

From: Stinson Creative Lab
Sent: October-11-16 12:42 PM
To: clerk@hamilton.ca
Cc: Farr, Jason
Subject: A Pro LRT Message from the Stinson Creative Lab Group

Greetings, Council and Staff of the City of Hamilton,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Lee, and I am part of an arts-based, community-building collective called the Stinson Creative Lab. We are a fledgling group, spun off from our activities as community builders in the Stinson neighbourhood, but with an aim to sharing our knowledge and experience with other neighbourhoods and hub groups around the city.

However, I am not writing to you to announce our group. I am instead writing to you on the subject of Light Rail Transit in Hamilton. This is an important initiative that Metrolinx and the Province are undertaking for us; part of perhaps the most ambitious project that they are currently empowered to enact. Almost certainly the biggest change in Ontario since the Harris Administration (and amalgamation), and definitely the most progressive and hopeful provincial project I've seen in my lifetime. It stands to benefit millions of future Ontarians of all classes. We've seen an estimated population increase of over 1.1 million people in Ontario in the last ten years alone, and estimates for the next ten years show that we stand to see a boom of another 2.5 million people. Hamilton's population will be affected by this growth, approximately doubling our roughly 500,000 population by 2030. These are numbers every councillor knows or should know by now.

The same can be said for the \$3 million road deficit we are faced with, which will only get higher as we continue to patch up old roads and build new ones to accomodate runaway suburban sprawl at the expense of good intensification strategies. Everyone knows this to be the case, but few if any are currently talking about real solutions to ensure that we don't experience higher incidences of road rage brought on as traffic congestion--real or perceived--increases on roads in and out of our city. Building more roads is a proven recipe for failure in this situation. City Building experts the world over have clearly shown that the principle of Induced Demand is a real phenomenon, despite how counter-intuitive it may seem. These are not conveniently made up theories; they have real-world, proven case studies in the largest cities in the world to back them up. They show that building more roadways does not actually relieve congestion; it merely enables more drivers to drive more often. Economies tied to building roads alone are locked in a zero-sum race to the bottom, and our city is already impoverished enough without the spectre of rising road construction costs and a continually crumbling infrastructure.

Again, this is news to no one.

What is news is that there is significant fear and resistance to making real, meaningful changes, in order to properly accomodate both drivers and non-drivers in this city. Much like any other ecosystem, residents of a city must be enabled to live in balance with one another. Build a city that caters solely to cars, and only drivers will thrive. It's that simple. But it doesn't stop there. Health

outcomes, that blurry catchphrase that doesn't seem to get discussed much anymore, are still very much an issue in Hamilton, particularly in portions both in the lower city and the old mountain. Communities are forming to try to address some of the basic issues of health and safety, but it will take larger infrastructure changes, and as well, a commitment to change in the mindset of virtually everyone in our city, to ensure that the projected future needs of our growing population will be met in time.

I don't pretend to be an expert in these matters. I am just an activist and life-long resident of the lower city, who sees the signs of population growth, including gentrification and displacement, on an almost daily basis now. But that is purely anecdotal. What Metrolinx and the City Staff of Hamilton provide is coherent data and advice, and we should be heeding it, because that's what we pay them to do. It doesn't help to gainsay their expertise because it doesn't jibe with our traditional political view that more roads and more leniency for a car-centric population are good for the city. Road injuries and fatalities are on the rise, despite traffic calming measures all over the lower city. Drivers are becoming more aggressive, and every road reclaimed for Complete Streets and Safe Streets initiatives is now perceived as a 'War on Cars'. This is an untenable situation. It needs to be addressed, and the best way to do this is to educate our residents to the reality of population growth and intensification, and the very real need for a change in our attitude towards 'ownership' of the roads.

We use the bogeyman of gridlock to ward off notions of 'road diets'. Hamilton knows nothing of what real gridlock looks like, and perhaps won't for decades to come. My wife, a fellow co-founder of our group, is a native of New York City, where she watched all of the tried and true methods of traffic relief be proven flawed at best, if not disastrously wrong. The answer, particularly on the island of Manhattan, was to build a world-class transit system, and to induce road diets through parking rate increases and measures that made large surface parking unfeasible.

