

## Budget Deputation, Mary Blake Rose Delivered January 17, 2023, City Hall (6:00pm–9:00pm)

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the budget. My name is Mary Blake and I live in Councillor Malik's ward.

I appreciate that this budget has not been easy to prepare, and that the City faces financial pressures from every direction. I also appreciate that an unfathomable amount of work has gone into this budget, and I thank everyone for the hours upon hours they've put in. With that being said, as a resident, I'm here to share my perspective, and this budget is not what I'd hoped it would be. It's year 1 of a 4-year election cycle, and that's when I expect to see vision and ambition. In my view, this budget is not sufficiently ambitious. It does not put us on track to meet our climate target of Net Zero by 2040. It also does not have the kinds of priorities that we need to see for a city of Toronto's size and scale. In my comments today, I'll focus on transportation. I would like to highlight, though, that transportation is not an isolated issue, and neither is climate change. In particular, I would like to express my agreement with the many deputants who have spoken about the importance of affordable and supportive housing for the city's most vulnerable residents.

Regarding transportation, we're not funding the TTC enough. As the TTC showed in their budget presentation last week, the Green Bus Program has the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by over 165,000 tonnes per year. Based on what's provided for in the 2023–2032 Capital plan, we're looking at reductions of just over 30,000 tonnes per year. That means that the 10-year Capital plan provides for less than 20% of the emissions reductions we could potentially see from the Green Bus Program. That seems to me like a pretty significant missed opportunity.

More broadly, I think that the way we talk about transit is still a bit backwards. We talk about ridership levels now compared to pre-pandemic, and we talk about how office workers are only coming downtown a few days a week and that's affected ridership. The point about office workers may be true, but people do things other than commuting to offices. Simply put, Toronto has gotten too big for us to be talking about transit like it's just something people use to get to

an office downtown or if they can't afford to drive. Toronto has one of the most impressive transit systems in North America, but that's a pretty low bar, and we also have some of the continent's worst traffic. There is no number of lanes we could add to the DVP or the Gardiner to make traffic better. The only way to improve traffic flow is to make it more feasible for people to get around without cars. For a lot of people in my neighbourhood (the Entertainment District), walking, cycling, and transit are already our default modes of transportation, but that's not easy in some parts of the city. How can we reimagine transit in Toronto so more people see it as a viable first choice for getting around and not as a last resort or just a way to get downtown? These aren't the kinds of problems you solve with one budget, but this budget proposes service reductions and fare increases. These kinds of changes move us in the wrong direction.

Now, everything costs money, and I think that to pay for the capital investments we need to make to meet our climate targets and to really be the world-class city we aspire to be, we need new revenue tools. I think that the City should consider a commercial parking levy. I also think that the City should work with the other orders of government on the possibility of a municipal sales tax.

Some would say that because the City faces extraordinary challenges this year, we should be content with "good enough." I disagree. I think that the challenges Toronto faces this year make it even more apparent that as a city, we need to aim higher. I want to see not just how Toronto intends to get through the year, but how we intend to be a world leader on fighting climate change, how we intend to house the vulnerable people living in parks and on sidewalks, and how we intend to make life better for every person living in this city.