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THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS  
IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

By

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A Major Research Paper  
presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Planning  
in  
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
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### ABSTRACT

Politicians in the Greater Toronto region have announced major regional and local transit infrastructure investments in recent years. While benefits of enhanced facilities are recognized, experts interviewed assert that projects were identified and justified more predominantly by political preferences, and rarely on objective, expert evidence; while the public also become frustrated with the inability to provide feedback, as well as to witness the delivery of results. Given limitations in funding and attractiveness of alternative funding tools and structures of governance, experts advocate honest, open examination of all feasible ways to plan, implement and deliver transit. In the end, the resulting structure must be effective, progressive and responsive to changing needs. For Toronto, these include improving customer service, facilities, funding and labour management.

*Keywords:* political economy, governance, decision making, mass transit, infrastructure,  
Toronto, Greater Toronto Area

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All errors, of course, are my own.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS  
IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA



# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

## **Dedication**

This Master's Research Paper is dedicated to the Campus for Christ student ministry at Ryerson University. Their unwavering support, prayers, and spiritual mentorship have helped me go through the good and the hard times during my graduate career.

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

## Table of Contents

Author's Declaration	iii
Abstract	v
Acknowledgements	vii
Dedication	ix
Table of Contents	xi
List of Figures	xiii
Chapter 1 – Introduction	1
The inspiration and urgency to act	1
The concepts of political economy and governance	1
The Greater Toronto context	3
The research questions	4
This paper	5
Chapter 2 – Literature Review	7
Literature on identification and justification	7
Literature on implementation and operations	10
Chapter 3 – Methods	13
Expert panel interview	13
Selection of experts	13
Survey design, procedure and ethics	14
Chapter 4 – Results	17

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

Identification and justification questions	17
Implementation questions	21
Operations and governance questions	29
Chapter 5 – Discussions	39
Identification and justification	39
Implementation	40
Operations and governance	45
Chapter 6 – Recommendations	49
To GO Transit and Metrolinx	49
To TTC and City of Toronto	50
Chapter 7 – Conclusions	53
References	57
Appendix	61
Interview Package	61

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

## List of Figures

- Figure 1      Factors affecting selection of mode and scale of service implemented
- Figure 2      Advantages or challenges associated with present plans and investments in transit,  
breakdown of number of experts presenting each view.
- Figure 3      Adequate education or feedback prior to official decision or commitment by  
Government
- Figure 4      Opinions about current funding sources and potential applicability of alternative  
funding mechanisms
- Figure 5      What areas of attention or improvement is required for long term success,  
efficiency and responsiveness to current and emerging needs of GO Transit and  
the TTC?

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS  
IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

### **The inspiration and the urgency to act**

The decision to improve or expand mass transit infrastructure comes with several implications. To begin, the extent of infrastructure affects how local residents and visitors travel between city-regions and access jobs, housing and leisure opportunities. In addition, the existence of infrastructure also plays a critical role in shaping the built environment and growth patterns of cities. Despite these positive externalities, transit infrastructure remains in our communities for a long period of time; and the implementation of transit projects can become financially, politically, socially, and environmentally costly to decision makers, taxpayers and society-in-general. As a result, debates about proposed plans and investments are often cast into the spotlight by politicians, media, equipment manufacturers, and special interest groups; where audiences pack into council chambers, community centres, and university halls? to voice their approval or displeasure. Generally, these debates work to engage various audiences, and works to inform them of where the transit lines are planned, how often their buses would come, and whether their travel times would improve. While well-discussed in literatures, deeper issues, such as governance structures, which are organizationally complex; as well as infrastructure investment decisions, which are politically charged, are rarely examined in Canadian academic context, as well as internalized or appreciated by Canadian decision makers. Thus, there is an urgent need to unpack these deeper issues, and to provide a useful interpretation and response to the prevailing political economy and governance matters surrounding mass transit infrastructure investments. It is the intention of this paper to do just that.

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

## The concepts of political economy and governance

Before I put these matters into the context of my research setting (the Greater Toronto Area, or GTA, for short); as well as present my research questions, I would like to offer the reader some definitions on easily misunderstood terms – *political economy*, and *governance*. By explaining these at the onset, I hope to reduce confusion as to ‘what I mean’, and also to address the multiple interpretations and understandings that exist in the public domain.

*Political economy* emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a term that described the production of goods and services, as well as the act of buying and selling, in the context of their relationship with established rules and policies of the state. It also included the process of budgeting, matters concerning income and wealth. Today, the definition incorporates the effects political forces have on policy establishment, selection, and execution.

*Governance* refers to the “*plurality of coexisting networks and partnerships*” that deliver and implement goods and services<sup>1</sup>. Although the application of these networks and partnerships may differ between institutions, commonly subscribed to models of governance include the public model and the private model. Increasingly, the public-private partnership model has become popular in discourse, and its application in traditionally public contexts has emerged. Generally speaking, the differences between these arrangements are premised on how

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<sup>1</sup> See Savitch and Vogel, 2000 in Alpert, et al 2006; Hubbard, Kitchin, Bartley and Fuller, 2002 in Martin, et. al, 2003; also Ward, 2000 and Brenner and Theodore, 2002 in Martin et. al, 2003.



## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

participating agencies answer the questions of who, what, when, where, why, and how a good or service is realized.

While this paper is not a critique of which is better, the outlining of these definitions will help clarify these commonly misunderstood terms; as well as set the stage for discussing their current and potential application for mass transit infrastructure investments in the GTA.

### **The Greater Toronto context**

The Greater Toronto Area is in the midst of major provincial-regional and local mass transit infrastructure investments. At the provincial-regional level, the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, or Metrolinx, is leading the charge in the planning and implementation of *The Big Move*, the region's long-range vision, strategy and plan for coordinated transportation services. This Plan advocates for the addition of 1,200 kilometres of new rapid transit services, with the ultimate goal of facilitating movement of current and forecasted populations that live, work, and play in Canada's largest urban region (Metrolinx, 2008). To date, C \$11.5-billion in initial funding has been committed by the Ontario government (Metrolinx, 2008), setting the stage for the commencement of engineering studies and environmental assessments, materials procurement, and construction of 15 'priority' projects (Metrolinx, 2010). Key projects currently underway include the subway extension to Vaughan Corporate Centre (now Vaughan Metropolitan Centre) via York University, Highway 403 busway in Mississauga, Pearson-Union Air Rail Link, as well as refurbishments to Downtown Toronto's Union Station (Metrolinx, 2010).

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

The City of Toronto also demonstrated its ambition towards mass transit investments. Championed by past-Mayor David Miller and then-Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) Chair Adam Giambrone, the *Transit City* Plan envisioned the construction of seven new light rail transit (LRT) routes along ‘key corridors’ of Toronto, with particular emphasis on connecting inner communities with each other, as well as the downtown (TTC, 2010). Prior to the election of Mayor Rob Ford, four of the seven LRT lines had been approved by the province (TTC, 2010). Like other regional projects, some studies were underway and orders for rolling stock were concluded (TTC, 2010). With the arrival of Ford, who saw Toronto’s transportation needs in a different sense, he ‘cancelled’ *Transit City*, and diverted staff resources to investigate the feasibility of subways to implement his Transportation City platform (Toronto Star, 2010). It is uncertain, at this time, whether any elements of *Transit City* will come to fruition. While details of Mayor Ford’s vision remain scant, and given the implications associated with the soon-to-be provincial election, the threat of uncertainty again surrounds the financial, political, social, and environmental viability of his Transportation City vision.

