

Good afternoon Madame Chairperson and members of the LRT Subcommittee, thank you for taking the time to hear from me today.

My name is James Kemp and I wish to speak regarding the LRT and why it should be kept within Hamilton's control as much as possible. I had the opportunity to tour the Kitchener/Waterloo Grand River Transit's ION LRT in the spring of this year and receive a presentation from staff on its accessibility. I want to take a moment to appreciate the GRT's efforts to answer our questions and speak to our concerns, they are a wonderful group of people. That being said, I personally was quite dismayed by what I saw and experienced.

From the history we were given, the LRT was built before any real accessibility consultation occurred with the K/W Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC). This has resulted in millions in extra costs associated with retrofitting the stations to meet accessibility standards. Even after this effort, we found the stations to be woefully inaccessible; perhaps the retrofitting hadn't made it that far yet. We saw many problems with integrating municipal features and services with the LRT. And this project is being held up as the gold standard of the P3 model. That has me concerned greatly and I am compelled to bring those concerns forward through more direct means than I have previously.

Slide One

The ION LRT's Accessibility was built according to the AODA. As we know, the AODA is woefully inadequate in actually achieving accessibility and should be used as a starting point only. When the completed LRT was assessed, it was solely from a visually impaired standpoint. No other accessibility concerns were considered or addressed. We were told this specifically when we raised such issues with staff from the GRT.

Slide Two

I wanted to highlight the snow removal difficulty because we already have difficulty having the HSR stops cleared properly and connected to municipal snow clearing efforts. This would add another layer of complexity. All other recommendations refer to vision loss issues and we did not find them good enough for our standards.

Slide Three

Hamilton already has a very progressive urban braille strategy and design plan. While it is far from complete, it has progressed considerably and Hamilton is continuously finding ways to improve the built environment, making it more accessible and welcoming for everyone. I have a number of concerns with a private company or Metrolinx making all the decisions on a 14km corridor through the heart of our City. Intersections are of great concern as it is where two different designs potentially clash. Hamilton should have control where possible.

Slide Four

This Slide is a great example of what I was just speaking about. I have no idea what is going on here. Do you?

Slide Five

And now we get to the subject of button plates. K/W and the GRT both loved their button plates. We do not. They are terrible tactile surfaces, causing pain and unnecessary vibrations for people in mobility devices and providing an unstable surface for people with mobility or stability issues. While I recognize that the edges of the platform will have to have some button plating, it should be as small as possible. A comparison for button plates is the edges of the highway that have been given a rough texture. They should be used as a warning of immediate danger only because they are quite violent; you know when you've crossed that line and it wakes you up. In most cases, textured concrete is the far better method of tactile marking. It alerts people to the danger quite effectively and is by far less violent. Button plates do not provide adequate guidelines.

Slide Six

This slide is just highlighting our concern about outsiders making decisions that affect us. While they supposedly have a Metrolinx AAC, I have no knowledge of any one from Hamilton serving on it (I applied and got no response). As I have already indicated, not all AACs are the same. How does the ACPD raise issues to Metrolinx? Can we have some sort of combined working group or task force to handle such issues before they arise or it is built? Taking over control after ten years still leaves us with ten years of rule from afar.

Slide Seven

This Slide is another example of the inaccessibility of the platforms. Almost invisible obstructions are confining the passageway and blocking safe access. While this was flagged as an issue, it still remains because to fix it would require a major overhaul of the station design. This should have been caught on the Launchpad.

Slide Eight

This slide highlights other accessibility issues we found, The kiosk's accessibility could not be tested, but it has poor colour contrast. The bus shelter is practically invisible, our tester had to feel along the walls to get inside. The hand rails are also practically invisible. No tactile wayfinding other than button plates.

Slide Nine

We asked how far one had to travel to get to the nearest bus stop and one of our hosts was kind enough to demonstrate. The distance from the LRT station to the next bus stop was enormous. This is not a safe or accessible design without benches and rest points along the way. People using rollators or walkers often find every step an agony and we must take that into account when putting the LRT in the centre of the city. I was also concerned about the minimal tactile warning of danger considering the vast use of button plates everywhere else; this is where it belongs.

Slide Ten

While we didn't get much chance to really put the train itself through its paces, I did point out a few issues of concern. I found out about the turning section of the train because I had accidentally parked on it on the way back. My powerchair began moving on its own and I had a moment of panic. It should be much clearer. The button to open the door was also an issue. It is too small and requires people to basically rub the walls to find it. Should be a wave sensor and should be a different colour contrast. Red is terrible for contrast. To be completely honest, while I didn't enjoy the process of getting on and off the station, I did enjoy the smooth train ride.

We are fully aware of the accessibility issues Toronto is having with Metrolinx. People with disabilities are still having issues with the HSR and feel helpless to affect change over a local municipal transit provider, let alone raise issues with a provincial one. I implore you to consider retaining

as much control over the LRT as possible. While it takes a more steady hand and more work, we can ensure it is the crown jewel of the golden horseshoe and not an albatross around our neck. I am willing to do whatever is required of me to achieve that end. I hope you are too.

Thank you for your time and attention!