

HL 20.3.1

Monday, March 25, 2013

Written Submission to Toronto Board of Health Committee

Re: HL 20.3

Accelerating regional transportation in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) is a key priority for the Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance. Our 'primitive' transportation system affects us all. Whether it's as a resident, an employer or employee, a goods mover or a service provider, or a consumer, we're all impacted by transportation options every single day. Many of us have first-hand experience with a system that is inefficient and ineffective, and fails to meet the needs of our residents and businesses. This system is impacting our economic success, our quality of life, and our environmental and physical health.

Through its Your32 campaign (www.your32.com), CivicAction has been asking GTHA residents to imagine what a better transportation system would mean to them through a simple question: "What would you do with 32?" 32 represents the number of minutes, on average, that commuters in the GTHA will save if Metrolinx's *The Big Move* is funded and built over the next 25 years.

Everyone in the GTHA needs to be part of this conversation. One voice that often gets lost in this discussion is the voice of those experiencing poverty, homelessness, disability or mental health issues.

On March 18, 2013 CivicAction co-hosted a roundtable with Metrolinx, Voices from the Street, and other stakeholders to hear specifically from those who represent that missing voice. Participants recounted personal stories of their (often traumatic) experiences with public transit. Many of these stories were heartbreaking; each of them provided deep insight into the equity issues that deserve serious consideration as we move forward with funding and building the system we so urgently need.

Here are the key takeaways that came out of our roundtable discussion:

- 1) **Regardless of income or accessibility needs, people want the option to come and go when they want, based on their own schedule.** Their limited choices are largely due to the fact that many of the GTHA's transit stations are not yet fully accessible. It can be difficult to board and alight from trains and subways as the doors close too quickly for many people with mobility issues. Buses and streetcars are either inaccessible or too crowded, and many people with mobility issues find themselves subject to abuse or harassment from passengers and operators. Individuals are forced onto Wheel-Trans, which is unpredictable and requires advanced booking.
- 2) **Transit connects communities, families, and community services.** Without affordable transit options, low-income individuals are cut off from friends, family, community and opportunities. The resulting social isolation can lead to depression and other health issues.
- 3) **The opportunity cost of transit can be prohibitively expensive.** Low-income individuals are often forced to choose between feeding their families and taking public transit to job interviews, medical appointments, and social engagements. This is a choice that no one should have to make.

A number of simple suggestions were put forward to ease the affordability burden on low-income earners:

- 1) **Offer reduced fares for those on the Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works**
- 2) **Provide longer, time-based transfer windows, so multiple errands can be rolled into a single fare**
- 3) **Give tax rebates to those on social assistance**

As Pat Capponi, lead facilitator with Voices from the Street, succinctly put it, "Fare is not fair." Cities such as Ottawa and Kitchener have already implemented measures to improve access to and affordability of transit for lower income earners. There is no reason why Toronto can't do the same.

Our transportation system needs to reflect its riders. We need a system that is inclusive, accessible and equitable. We need a system that will connect communities and enhance our quality of life— not one that compounds personal challenges and further isolates marginalized groups.

About CivicAction

The Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance (CivicAction) is an independent, non-profit organization. For the past 10 years, CivicAction has brought together senior executives and rising leaders from all sectors to tackle some of our region's toughest social, economic and environmental challenges.

CivicAction sets a non-partisan agenda, builds strategic partnerships, and launches campaigns, programs and organizations that transform our region.

For more information, please visit www.civicaaction.ca

Sincerely,

'Mitzie Hunter'
Chief Executive Officer