

**Presentation to the General Issues Committee (Budget), February 6, 2023 by Edward Reece.**

Madam Mayor and members of the General Issues Committee, my name is Edward Reece.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to this meeting of the Committee.

On behalf of myself and the Council of Canadians, Hamilton chapter, of which I am a member, I would like to register our strong support for the Hamilton and District Labour Council's Care Fare Initiative.

Let me state that we strongly believe that public transit, the Hamilton Street Railway system, should be frequent, electric and free.

Free public transit would make life fairer, more affordable and more climate friendly for Hamilton residents, especially those with the lowest incomes. Making the HSR free would benefit the people who are hurting the most. It would sharply reduce inequality, cut traffic congestion and improve the local economy. Free public transit would get more cars off the road, help Hamilton to meet its climate goals, and offer a real alternative to unaffordable gas prices.

The Council of Canadians, Hamilton chapter, along with our allies in Hamilton 350 mounted a public campaign during the last municipal election to make public transit in Hamilton frequent, electric and free. Thirty candidates for office pledged to support our call for the formation of a committee of Council to examine how the City of Hamilton can make the Hamilton Street Railway frequent, electric and free.

Five of those thirty candidates were elected to Council and one of those thirty candidates was elected to the Mayor's position.

The ultimate goal of the Hamilton and District Labour Council's initiative is free public transit for everyone in the city. However, they have indicated that they are prepared to work on a graduated approach to ensure some of our community's most vulnerable people have improved access to public transit: kindergarten to grade 12 students, seniors over the age of 60, people on Ontario Works or receiving Ontario Disability Support Payments, and people with a diagnosed disability.

While it will certainly take time for Council to examine how free public transit could be implemented in Hamilton and to put it into place, we support the Hamilton and District Labour Council's approach as a measure that could have an immense impact in the nearer term.

And we hope that in the longer term a committee of Council can be established to examine how the Hamilton Street Railway can be made frequent, electric, and, most of all, free.

Thank you.