

Public Transportation

By SHERALYN ROMAN

Sure there are plenty of topics to talk about this week, not the least of which would be the downloading of health and child care costs from the provincial government to the municipal. Oh I know it wasn't actually called 'downloading' but you and I both know what Mr. Ford is really doing and what he really means when he says: 'My friends, we are listening to you.' (For those that don't, loosely translated it means: 'We don't give a flying fig about your opinion.')

Rather than get embroiled in a whole conversation about an under vaccinated population, lack of food safety controls and children without access to affordable daycare now running wild in the streets today I would rather talk about something a little more upbeat. Still controversial, but an area in which Caledon, our Mayor and Councilors, (as well as our neighbours to the south) are all taking the lead in terms of forward thinking. That topic is public transportation because, 'my friends,' public transportation is for the greater good and it's about time we all 'get on the bus' to support it.

I recall sitting in a public meeting many years ago when the topic of public transportation in Caledon was raised. The level of vitriol against the introduction of transit both shocked and saddened me. A dear friend stood up in defense of the move and was roundly booed. That meeting literally took place in a different century and yet here we are today still arguing about providing access to jobs, community resources, health care, food and basic needs shopping and to school, friends and family. Because that's what public transportation does folks it provides ACCESS.

Accessible and affordable public transportation provides the means for a lonely senior who is no longer able to drive, to visit the public library, do their food shopping, perhaps even visit their local church or mosque. It gives them access to health care, access to the community and to fellow seniors. Public transportation provides your teenager with access to employment opportunities. You want them to get up from the couch and stop playing video games but they don't drive and you work 'til 6pm? They are going to need a bus to get to work. Don't want to see groups of teenagers 'loitering' in public parks? Public transportation provides them a means to access not only employment but also entertainment; shopping excursions heck, if they've got a part time job and can afford it they can go to Wonderland for the day. It also serves as a means for many, many young adults to travel back and forth to colleges, trades schools and universities; higher education opportunities most of us would agree we want our children to have access to. For many families, 'going away' to school is simply not an affordable option but public transportation to school and work is.

Let's not forget about that portion of the population that is marginalized in some way. You don't want a bus in your neighbourhood but that's easy to say when you climb in to your Lexus and drive away. What about those families that don't have the luxury? Or those that have one car but have two adults and a working teenager all of whom are trying to manage school and work schedules? How about single, working parents, struggling to feed their family and who might need a little extra help at the end of the month? No car? How does one get to The Exchange to supplement their food supply? This is where Caledon is on the right track. We can do more but public transportation has been a focus of our local government for some time now and improvements and enhancements are underway. Working with our neighbours to the south, bus service is being provided in Mayfield West starting in September. Our Mayor and local Councilors are continuing to fight for GO Transit service through the Bolton corridor. Caledon Community Services provides transportation when certain criteria are met. Other forms of publicly funded (or supplemented) transportation are currently being explored as our municipal government 'thinks outside of the box' about ways to support a diverse population that is spread out over a geographically challenging 700 sq.kms.

Public transportation is a necessity. In addition to providing access, 'public transport is now a recognized urban mobility option and a solution for mitigating pollution.' A number of both European and American cities are now offering public transportation for free and locally, Brampton Transit aims to provide seniors with reduced fares (and eventually free) rides as early as 2020. Luxembourg is set to become the first country in the world to offer an entirely free public transportation system. These are towns, cities and countries that are getting it right. They recognize that the costs associated with public transportation are appropriate to be borne by communities because they serve the greater good of its inhabitants. It's about access and our municipal leaders are getting it right 'keep your feet on the gas pedal Mr. Mayor' it's for the greater good.

Sources ? In Movement and Brampton Guardian.