## **The research questions**

The aforementioned context briefly illustrates the pungent effect of political forces in the establishment, selection, and execution of infrastructure investment policies. Particularly, that political and various allied outfits have consistently argued that the expansion of mass transit facilities will bring about enhanced mobility for citizens, as well as improved efficiency for the system concerned. While these notions can hold true, questions with respect to how the scale

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

and the elements of the proposed plans were identified, whether and how investments were justified, and whether or not decision makers were advised of the issues, barriers, and risks associated with large-scale infrastructure projects prior to official commitment are quickly emerging. Moreover, the issues of governance and post-implementation operations of transit facilities also appear neglected or hampered in recent debates. Thus, further investigation here will be beneficial.

### **This paper**

The outcomes of this paper should be engaging to government officials and decision makers, as it explores many inherent pressures and issues that affect infrastructure planning of today, and presents alternatives and opportunity to ‘think differently’ about current practices. Moreover, this research may appeal to professionals and academics in urban planning, transportation planning, engineering, political science, and economics, primarily to advance ideas, stir debate, and identify new ‘battling grounds’. The public may also find the justification, implementation, and operations aspects of this research to be informative, particularly as the transparency of public investments and decision making become increasingly and openly scrutinized in the modern day western context.

This paper begins with a review of relevant literature (Chapter two), as well as a description of research methodologies (Chapter three). This is followed by a presentation of results obtained through expert panel interviews (Chapter four). Next, results and key themes formed the basis for Chapter five. While taking into consideration the discussions and thoughts

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

from Chapter five, Chapter six presents the reader with local and regional recommendations, as it pertains to infrastructure investments and decision making in the Greater Toronto Area. Chapter seven will conclude with some final thoughts, as well as directions for future study.

## **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

The literature explored for this research provided much of the theoretical basis for understanding how infrastructure investments are identified and justified, as well how they are implemented and operated. Given the multidisciplinary nature of the subject matter, literatures were sourced primarily from referred journals and texts in the fields of engineering, planning, urban affairs, and political science. Moreover, studies from the consulting and advocacy communities were examined. All together, this review will serve as a useful survey of previous investigations, as well as a device to contextualize and interpret the real-world findings and discussions located in Chapters four and five.

### **Literature on identification and justification**

Literature that discusses the identification and justification process for investments in mass transit infrastructure has traditionally emerged from the field of engineering, where the identification of routes, facilities, technologies, and levels of service was a matter of modelling and forecasting needs, risks and financial costs. Relying on a variety of socioeconomic and technical variables, the earlier literature relied primarily on the four-step transportation planning process, beginning with trip generation, trip distribution, mode choice, and route assignment to identify and justify investments (Hanson and Giuliano 2003). Recent literatures have grown to include activity-based models, tour-based models, and reference-class models where their more comprehensive and referential nature have been instrumental in helping decision makers and planners make stronger, more accurate infrastructure investment decisions (Roodra, Passmore,

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

and Miller 2009; Flyvbjerg 2008). Despite the benefits of the aforementioned models, the influence and popularization of regional planning, coupled with realization of the intimate linkages between land use and transportation also brought about yet another modelling alternative -- integrated land use-transportation planning models (i.e. Garin-Lowry, Empiric etc) which were popular in the 1960s-1970s. In the Toronto context, Professor Eric Miller and his collaborators have developed the integrated land use and transportation evaluation model (ILUTE) (Hatzopoulou and Miller 2009). Irrespective of one's chosen model, the literature reviewed in this study has found that in most cases, subject cities (in those literature) had relied upon some form of modelling as a means to obtain data to justify capital investments, as well as any operating subsidies that may be required (see Elgar and Kennedy 2005).

While mathematic modelling continues to play a substantive role in providing technical justification for investments in transit infrastructure, the public and visible nature of investments have also placed public opinion and political motivation as another contributor to the identification and justification process. Literature that elaborates on these contributors include Siemiatycki's (2005) articles, entitled *Beyond Moving People: excavating the motivations for investing in urban public transit in Bilbao, Spain*, and *The Making of a Mega Project in the Neo-Liberal City* presents ground-breaking discussion on the notions of 'official and unofficial stories', 'power politics', 'bureaucratic roles', and 'finance and leadership connections'. Likewise, Kain's (1999) re-examination of *the urban transportation problem* revealed concerns with 'ethical honesty', particularly, the growing 'culture' of excessive optimism or overestimation of ridership numbers, as well as underestimation of infrastructure costs exist as a

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

means to justify investment (Berryhill and Butler 1983; Hamer 1976; HFA 1989; Kain 1990, 1992; Pickrell 1989; and Wachs 1990 in Kain, 1999; and Flyvbjerg 2008).

Beyond these, Babalik-Sutcliffe's (2002) article entitled *Urban Rail Systems: analysis of factors behind success* outlines several internal and external factors that affect decision making, and consequently influence the success of the investment. Some of these, presumably, could be arguments derived from "*downtown and construction related businesses, transit and labour unions, environmentalists, good-government organizations, advocates for the poor, and a variety of others who perceive transit as a way of reconciling development, equity, and amenity goals*" (Altshuler and Luberoff 2003, p. 217). Moreover, green technologies have introduced 'yet another thing' for decision makers to consider as they identify and justify investments in mass transit infrastructure (see Kilcarr, 2005).

Finally, the fields of political science and public administration have also contributed useful literature to the identification and justification process. Perhaps the strongest contribution in this regard is the article by Meyer and Miller (2001), entitled *Transportation planning and decision making*. The authors not only presented a historical context for decision making in transit, but concisely advanced five major conceptual approaches (*rational actor, satisficing, incremental, organizational process, and political bargaining*), their constituent properties (*pluralistic, resource allocative, consensus building, problem simplifying, and uncertainty avoiding*), as well as responsibilities that decision makers and transportation planners have in planning facilities and services for the future (*establishing context, responding to different scales of analysis, expanding the problem definition, maintaining flexibility, providing feedback,*

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

*relating to budget and programmatic processes, and providing opportunities for public involvement).*

## **Literature on implementation and operations**

Literature that pertains to the implementation, operations and governance aspects of mass transit investments are few in general, and especially rare in the Canadian context. To date, much of the discussion has focused on protecting scarce resources and our environment, ensuring value-for-money to the taxpayer and stakeholders, as well as supporting local needs and preferences (the triple-bottom line of environment, economy, and society). The most relevant piece in this regard is that by Kennedy, Miller, Shalaby, MacLean, and Coleman (2005), entitled *The Four Pillars of Sustainable Urban Transportation*. There, the authors discussed the realities and complexities that surround the implementation of an effective system of land use and transportation governance (*similar to* Hatzopoulou and Miller 2009, regarding ILUTE; *see also* Soberman et. al. 2006, Soberman 2010); a fair, efficient, and stable source of funding (*see also* Toronto Board of Trade 2010, regarding report on 16 funding tools; Soberman et. al. 2006; Soberman 2010); a strategic investment plan for infrastructure (*see also* Metrolinx, regarding *The Big Move*); as well as attention to neighbourhood design and preferences (*see also* The City of Toronto Official Plan; regarding Avenues, Growth Centres) (Kennedy et. al. 2005, see p. 395).

The implementation of mass transit infrastructure has also been viewed in the literature as an economic recovery and systems-stabilizing tool (*see* Sanford 2009). Spanning from “*Beijing to Brasilia*”, economic stimuli in the form of expansions and new facilities in mass transit have



## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

been launched with much fanfare. Aside from improving personal mobility, Sanford (2009) argues that investments can also create jobs as well as business for Canadian firms, as well as address longer-term challenges like Canada's \$123-billion municipal infrastructure backlog. Sanford (2009) also views that strategic investments in transit can also facilitate the development of a more resilient and efficient economic system.

