

Editorial ? What about our infrastructure?

It seems to be almost daily that we read about the infrastructure needs of our large cities, and particularly those in Toronto. We recently witnessed Premier Kathleen Wynne celebrating the completion of track-laying on the long-delayed extension of Toronto's subway into York Region and portraying it as the first step toward having a truly regional public transit system. Even now, the Province, through its Metrolinx agency, is building a crosstown LRT (light rail transit) line along Eglinton Avenue, stands committed to finance an eastward extension of the Bloor-Danforth subway to the Scarborough Town Centre and is apparently ready to finance a downtown relief line and a northward extension of the Yonge subway to Richmond Hill. These projects and others are part of a commitment by Queen's Park to spend \$120 billion on transportation infrastructure in Toronto.

But what is, or at least should be, at issue is the increasing reliance on Ontario taxpayers to pay for something that essentially benefits only Toronto and its immediate environs.

Looking at it in a slightly different way, the government announcements come at a time when housing prices in Toronto have risen about 30 per cent since 2012 and it's increasingly difficult to find a detached home anywhere in the city for less than \$1 million. The reason, the experts say, is a worsening imbalance between supply and demand, with little or no vacant land left in Toronto and Mississauga and a Greenbelt area designed to prevent the sort of urban sprawl witnessed since the Second World War. In the circumstances, spending \$120 billion on improving public transit in Toronto will obviously increase the value of suburban properties, making it even more difficult for young couples to find a starter home anywhere but in a high-rise condominium ? hardly the ideal place to be raising a family.

One consequence of the current planning will surely be an increasing exodus to the fringes of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), with homeowners commuting to Toronto from as far away as Kitchener and Peterborough.

Yet, we're hearing nothing at all from Queen's Park about improving the transportation infrastructure in these ?exurbs.?

We wonder whether any study has ever been made of the potential of policies designed to provide affordable housing and transit facilities on marginal farmlands in Dufferin and Caledon.

Ideally, we would aim to have new housing available for less than \$300,000 a unit, and commuter services that would allow breadwinners to make it to and from work in less than an hour.

That, we submit, would be possible if Metrolinx were to abandon its addiction to double-decker GO Transit trains and purchase equipment similar to that in use for the Union-Pearson (UP) Express and provide at least rush-hour service to Union Station from Orangeville, Alliston, Stouffville and Peterborough.

Such trains could make the trips to Union Station in about an hour if they provided express service through portions of the GTA that already have double-decker trains. Orangeville-area commuters bound for intermediate points in Mississauga and Toronto would have optional transfers at Brampton.

Financing such services would involve trivial costs by comparison with those now being contemplated for Toronto.

Of course, something that should happen, but won't, is a Provincially imposed property tax in Toronto to support the transit investments there. A tax of \$100 on each \$100,000 of assessed value would raise \$1,000 on a residential property worth \$1 million, and still leave the total property tax burden for Torontonians well below that already faced outside the city.

Such a measure would at least mean that a greater portion of the proposed \$120 billion in spending would be borne by those who will benefit from it.

Why won't it happen? Obviously because there are too many votes in Hogtown.