

Morrison opposed to regional gas tax idea of Metrolinx

By Bill Rea

It looks like Metrolinx is going to have some trouble selling the investment tools its recommending to finance its transportation plans in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA).

The agency announced Monday that the funding tools it's proposing includes a one per cent increase in the HST, a regional gasoline tax of five cents per litre, a business parking levy, additional development charges and high occupancy toll lanes.

The Province has to approve the implementation of these tools.

Metrolinx is the agency created by the Province to improve the coordination and integration of all modes of transportation in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). The agency has the job of implementing a long-term transportation plan for GTHA, known as The Big Move, and it's charged with the task of coming up with an investment strategy outlining how these plans are to be implemented and financed.

The Big Move is a 25-year plan that's slated to be implemented in two waves, and it's estimated the whole thing is going to cost \$50 billion.

Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones was concerned about the financial burden that the taxes would put on the motoring public, stating it's expected to add \$477 per year per car.

"I just think it's an unrealistic burden to put on Ontarians and working individuals," she commented.

She pointed out that financing The Big Move is slated to cost about \$2 billion per year, which is less than two per cent of the \$116.8 billion the government is planning to collect in taxes in 2013. She couldn't understand why the government wouldn't be able to find that money in its coffers now to deal with gridlock in the GTHA.

"We've just seen too much waste and too much abuse of government money," she said. "It's not okay to tax people more. We have to find a way to do it better."

Mayor Marolyn Morrison pointed out the gas tax is just regional instead of province-wide, and that is something she has been opposing.

"They're going to kill us," she declared. "They're going to kill local municipalities."

She pointed out it's very easy for some people in Caledon to travel outside the GTHA to buy their gas and beat the extra tax.

"It's going to be devastating for the business sector in our community," she said.

Morrison added that money is being used to deal with transportation issues in places like Barrie and Waterloo. Caledon is going to get nothing from this tax, but residents are still going to have to pay it.

"I'll be getting in touch with all the countryside mayors," she said. "We'll be having a chat about that."

"Congestion is getting worse every day," commented Metrolinx Board Chair Robert Prichard. "It's having an increasingly negative impact on both our quality of life and our region's economy. The \$16 billion of new transit being built today will deliver real results for commuters, but we cannot stand still. We need to continue to invest in The Big Move and get the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) moving again."