A range of governance models have also been presented in the literature. These include privatization and public-private partnerships, as well as alternative public structures (*see* Barker 2008 on Crown Corporations). To begin, the literature has examined where privatization has succeeded in Hong Kong (Tang and Lo 2010), evaluated the performance and costs of privatization in an urban and regional context (Leland and Smirnova 2009; Cho and Fan 2007; Karlaifis, Wasson, and Steadham 1997; and Perry and Babitsky 1986), and has reviewed the implications of contracting out on labour protections (Luger and Goldstein 1989). For public-private partnerships, the most relevant Canadian information could be obtained from the Canadian Council of Public Private Partnerships, followed by the Federal Government through Public Private Partnerships Canada. Academic literature also exists, and focuses primarily on the characteristics, benefits, and shortcomings of these partnerships. Important thinkers that have contributed research in this area include Barker (2008), Alpert (2006), Cigler (2001), Saxenian (1994), and Powell (1990). In terms of continued public operations, literature such as Barker (2008), as well as Wachs (in Hanson and Guiliano 2003) charts out the roles and responsibilities for public actors in the transportation planning, decision making, and implementation process. Specifically, Barker (2008) examines what public ownerships can look like as a wholly-owned subsidiary, subsidiary, associate, joint-enterprise, or shared-governance.



### **Chapter 3 – Methods**

The previous chapter provided an overview of existing knowledge and literature on the subject matter, and is in itself one way of examining the political economy of investment decisions and governance in the Greater Toronto Area. To move beyond existing literature and knowledge, this research relies also on expert panel interviews to contribute possible answers to the research questions, as well as uncover topics for future study (see Chapter 7). This section will outline the technical and organizational details of the expert panel interview.

#### **Expert panel interview**

##### **Selection of experts**

Expert panel interviews were conducted over a four-week period to obtain opinions with regard to governance and decision making for transit investment projects in the Greater Toronto Area. Given this context, only those, whom reside, represent or conduct regular business in the Greater Toronto Area, were eligible to participate. Experts interviewed were drawn from municipal councils, provincial agencies, universities, transit agencies, transportation and planning consultancies, and advocacy organizations.

Twenty (20) experts were approached on the basis of their role in the aforementioned entities. In most cases, experts interviewed held positions such as Professors; Senior Advisors and Managers of Planning or Strategic Policy sections; Vice Presidents and Directors; and

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

Councillors and Provincial Ministerial appointments. The decision to interview these parties follows the notion that these individuals have traditionally participated in, or contributed to the decision making process behind mass transit investments.

## **Survey design, procedure and ethics**

The expert panel interview consisted of a pre-developed survey and a less-structured open discussion time. The pre-developed survey questions followed two major themes – a) infrastructure and b) governance. Aside from providing answers to the research questions, responses from the interview were used to identify policy and procedural reforms, as well as opportunities for future research. The types of questions used in the pre-developed survey include general knowledge, past experience, opinion, agree-disagree, numerical ranking, and multiple-choice responses. The open discussion time allows the expert the opportunity to voice any further comment or experience that was not captured by the questions posed in the pre-determined survey. This aspect allowed the principal investigator to clarify and confirm the facts and statements discussed during the interview.

Each expert was invited to attend one formal interview, and as required, follow up interviews. Formal interviews were designed as a thirty minute session, whereas the follow up interviews were designed to be fifteen minutes in length. Each expert was offered the opportunity to be interviewed face-to-face at Ryerson University, their preferred location, or via telephone. The formal interview was preceded by a consent and orientation process – where the expert was briefed on research methods, purpose, ethics and confidentiality matters.

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

This research conforms to research ethics guidelines as outlined by the Research Ethics Board (REB) at Ryerson University. To protect the identity of experts, this masters' research paper does not attribute comments to an individual's name or any organization that they may represent. Consent forms, recruitment scripts, the ethics protocol as well as the survey questionnaire ("The Interview Package") can be found in the appendices of this paper.



## Chapter 4 – Results

This chapter presents the original findings and sentiments that were obtained during the expert panel interview. The findings will be organized in an identical manner to the research questions, that is, the structure of: identification, justification, implementation, and operations. For convenience, the questions posed to experts are provided, and will precede their respective results. Discussions of key observations and significant trends can be found in the next chapter.

### Identification and justification questions

*Transit infrastructure is often implemented on the basis of identified needs and opportunities. Of the following list of determinants: a) infrequent service; b) inadequate service; c) environmental benefits; and d) enhanced mobility, please rank them according to relevance with a score of one as least relevant, and five as most relevant.*

The first question intends to capture some of the broad identifiers and triggers that would inspire officials and decision makers to pursue expansions in transit infrastructure. Framed in the notion of least relevant and most relevant, the grid-response format, as well as the limitations in the choices above caused respondents to feel ‘boxed in’ to answer according and only to these results. As such, this question was maintained, but was rephrased later into:

*Transit infrastructure is often implemented on the basis of identified needs and opportunities, could you share with us some of these needs or opportunities?*

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

Without altering the overall intent, the author remained capable of capturing the suite of possible reasons behind expanding transit in the GTA. According to experts, some of these reasons include the chance at enhancing our local and regional connectivity, fostering economic and population growth, addressing social and demographic needs, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, nearly all interviewees stressed the importance of political and public preferences as equally significant drivers behind our region's infrastructure investment programs.

*In your view, what are some of the most important factors that influence the selection of any particular transit mode, and the scale for which the service is designed?*

This question intends to find out, all things being equal, what factors affect the selection of different technologies within rail-based modes (i.e. streetcar, light rail, subway, and commuter rail) and bus-based modes (i.e. bus-rapid transit, conventional transit, articulated transit, trolley). As well as how these modes are 'decided' and 'applied' at local or regional scales.

Experts who responded to this question have emphasized, in this general order: a) political preferences; b) ridership and demand; c) cost benefit; d) network connectivity and system completeness; and e) recent memory as key factors that influence the modal selection and applications across the Greater Toronto landscape.



## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

Seventeen experts explicitly expressed political preferences as a significant factor in the identification and justification process for mass transit investments (see Fig. 1). To begin, experts noted that some elected officials appeared ‘comfortable’ with making decisions that may not fully align with the recommended advice of expert communities. Moreover, elected officials appeared to be ‘visibly comfortable’ with rail-based technologies, such as subways (under the current administration of Mayor Rob Ford) and light rail (under the previous administration of Mayor David Miller). While experts remain uncertain of the true reason behind their preference with rail, some have suggested its ability to facilitate ‘more efficient car travel’ – by way of reducing in-street on on-road vehicular traffic (the argument aligning with Mayor Ford’s philosophy), as well as ‘heritage and urban form factors’ – by way of nostalgia and environmental fit (remotely referential to Mayor Miller’s views) as potential justifiers. Finally, political lobbying and parochialism; as well as positive image associated with ‘ribbon cuttings’ (political achievements) were also suggested by consultants and some public experts as yet another motivation behind transit facility investments.

Ridership and demand was raised explicitly by 13 experts as the next most important factor for justifying transit investments (see Fig. 1). The most dominating view in this area was the importance of matching investments with demand. This aside, one academic cautioned against ‘thinking too far ahead’, and getting caught up with building in anticipation of ‘doubling or tripling’ of demands. Similarly, another academic warned of the same notion, but viewed the costs of overbuilding as significant ‘penalties’ for forecasting errors. Instead, these individuals advocate that a measured, cost effective, incremental and cost recoverable approach as a smarter way forward in building and expanding transit.

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

Cost benefit was raised explicitly by 10 experts as the next most important factor for justifying transit investments (see Fig. 1). This case was particularly true to Metrolinx, where cost benefit is a central argument and thrust to their Benefits Case Analyses framework, which examine benefits and costs to transportation users, finances, environment, economy, and society; and is used heavily in determining investment and project priorities. This aside, experts were less confident on whether or not cost benefit played any role in justifying recent plans advanced by the TTC.

Network connectivity and system completeness was another factor that had surfaced during the expert panel interview. Eight experts explicitly stated that desire to intersect and interface with different modes, as well as providing services that imitate closely the real travel patterns of citizens were significant arguments for the expansion of transit facilities (see Fig. 1).

