, gain skills and access employment, transit must link lower income communities with colleges, universities, employment areas and other institutions.

People working in lower density areas – Some research reveals how employment in lower density areas contributes to long commuting times which affect quality of life. As the geography of work suburbanizes, the importance of transit access intensifies. A recent study on accommodation workers in the Greater Toronto Area reveals how accommodation workers tend to commute long distances in heavier traffic conditions and that 76.9 percent of room attendants in the GTA use public transit.²⁸ Many of these accommodation jobs are located in low density areas such as near the airport and are not frequently serviced by transit.

Similarly, employees commuting to light industrial and retail employment in lower density areas require frequent transit accessible on evenings and weekends. As one person mentioned in a focus group, “transportation needs to be really improved so that people can work in the wee hours. Early in the morning or late in the evening, it is very poor and in some areas there are factories, but there is no transportation after certain times.”²⁹

²⁷ Frisken, Francis, Immigrants and Municipal Services: Client Perspectives, A Report on Discussions With Focus Groups Composed of Multicultural Service Providers and Selected Clients in the Greater Toronto Area (Toronto: York University, 2001).

²⁸ Tufts, Steven, ‘It All Depends on Where You Live:’ Contradictions in the Mobilization of a Spatially Dispersed Hotel Workforce in Toronto”, paper presented to the 50th annual meeting of the Canadian Association of Geographers, Montreal, Quebec, June 2001.

²⁹ Frisken, Francis, Immigrants and Municipal Services: Client Perspectives, A Report on Discussions With Focus Groups Composed of Multicultural Service Providers and Selected Clients in the Greater Toronto Area (Toronto: York University, 2001).



Source: Urban Development Services, City of Toronto



Source: Oakville Economic Development Alliance Inc.

Transit availability affects how people access community services, education, recreation and employment.

Getting Around by Transit in 905

“ There is no problem for me if I want to travel to Union Station in Toronto. I simply take a local bus to the GO station and board a train. I’ll be there in under an hour. However, if I want to travel only one and half kilometres directly north, within Oakville, it will take me almost an hour.”

“Every time a new subdivision is built – each house represents possibly 2 more cars on the road so that the new homeowners can access the employment and services they need.”

Elaine Nielson Oakville Resident, GTA Transit Forum, *Who’s at The Wheel? Debating the Future of public Transit in the Greater Toronto Area*, Meeting Notes (Toronto: GTA Forum, 1999).

“Transportation needs to be really improved so that people can work in the wee hours. Early in the morning or late in the evening, its very poor...there are some areas where there are factories, but there is no transportation after certain times.”

“ If you need to take transit from Newmarket to Vaughn to Richmond Hill, you need half a day.”

“ In Peel to go from Bramalea City Centre in Brampton to Mississauga Square One takes an hour to two hours by bus. By car it takes 10 to 15 minutes.”

“ In York Region, many newcomers don’t have cars. A lot of times they have to go to a counsellor, for example, or search for a job, or go to workshops, co-op placements, or mentoring services...transportation is very necessary.”

Frances Frisken and Marcia Wallace, *Immigrants and Municipal Services: Client Perspectives* (Toronto: York University, 2001).