

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Letter to City Council re: electric buses and LRT

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From: Joshua Weresch <

Sent: April 26, 2019 2:01 PM

To: clerk@hamilton.ca

Subject: Letter to City Council re: electric buses and LRT

Dear City Clerk:

Please include my letter, below, in public correspondence on the next City Council meeting's agenda. I write, as a resident of Ward 7 on Anishinaabeg land.

Kindly,

Joshua Weresch

26 April 2019

Dear Mayor and City Councillors:

I write in regards to the article published in this morning's Hamilton Spectator regarding the Hamilton Street Railway's test-run of an electric bus, having begun doing so in December 2018, to add to its fleet and the implications of this article for the city's discussion regarding light-rail transit. I write, too, as an almost-daily user of public transit since beginning work as a supply-teacher for the city's public-school Board in 2011.

I would ask that the city's plan for light-rail transit (LRT) be abandoned in favour of express buses, for several reasons, environmental, economic, and social in nature.

I am in favour of the use of electric buses, instead of natural gas, as natural gas is, by and large, obtained by hydraulic fracturing, poisoning ground-water and aquifers. Electrical energy in Ontario is drawn, according to the Independent Electricity System Operator, from nuclear energy, for the most part (9,165 MW of 26,451 MW, as of 0800 EST) and the disposal of nuclear waste is still an unsolvable environmental problem; Deep Geological Repositories under Kincardine, Ontario, for example, are not a solution, thinking seven or more generations ahead. Electric buses are better, at least, as far as air pollution is concerned, as the main cause of air pollution in Hamilton is private transit's vehicular emissions, according to Environment Hamilton. Certainly, light-rail transit would use electricity, too, but buses are much more manoeuvrable.

Fraser Pollock writes an article, *With Love from Ottawa, on Raise the Hammer* (19 Oct 2018) about Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in Ottawa and includes this phrase: "The advantage of LRT is that it requires a far smaller bus fleet and, by association, fewer bus drivers." Ryan McGreal, editor of *Raise the Hammer*, argues the same, that paying for drivers is the highest cost of transit systems in his article, *BRT Is Not Just Express Buses* (19 Sep 2014). I would not want to advocate for a LRT system that, ultimately, costs unionized HSR drivers their employment. What we require is not less employment but, in fact, full employment—and Universal Basic Income and exploration of Ivan Illich's idea of useful unemployment—for all people living here on Turtle Island. Full employment is important but unionized full employment is best of all, especially under a union that fairly and democratically represents all of its members. It may be possible, and should be argued, that Metrolinx's employees unionize, too, if they've not already done so.

The \$1-billion provincial government's money that was to be dedicated to light-rail transit can be used to purchase more express buses instead of expropriating properties in service of an economic revival that will benefit only those with wealth. Express buses can also be routed around accidents and adding more articulated buses to routes already in existence would help alleviate the by-passing of passengers, especially on the 1-King route, and especially at stops where many secondary-school students are boarding. Private- and public-sector employers could also help increase ridership by offering all of their employees a subsidized transit pass, though public-sector employers may quail at the thought of including these passes in the midst of collective bargaining, as the passes could be considered a part of wages and monetary negotiations. Express buses are a realistic option for those who are using the HSR often throughout the day and would require less upheaval as far as businesses and traffic are concerned. It would be best, in my opinion, to fix the system we already have in place than to uproot it completely in favour of a light-rail transit system that may not yet be unionized (though, of course, Metrolinx could and should be), requires fewer drivers to operate, and will have to overcome significant social head-winds to remove the unfair stigma of public transit and the apparent conveniences of private transit, despite private transit's contributions to air and noise pollution and to a growing infrastructure debt through road maintenance.

(If there is to be an economy built for every single person in the city, beginning with the poorest, it has to begin with giving money taken from those with wealth, specifically those with higher net worth and taxable incomes, to those without. This can be done through the increase of Ontario Works and Disability Support Payments, establishing stricter rent controls, and the expropriation by way of eminent domain of the new condominiums and buildings throughout the city of Hamilton and their transformation, by handing them over to CityHousing Hamilton or to Indwell or to Mission Services or to another social-service organization, into public housing for the poor. It could be coupled with a cap on the salaries of public-sector executives and a progressive taxation programme that taxes property instead of income. Combining the best of the New Democratic Party's Socialist Caucus's policies with those of the Revised Platform of the Socialist Party of Ontario would be a useful contribution to our political conversations and a further development toward a society that cares for the least and poorest within its ambit.)

For these reasons, environmental, economic, and social, I would ask that the city consider simply adding more express buses to its existing HSR routes and ensuring that those express buses be articulated, especially at peak usage times in the early morning around 0700 hours and in the afternoon at about 1530-1600 hours and later. Do this instead of light-rail transit and care for those who use public transit now and stand in need of its improvement.

Thank you for your time and attention in these regards and for reading and considering my letter. I look forward to your reply and, more, your actions. Take care!

Kindly,

Joshua Weresch