Finally, three experts raised the notion of recent memory as an important investment justification piece (see Fig. 1). Though not quantitative in nature (like those of the previous), this qualitative factor considers recent experiences, whether favourable or frustrating, for which may affect the public approval of or hesitation with the currently proposed program. In other words, investments may be more justifiable if the implementing agency or public has had a recently good experience, or the opposite may be true. Two experts have also explicitly referred to the St. Clair streetcar project, where frustrations with its planning and implementation may have affected the palatability for similar projects at this time.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS  
IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

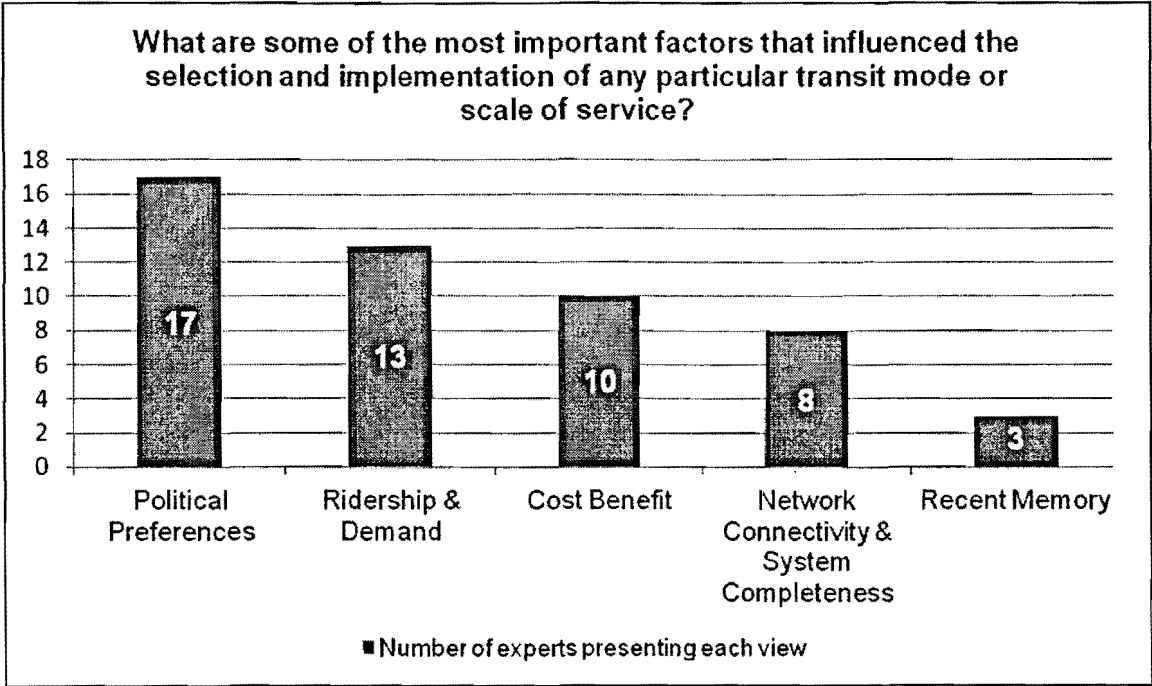


Figure 1 Factors affecting selection of mode and scale of service implemented.

Implementation questions

*What are some of the advantages or challenges associated with the present plans and investments in mass transit infrastructure in the Toronto region?*

When asked this question, four experts discussed the advantages, while nearly all others responded to the challenges portion. The key advantage, viewed by one member of the academic community, was that the presence of investments allow Toronto to engage in the development of a stronger multimodal network – while we have subways and streetcars and buses, semi-rapid transit appear to be a missing part of the picture for certain areas of Toronto, namely our inner suburban communities. Another advantage of *The Big Move*, as advanced by one specialist, is that it considers the mobility needs of our region and our cities, as well as demonstrates to

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

decision makers the investment priorities that are required to ‘get our communities and economies moving’. Working alongside with the Growth Plan’s intensification targets, one politician argues that investments help improve connectivity, as well as realize a strong, region-wide, integrated mobility network. One expert challenges us to think of the alternative, where governments continue to invest in local transit systems, but their planning and investment processes remain confined to meeting the needs of their own communities. While these systems may fare well in their local context, these systems may lack the ability to reap benefits associated with service integration with other regional operators, i.e. coordinated stops and scheduling for ease of transfer, integrated fare systems for ease of payment, as prime examples. Given the potential outcomes of *The Big Move*, this expert believes that the investment is invaluable for our region, and a no-brainer for the current administration to pursue.

While the successful implementation of these investments may be attractive, 14 experts expressed explicit concerns with adequate funding (see Fig. 2). These experts argued that society has become subscribed to a culture of wanting and desiring a good, like transit, but are unwilling to realize and accept the true costs associated with improving or providing the service. That said, the ability to invest in new facilities are also hampered by Canada’s growing infrastructure deficit, as well as inattention of past and present decision makers in committing long-term, earmarked funds. While recent infusions of funding have come from the provincial and federal governments, these remain one-time offerings that could only support a limited range of improvements to transit facilities.

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

Moreover, 12 experts showed great disappointment over how transit investments have and are being made today in Toronto, namely, being ad-hoc, knee-jerk, and reactionary to perceived political mandates, parochialism, or self-interest (see Fig. 2). One expert voiced further concern over how recent Mayoral plans emanated a ‘take it or leave it’ stance; while another argued that transit is often pursued by politicians, primarily because new transit facilities are publicly-visible and politically-‘sexy’ pursuits (referring to the media attention and political ‘points’ that can be ‘scored’ at ribbon cutting opportunities).

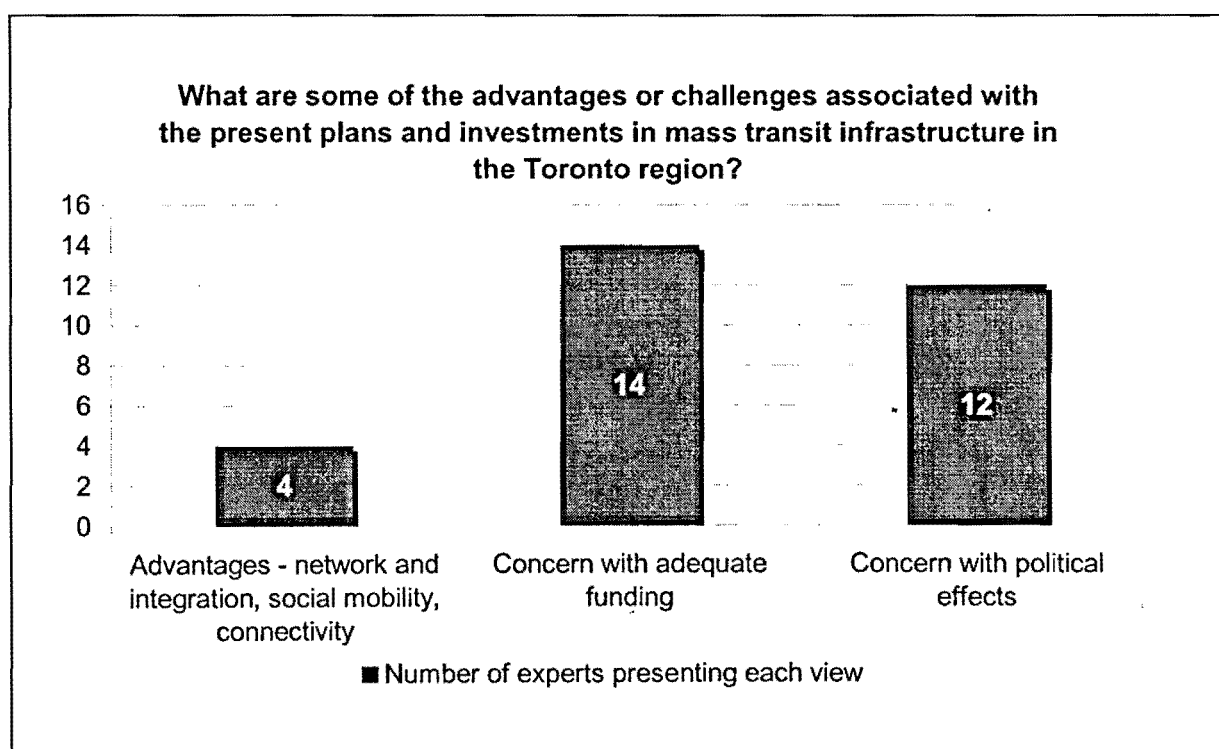


Figure 2 Advantages or challenges associated with present plans and investments in transit, breakdown of number of experts presenting each view.