As well, tolls on bridges and tunnels have made it possible to afford road repair, whilst reducing the amount of overall traffic in the five boroughs, again, especially in Manhattan. Cars have not gone away. There is still black car and taxi service, buses, and delivery truck and traffic on the island, as well as what can probably be summed up generously as 'tourist' traffic, for out-of-towners who don't know how transit in NYC works.

Now, I know Hamilton is not New York City, or even the new Brooklyn, for that matter, despite news pundits' assertions. We may never grow to those levels of population density. But if these projections are correct, a city our size may well become as difficult to live, work, play, breathe and, yes, drive in, if we don't abandon failed models of city development and embrace those which modern, urban dwellers have been demanding for years.

Yes, by all means, improve and expand the HSR service. As it stands, the service is slow and infrequent on the mountain, rare or unavailable in the outer wards, and now more than ever, dangerously fast in the lower city, where 'Lead Foot Larry' drivers are seemingly being encouraged to race their way from stop to stop at ever increasing speeds, while infirm passengers rush to take the few seats available before they fall to the floor.

LRT isn't going to cure cancer (well, not directly, anyway), and it IS an expensive proposition; but it's also a necessary measure. As it stands, we won't even have to pay for it all by ourselves; we have the whole province chipping in to build it. That's a brave investment in our future that we shouldn't sniff at. In the end, it will even save us hundreds of millions of dollars in road construction we will only have to do for ourselves, anyway. The only way we really lose out here is if we say 'No', and discover down the road that we were wrong. If the last forty years of passing up similar opportunities has shown us anything, it's that we will live to regret this if we do pass on higher order transit yet again.

We have the province's assurance that the B-line LRT route will be built, no matter which government takes office in the next provincial election. This is because the majority of Ontarians see that the overall benefits of--and need for--an improved transit network is greater than any reasonable negative economic forecast.

If we as a province don't put real, modern transit solutions in place for the intensifying populations of the cities of Southern Ontario, we will begin to see real gridlock and economic downturn throughout the GTHA. This is what the experts have been telling us for a decade. Why pay the experts at all if we're not going to listen to them when they tell us what we need to know?

We have the BLAST network transit plan, which promises to reach every part of Hamilton through one means or another, but which will no doubt need more outside money to fuel its' construction by 2030; how likely do you suppose the Provincial or Federal Governments will be to endorse further spending in Hamilton if we can't manage to take this first step?

But if we work together, cities like Hamilton could flourish again, for perhaps the first time in thirty years. I would love to be able to recommend my city to all comers. But when they ask me what we have that makes Hamilton a great city to live, work, play and grow old in, I hesitate, because I know that, despite all of our amazing natural features and our resilient and real, down-to-Earth people, our infrastructure and the economy that is tied to are deteriorating at an accelerated pace. We have hotly contested new bike lanes, we have business and residential infill in the lower city and especially in our urban core, and we have comprehensive plans for safer, more pedestrian-friendly street design, but we also have more people moving here every day, and they want to know we will have real transit solutions, so they can safely leave their cars at home, and still make it to work and back on time.

Perhaps it's an alien concept to Hamiltonians, who have been betting and doubling down on the continuation of the North American auto industry, to diminishing returns, but the decrease in car ownership in the younger and oldest members of North America makes it clear: More roads for more cars are not the answer. They are at best a stopgap, and at worst, a measurable accelerant for the infrastructure problems we are faced with today.

I say all of this to deliver one message: our city is made up of living, breathing communities, many of which are struggling to get to their feet again for the first time in decades. The future success of our city depends on us being

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willing to accept the changes before us, and showing our generosity of spirit to help everyone rise with that tide of change.

This is our city. All of us must learn to share in our common strengths and resources, if we're ever going to truly be the Ambitious City again.

We can do this, and we can do it together.

All we have to do is say, "Yes".

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Lee Edward McIlmoyle,
Founding Member,
The Stinson Creative Lab