



# WARREN : A better transit plan for Ford

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**BY R. MICHAEL WARREN**

This year, expect a battle royale between the province and the City of Toronto over Premier Ford's ill-advised plan to upload the TTC's subway system.

Both sides will spend carloads of political capital arguing about a move that will do little to enhance the use of transit.

Instead, Ford should look beyond this upload bromide to more important governance reforms that are long overdue. He has a chance to lead changes that would actually curb congestion and help the environment.

In the 1980's, Metro Toronto was the eleventh largest municipality in North America, but enjoyed the third largest annual transit ridership, exceeded only by Chicago and New York.

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The ridership-per-capita was the best on the continent. The system raised 75% of its operational funding from the fare box. The TTC was a model system.

This performance level had many mothers: consistent capital and operating financial support from Queens Park. Professional transit staff identified the most cost-effective system expansion priorities and implemented them.

There was some political meandering, but nothing like recent years. Over the last decade and a half, we've had three provincial governments and three Toronto mayors all with dramatically different rapid transit plans — each taking years to build.

During the 1980's, the TTC acted as the single regional provider of all aspects of transit within Metro Toronto.

It planned, partially funded, built and operated an integrated system of buses, streetcars and subways.

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This regional role was a key factor in the TTC's success during that period.

Today there are ten different transit fiefdoms across the Greater Toronto Area, all with different plans and responding to local political

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directions.

TTC ridership has flatlined since 2014.

Established in 2006, the provincial agency intended to coordinate transit services across the GTA, Metrolinx, has strived to deliver on a mandate of “To get you there better, faster, easier” — with limited success.

They are investing tens of billions of dollars on rapid transit projects across the GTA without the authority needed to make the resulting network truly integrated and car competitive.

As a result, congestion is still growing.

The car is still omnipresent.

Metrolinx cannot improve rider experience across an area like the GTA with ten largely autonomous, local transit fiefdoms, each delivering different levels of service and competing for funding.

Regional transit authorities are not a new idea — just look at the Massachusetts Bay Area, Chicago, Washington, D.C. or New York City.

The Toronto Regional Board of Trade has called for the creation of a “Superlinx” transit authority for the Toronto region, to centralize planning, funding and decision making for fast-track expansion. This uploading would include all assets, liabilities, planning, fares and real estate development.

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In addition to making Metrolinx a fully-formed regional transit authority, there are two “inconvenient transit truth” that must be faced:

First, the rider experience across the whole region must be more car-competitive: easy to access, fast, reliable and affordable.

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Second, motorists need to be charged the full cost of using the roads, with the proceeds directly funding future rapid transit infrastructure.

The massive infrastructure investments being made by Metrolinx and local municipalities will not alone move people out of cars. The overall value proposition has to be made to favour transit.

This has been successfully demonstrated in jurisdictions that have coupled inner-city parking fees, tolls and other road-pricing initiatives with constantly expanded mass transit facilities.

The GTA competes with other North America and offshore regions for investment, entrepreneurs and tourists. Moving people and goods effectively is a key factor in our regional competitiveness.

Premier Ford knows the current transit governance model isn't working. Uploading the subway alone is not the answer. He needs to go further.

Much further.

— *R. Michael Warren is a former corporate director, Ontario deputy minister, TTC chief general manager and Canada Post CEO.*

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