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

*New page perhaps?*

*Do you feel that the public was adequately educated about the present plans and investments in mass transit infrastructure, prior to any official decision or legal/financial commitment?*

AND

*Similarly, do you feel that the public was given adequate opportunity to respond and contribute ideas, as well as to give approval to the present plans and investments in mass transit infrastructure?*

Nine experts interviewed believed that Metrolinx had offered adequate opportunity for the public to become engaged and educated with the present plans (see Fig. 3). In addition, they commended Metrolinx on how it had worked with constituent municipalities, local officials, as well as professional communities in the development of plans and projects. Aside from working with stakeholders, experts were also impressed with how Metrolinx had also reviewed and taken into consideration municipal official plans, transportation plans, and other inputs as part of the development *The Big Move*. One official emphasized the unanimous approval of the plan as a major sign of ‘collective acceptance’. However positive this may be, four experts recognized explicitly that Metrolinx’s consultations process could still be strengthened. Some areas, they propose, include clarifying common misconceptions and making planning processes easier to follow for the every-day citizen.

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

Nine experts expressed concern with how Toronto was simply ‘given’ LRT by the former Mayor and subways by the current Mayor; and are frustrated with how these plans were arrived at without following established planning and methodological process (see Fig. 3). Moreover, eight experts recognized that public consultations are few during the life of *Transit City*, and assert that they are non-existent with regards to Mayor Ford’s current proposal. In both cases, these experts expressed concern with the *quantitative sufficiency*, that is, the number of consultations, especially if billions of dollars are about to be spent on proposals that will forever affect our city’s urban form and mobility opportunities.

Aside from the debate on the quantitative sufficiency of consultations, one academic also raised issue with the *qualitative sufficiency*, that is, the presence of intentional, two-way dialogue and the visible incorporation of discussed outcomes into the project at hand (see Fig. 3). This included aspects such as whether or not the atmosphere was conducive to dialogue and honest participation, as well as whether or not decision makers were keen in feeding back the derived knowledge into their decision making process. That aside, this academic also posed a differing, yet also-legitimate view, asking whether it is meaningful to maintain extensive discussions with regard to the proposed alignment, technology, and benefits; especially when funding of the present plans has yet to be confidently addressed by officials.

Quantitative and qualitative sufficiency aside, still another body of thoughts exist within consultant and some professional minds. Here, four experts explicitly assert that the public ‘are less attuned’ to ‘the details’, unless it directly affects them on a personal, one-to-one basis (see Fig. 3). Similarly, these experts also charge that the public ‘are not knowledgeable enough’ with

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS  
IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

the complexity of transit, and are not convinced that the public could be involved in decision making, especially on such a technically-involved discipline like transit. While some appreciate the added input, others view the vocal and positional pluralities that surface within meetings as a ‘drag’ to the decision making process, as well as make the issue itself more difficult to unpack and interpret. Considering the ‘adequacy’, then, of current ‘engagement process’, this group feels what exists, while not perfect, is sufficient for the most part, and that major changes to consultative process need not arrive at this time.

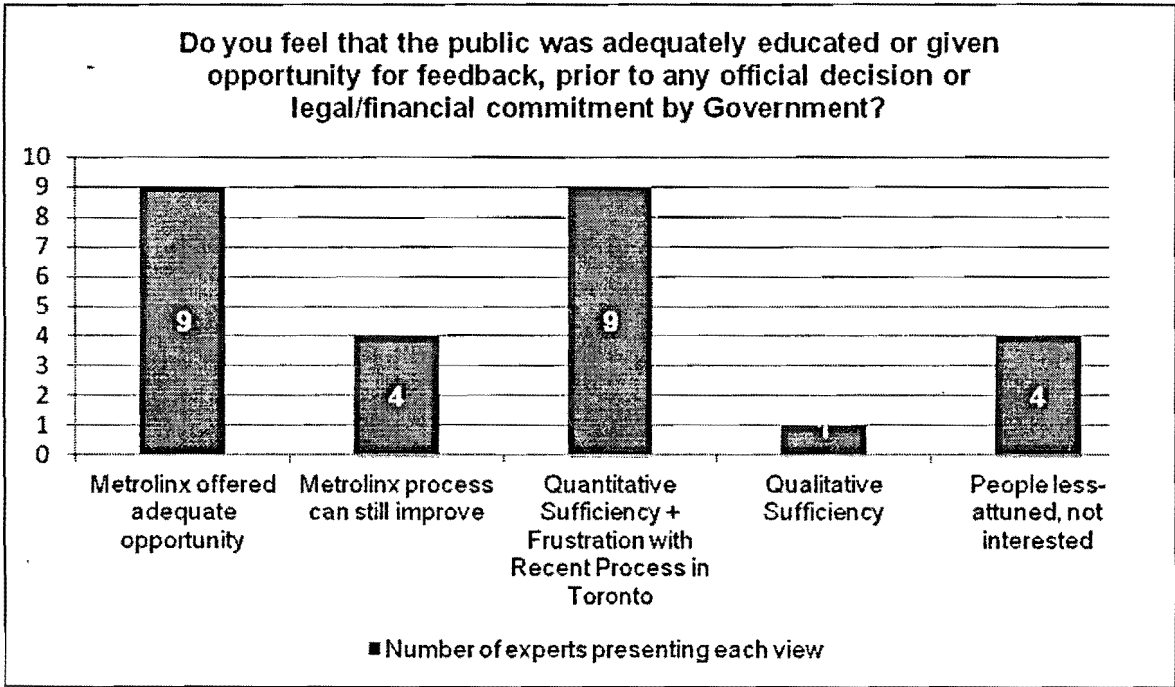


Figure 3 Adequate education or feedback prior to official decision or commitment by Government.

*What is your opinion on the funding model pursued by the present plans and investments in mass transit infrastructure?*



## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

The most prevalent comment about the public funding model is that it is not able to fully support the proposed expansion plans, and that alternative mechanisms must be considered to support new transit facilities. Specifically, 12 experts believe that it is not realistic to rely exclusively on municipalities to pay their part of regional projects, and likewise, the current fiscal position of the Provincial government also makes it difficult for them to invest significantly and predictably in the region's growing infrastructure needs (see Fig. 4). Aside from providing new facilities, costs are also rising with respect to requirements to provide late night services, as well as upgrading facilities to meet accessibility standards (i.e. AODA). Coupled with minimal authority for local agencies to raise funds beyond the fare box and property tax increases, the task of funding infrastructure has become increasingly tough. While experts warn that alternative funding mechanisms are not a magic answer to our funding needs, they stress the urgency to investigate and 'be open to' alternative funding mechanisms that can help support our current and emerging needs in mass transit.

