

## **Take-It or Leave-It: LRT is Hamilton's \$3.4B Opportunity**

### ***Submitted by:***

***Joseph Mancinelli*** is the International Vice President and Regional Manager for Central and Eastern Canada of the Laborers' International Union of North America

***Keanin Loomis*** is the President and CEO of the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce

It is not often you see a labour union and a chamber of commerce standing together in steadfast support, but it's the obvious course of action when your community gets a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that will create an influx of jobs and upgrade aged infrastructure that will unlock billions of dollars in additional growth through development.

Hamilton has spent 10 years and nearly \$200 million in planning for the B-Line LRT. Now, with a direct capital investment of \$3.4 billion from the federal and provincial government through a historic deal, we have the opportunity to finally get past the dithering and to dramatically alter the future of this great Canadian city.

Putting aside what has already been invested in getting to this point, current councillors are right to ensure that there will be a limited impact to the municipal taxpayer. But when you consider what contribution, if any, is required from you, the taxpayer, to support the ongoing operations and maintenance of this state-of-the-art transit corridor, it is important to contemplate what we'll get in return.

First and foremost, B-Line LRT is the first step in a Council-approved five-line, 25-year transit vision called BLAST that will see efficient transit reaching all corners of the city. The B-Line will be the spine of Hamilton's future transit system, improving local transit options and modalities, and reduce congestion. It will run on track segregated from automobiles to ensure transit times across the corridor remain consistent, even during rush hour.

Second, and of great importance in the post-COVID world, is the impact of job creation. The transformative potential of this major infrastructure investment provides 7,000 jobs for Hamilton and neighbouring municipalities, that will in turn boost our economic recovery.

Furthermore, the Hamilton LRT will completely modernize all Hamilton taxpayer-owned underground infrastructure along an important, and ancient, 14-km swath of the city. Usually out-of-sight, out-of-mind, we were reminded not too long ago just how important underground infrastructure is to the foundation and functionality of our city.

This project will also catalyze the intensification of the lower city at a time when future population projections are forcing us to contemplate expanding our urban boundary. Hamilton's Lower City can easily accommodate much of the anticipated 236,000 new residents we'll see move to this city by 2051, but we can't do so until the underground infrastructure is improved.

Finally, this is about bringing more tax revenue into the City's coffers. The growth we've already seen in the Lower City is primarily based on the promise of LRT. And it's just the start. We don't have to look much further than Kitchener-Waterloo to see the development that this type of transit unlocks. In fact, the province estimates that one dollar of investment in LRT generates seven dollars in return. Over the course of a 40-year lifespan, that's not at all unrealistic for Hamilton.

With the vast benefits provided by the LRT, it is no wonder why over the past decade there has been an overwhelming demonstration of support, not just from the Hamilton Chamber Commerce and LiUNA, but from a broad coalition of businesses, labour unions, public health professionals, environmental groups, educational institutions and many others who have the foresight to understand the impact that this higher-order, modern transportation system will have for the city, for the province and for our country.

After more than a decade of planning and politics, we are now at a very simple moment. We heard loudly and clearly from provincial Transportation Minister Caroline Mulroney and federal Infrastructure Minister Catherine McKenna that their \$3.4 billion investment deal is for the only shovel ready project that exists in Hamilton: B-Line LRT. In other words, Hamilton, this is take-it-or-leave it. There are many other communities lining up for this money.

It is time to turn the page on this conversation, get shovels in the ground and start a new chapter in realizing the community benefits of such a transformative investment.