*What is your perspective on alternative funding mechanisms for infrastructure? What role could these mechanisms play in supporting mass transit in the GTA?*

Fourteen experts (of the 20 interviewed) believe that a variety of mechanisms exist and could be helpful to supporting mass transit in the Greater Toronto Area, however, they cautioned that we must examine past histories and ensure that we learn from past mistakes, and understand truly what we are trying to pursue (see Fig. 4). More importantly, as each tool will influence social, environmental, and economic forces differently, we must remain cognizant of these issues, and ensure that our actions do not simply shift liabilities or responsibilities from one

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS  
IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

group to another. However, some officials believe that it is more essential to have an honest and open conversation at this point in time on funding needs. One expert also emphasized the importance of including the benefits and costs of the business-as-usual case as part of the analysis of an appropriate suite of funding mechanisms.

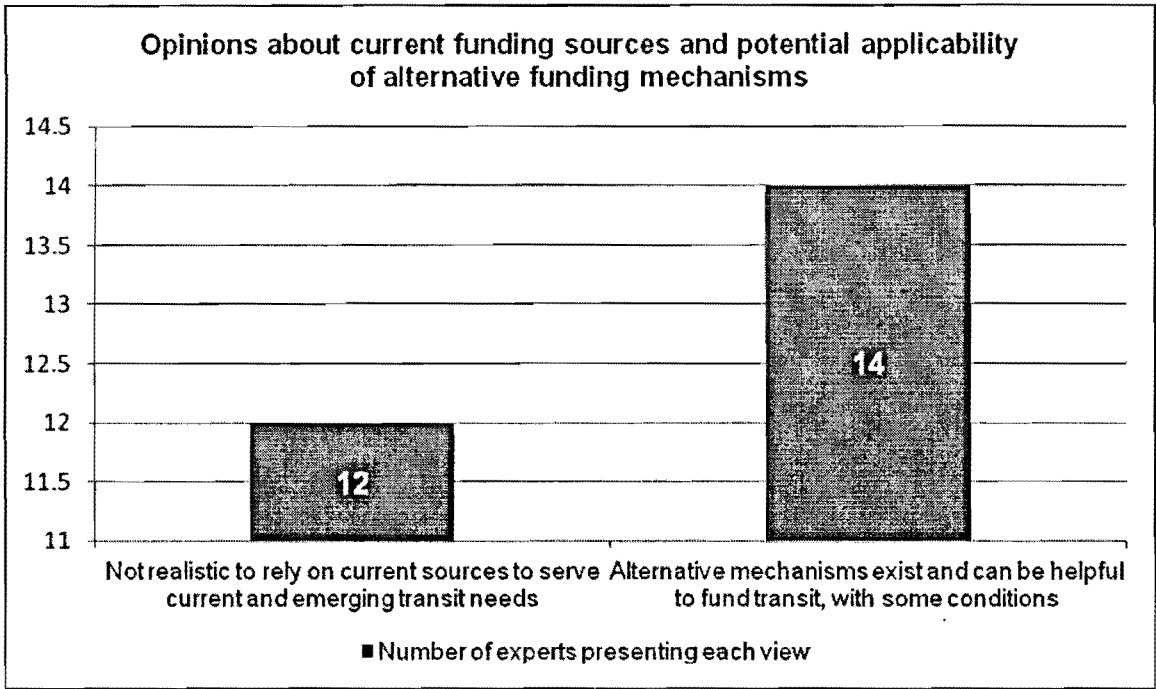


Figure 4 Opinions about current funding sources and potential applicability of alternative funding mechanisms.

*Have you any opinion with respect to the proposed implementation strategy or process of the present plans and investments in mass transit infrastructure?*

When asked of their opinion on the implementation strategy behind Metrolinx Big Move, experts believe that the scientific and technical judgment behind much of *The Big Move*'s plans and projects have been useful in informing provincial politicians on project benefits, as well as which of those projects are in a better state of readiness to proceed. One priority for Metrolinx,

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

according to a public staffer, is to quickly deliver these shovel-ready projects, so that customers can expediently understand and experience its associated benefits. The faster and more efficiently this occurs, according to this staff, the more likely the public will entrust implementing agencies with additional funding tools, which support further expansions of the transit system. This comment is similar to those of one public official, who references the current public appetite as one desiring visible, tangible results, as opposed to ‘cheap’ announcements and endless talk. This official hopes that the quick realization of shovel-ready projects will renew public confidence in transit, as well as build trust with implementing agencies.

The comments with regards to the implementation strategy behind former-Mayor Miller’s *Transit City* plan, as well as Mayor Ford’s subway plan is more critical in comparison of those offered for Metrolinx. Experts questioned the soundness of the implementation strategy behind these proposals, with primary criticisms levelled against the breadth and depth of the studies used to justify these plans. While *Transit City* could be viewed as ‘history’, experts remain concerned with the funding and governance strategy that Mayor Ford has thus far put forth. The effects of Mayor Ford’s strategy, of course, remain to be seen.

### **Operations and governance questions**

*Who are the important or relevant parties in mass transit governance and decision making; where a score of one means not very relevant, and a score of five means very relevant.*

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

## AND

*Based on your selection above, what are the most important roles, responsibilities, and contributions required or expected of the most relevant party (or parties)?*

The results of the above two questions are presented here as one analysis. The parties listed in the above two questions can be grouped into three like categories: a) staff and elected officials; b) specialists, manufacturers, academics; and c) advocacy groups, unions, taxpayers, and the media. While most respondents gave general and overarching comments about these categories, others offered insights that will be described here.

Under the staff and elected officials category, experts believe that transportation engineers, planners, and urban designers presently perform a moderately essential role in governance and decision making processes. Particularly, experts believe the primary contributions of this category to date were to put forth solutions that support what the public wants, as well as provide technical expertise to elected officials. While provincial officials reviewed and accepted expertise provided by elected officials, and assumed for itself a very involved and relevant role in making the final judgment call, the same was less true for their municipal counterparts. During the interviews, many respondents showed concern with how officials at the municipal level have approached the decision making process. Particularly, experts asserted that evidence-based planning and proactive engagement strategies could have played a greater role in the development and justification of former-Mayor Miller's *Transit City* plan, as well as present-Mayor Ford's subway plan. Posturing aside, one official felt that another

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

important contribution for local politicians, aside from making the final decision, is to better explain their visions before the public, as well as present a stronger case for funding before senior tiers of government.

Under the specialists category, experts interviewed appeared undecided over the relevance of external service providers and equipment manufacturers in the decision making process. To begin, one? Interviewee? felt that although these groups have a place in offering ideas to the final outcome (i.e. modal technologies and solutions), their role in making the final investment decision should be minimized, and left with elected officials. On a different note, experts expressed that the academic community has played only a moderate role in the development of current plans and projects, and stressed that researchers could play ‘yet a greater role’ in strengthening the proposed plans and projects.

Under the advocacy category, experts interviewed attributed a major role to tax payers, the general public, and transit unions in the decision making process; whereas special interest groups like environmental outfits and coalitions held a less influential role. Finally, experts were split, with some viewing a more significant role for the media, and some viewed them as contributing a lesser role. While experts defend that technical details are best left to professional staffs, they believe that room exists for us to make the participatory process more attractive, accessible and understandable to the public. As funders and providers of resources for said investments, tax payers deserve to be better respected and have their dollars invested wisely. The current nature of ‘inconsistent decision making’, as well as culture of public management as opposed to creative engagement marks a fundamental shift that is required in how planning ideas

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

are communicated and resolved with end users and financiers-at-large. Similarly, experts believe that transit unions should maintain a voice at the operational end of the discussion, but the final decision should remain in the hands of planning staff and elected officials. Special interest groups, on the other hand, have been described by experts as having a lesser role in the development of current plans and projects. While this observation was made, interviewees didn't offer a direct answer as to why this may be. The closest response to this observation was that 'too many groups and objectives' may blur the clarity of the end vision, and make difficult the implementation process. The final observation pertains to media, for which interviewees held mixed opinions with regards to their actual role and contribution. While some see the value and importance of media in disseminating information and in educating to the public, experts charge that the short attention span of media, their lack depth in analysis, and superficiality to comments made by the political administration and business communities of the day as foremost concerns and weaknesses of this group.

*If mass transit services remained or continued as a public operation, what areas of attention or improvement, in your opinion, is required to ensure long term success, efficiency, and responsiveness to current and emerging needs?*

Experts responded with several areas that could be improved should mass transit remain under public operation, most of which pertain to the TTC, while some also pertain to GO Transit (see Fig. 5). These areas include: a) customer service excellence; b) facilities improvement, advancement, and integration; c) labour management, and d) predictable, long term investment and funding strategy. To begin, 11 experts surveyed agreed on the need to change the culture

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

and improve the professional image of the TTC. To improve public confidence in the Red Rocket, nine experts interviewed believe that the TTC must address consistent delays and issues with signals and track, ensure cleanliness in its passenger facilities and vehicle cabins, as well as replace out of date fare and passenger information systems. In other words, state of good repair must be more strenuously pursued, and be given more financial and political support. Aside from improving facilities, one academic argues that strategies that improve connectivity, schedule adherence, and reduced need for transfers must be actively pursued by the Commission. In terms of labour management, four experts argued that a better relationship is required between management and employee unions. The need for a better relationship, as these experts identify, has much to do with value-differences associated with technological innovations. Here, experts advance that unions have perceived innovation as a threat to job security, while management views this as an opportunity for introducing efficiency, and thus savings for the taxpayer. Finally, eight experts stressed that a predictable, long-term investment strategy that can support both capital and operating requirements is required. With such strategy, experts argue that they can then plan and execute projects with greater confidence than today, where they feel 'practically constrained' by political preferences and timing.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS  
IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

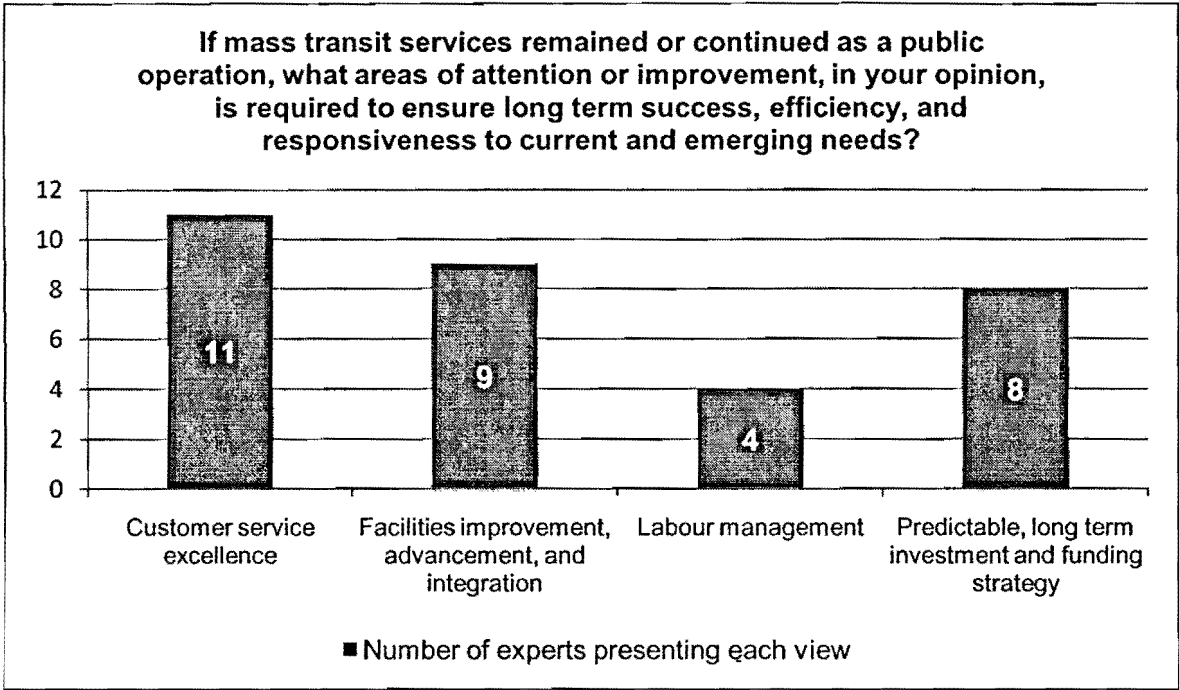


Figure 5 What areas of attention or improvement is required for long term success, efficiency and responsiveness to current and emerging needs of GO Transit and the TTC?

*If a proposal was put forth to depart from the current governance structure, which alternative would be most appropriate in managing and meeting the current and future needs of mass transit in the region, and why?*

While many have shied away from encouraging the privatization of transit, many demonstrated openness to some form of mixed-delivery structure. Within this context, experts assert that governments must maintain the role of policy and standard creation, evaluation, and monitoring, but hold no reservation to private actors to be involved in certain ground services, by way of a competitive bidding process, where private firms as well as public agency employees could compete for operations and maintenance responsibilities. Experts believe that the competitive aspect of this model can help boost customer service quality, improve facilities,



## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

advance and integrate technologies, as well as overcome some of the challenges associated with the present labour environment.

*What are some of the key advantages or concerns for your suggested alternative?*

The alternative most discussed during the interviews was mixed-delivery. At the interview, those who responded to this question provided responses solely to the concerns of this alternative. Concerns outlined for this alternative include: a) equity issues; and b) risk assignment; c) feasibility; and d) service assurance. In terms of equity, one respondent identified that transit must remain accessible to all citizens, signalling a fear of service adjustments (either reduction or conclusion) should a non-public interest assume full or partial control.

Additionally, one expert raised concerns about how partners divide and share risks and responsibilities, signalling the complexities involved with this alternative. Three experts also questioned the feasibility of mixed-delivery under the current political and unionized environment, signalling challenges with palatability and understanding of this concept. In terms of service assurance, four experts who responded believed that extensive agreements are critical alongside a system of incentives and penalties, possibly signalling concerns with level of service or public and political confidence with such alternative.

*What would the logical steps be to implement or move towards the suggested alternative?*

To transition into a mixed-delivery model, experts expressed that a transitional approach is preferable over an instantaneous shift in practice and policy. To begin, one official suggested

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

the need to focus on issues at hand, that is, to make strides in improving system efficiencies and customer service. This suggestion is similar to that of an academic, who suggested the need to coordinate regional and local services, as well as introduce integrated fare systems and customer-side technologies. Moreover, one expert put forth specialized branding and marketing as another priority, as it can help improve and rebuild the ‘currently tarnished’ image of mass transit in Toronto. Where appropriate, decision makers can also update the *Metrolinx Act* and the *City of Toronto Act* with policies that permit the introduction of innovative governance, decision making and financing strategies. Moreover, programs that educate the public as well as stakeholders and politicians on the benefits and drawbacks of alternative governance models could be pursued. While cases of failure exist for mixed-delivery structures, one expert was quick to point out that some transit agencies, including those in our own backyard (Regional Municipality of York, with YRT) have seen positive outcomes. Drawing on their experience, as well as others, than, we can learn what we need to do (or not do) to maximize the benefits of a mixed-delivery approach.

*Have you any final comments or concerns?*

Aside from the pre-determined survey questions, interviewees had the option to offer additional commentary with regards to the political economy of mass transit infrastructure investments in the Greater Toronto Area. Commentaries captured explored: a) the issues of timing and industry limitations; b) the evolving nature of media and communications; and c) matters of accountability.

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

To begin, two industry consultants that were interviewed were concerned of timing and limitations. Specifically, one was concerned with the lost time that was invested in the prior projects when Mayor Ford decided to ‘switch gears’ from his predecessor’s plan of light rail transit into his preferred alternative of subways. This consultant wonders if a compromise could be developed, and in the end, help bring projects to fruition as opposed to preserving them on paper. In this consultants view, it is important that projects ‘get-off-the-ground’, so as to contribute to building and addressing the urgent needs of this city-region. The second consultant, however presents to us some cautions; particularly, that while we need to address our transportation needs, we must do so with foresight of industry capacities – in other words, asking the question of “*do we have the manpower to implement this in the prescribed timeframe?*”

One public sector staff member also referred to the evolving nature of media and communications as one critical area of thought in better engaging with different publics. This individual raised the challenges of breaking through the clutter of messages that one faces in an increasingly ‘busy’ information age; and emphasized the growing role and potential of social media networks, such as Facebook and Twitter in reaching an increasingly mobile and web-passionate generation. As an active platform for two-way conversations, the possibilities of government agencies to capitalize on these assets should not be overlooked by the TTC, The City of Toronto, Metrolinx, or the Government of Ontario.

Lastly, experts have expressed a desire for staff to have more influence on the final decision; while others feel that is it more appropriate and accountable when our elected officials make the final judgement call. Understandably, staff may be more qualified due to their training

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

and experience, but one expert advance that in the end, political preferences should ‘matter just as much’ as those from professional staffs. The role of staffs and officials aside, one expert have also suggested that intergovernmental politics, such as those between the Mayor and the Premier, will continue to play a significant role, and must necessarily be ‘resolved between the Mayor and the Premier’ themselves – as opposed to staff or the technical community.

## Chapter 5 – Discussions

### Identification and justification

*Key: While scientific modelling and technical analysis remain important inputs for decision making, voices of politicians and advocates have become more influential with regards to how infrastructure investments are identified and justified.*

### Scientific and professional judgment embraced by Metrolinx, not TTC

Experts interviewed concur with literature in that empirical modelling (*various models identified in Chapter 2*) and professional judgment remains as crucial processes behind decision making. These processes conform best the *rational actor* and *satisficing* approaches advanced by Meyer and Miller (2001), which relies on iterative efforts to arrive at an outcome. In our case, the outcomes are investment direction and justification behind mass transit infrastructures, routes, and modal technologies. Despite this importance, evidence shows that much of the scientific modelling and ‘ethical, deep thinking’ had been reserved to analyses conducted by GO Transit-Metrolinx, and less so by the bureaucracy and leadership of the TTC-City of Toronto. Both charged with enabling mobility in their jurisdictions, the differences in how they internalize and undertake evidence-based planning methodologies have catapulted our regional and municipal leaders into a political debate on modal technologies (subway vs. LRT), alignment priorities (Eglinton vs. Sheppard), and fare systems (Presto vs. Open-payment), among others. Conveniently, planners are well positioned to present some form of reconciliation strategy. This

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

strategy, however, appears murky for Toronto, and unless its champion can successfully navigate the increasingly cloudy pool of business, labour and environmental opinions (*see* Altshuler and Luberoff, 2003), the detachment of some officials from relying on professional scientific analyses to justify investments remains an unresolved and serious concern in our region.

### Implementation

*Key: Plans and commitments made by Mayor Miller and Ford lacked evidence-based analysis, as well as proper planning process and methodology – all of which are essential in understanding the issues, barriers, and risks associated with these investments.*

**Doing your homework may be a good idea, especially if you are spending billions of hard-earned, tax payer money**

Metrolinx and the TTC are both charged with investing public funds wisely. While Metrolinx could point to their BCA-backed studies, Mayor Miller and Ford, via the TTC and the City of Toronto, frankly, cannot do so with the same justification. By justifying expensive investments through excessive optimism on ridership (*see* Berryhill and Butler 1983; Hamer 1976; HFA 1989; Kain 1990, 1992; Pickrell 1989; and Wachs 1990 in Kain 1999; and Flyvbjerg 2008) and unlikely-effective financing instruments (*see* Mayor Ford's recent view on funding his subway plan through development charges and tax increment financing), Toronto's leadership have forced staff to plan according to untested assumptions, and to invest large sums into projects that are not supported by evidence-based professional opinions. While Toronto may

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

have set itself up in as an embarrassing case study of how not to invest in major infrastructures, our city holds a unique opportunity to prove the opposite. But for now, will our elected leaders recognize this before ‘history repeats itself’ (for instance, the former Eglinton ‘experiment’ and the Sheppard ‘investment’)? And are planners prepared to encourage our leadership to invest in transit facilities that make not only short-term political sense, but long-term financial, technical, and social sense as well? However these are achieved, planners must ally with the public, as it is the public that is best positioned to influence the votes of our elected officials.

### **Two way communication: regional – check, local – limited**

The experts interviewed shared with us their appreciation of Metrolinx, with particular regard to how the government agency engaged with local citizens and municipal staffs, as well as businesses and tax payers while and before they drafted the proposed plans. Moreover, experts remain impressed in that Metrolinx officials took into account existing plans and strategies when developing the regional vision, all appearing to ensure that ‘as many bases’ as possible are covered. The sentiment received from experts was that much of these conversations were two-way, and while others may contest this idea, the efforts in aggregate coincide well with established principles of transparency, accountability and democratic participation. The author postulates that these efforts may have contributed to its unanimous approval back in December 2008, as well as the continued public buy-in that this plan enjoys.

Consultations for *Transit City* remain limited to media campaigns and legally-mandated consultations associated with the environmental assessment process. While billboards and

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

television ads played a role in ‘educating the masses’, public consultations remained more so to sessions mandated by the environmental assessment (EA) process. While the EA process assessed the projects’ impact on society or the economy, the scale and scope of the proposed projects, as well as their complexity alone may put forward issues that are not fully captured by current EA process. This aside, why exhaustive dialogues for *Transit City* failed to emerge is a question that could perhaps be answered by Mayor Miller or the TTC. The current administration of Rob Ford fares no better, as he has yet to foster a two-way, public discussion of his Transportation City Plan, which is ‘shameful’ given the opportunity for him to learn from the shortcomings of his predecessor.

### **Quality, meaning, and necessity of consultations**

The views on the quality, meaning, and necessity of public consultations struck me as an interesting way of evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of our current consultation process. This is one area that is not well explored in the literature, and certainly not in the context of transit infrastructure investments. Thinking about quality of meetings has me thinking about the intentions and objectives of those facilitating the consultations, and those who participate in them – is the former simply interested in managing and manipulating the public point-of-view, or something else? And for the latter, are they there to raise legitimate concerns, or to advance the familiar and well-feared “*n*” word – NIMBYism? Moreover, are the instruments and structures useful, creative, stimulating, inclusive, and relevant to the issue at hand, as opposed to being expressions of partisanship, fear-mongering, or ‘tactical warfare’?



## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

Looking at the meaning of consultations, I agree with the views advanced by that academic, and encourage the reader to think deeply for a moment, and ask “Why are we having fixed and exclusive talk on subways, when Mayor Ford has yet to conduct scientific analysis on this mode, as well as secure a long term, reliable and sufficient funding source for this undertaking?”

Lastly, the notion of necessity perhaps struck me the hardest – where planners have to assess whether or not the public ‘cares’ or need to be informed of the minute details or higher level strategy. It occurs to many experts that it is understandably more common for the public to be involved in more visible stages, like construction; but (experts) remain understandably split when contemplating whether publics are interested in becoming more involved in earlier, more strategic points. At the same time, a body of experts also feel that more involvement is critical, and though it remains uncertain whether this means more involvement in earlier or later points, this dichotomy is interesting to me, as planners often play the role of facilitators, and timing is one aspect that this profession ponder on a regular basis.

*Key: While current financial arrangements are visibly inadequate for meeting current and emerging needs, alternative funding mechanisms exist, and could potentially address some of our infrastructure needs and deficiencies. However, political confidence and public understanding of them appear insufficient, misplaced, and at times out of context.*

**Competing needs and priorities, how do we move forward?**

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## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

The notion of inadequate funding for mass transit infrastructure in Canada is well documented in both academic and public literature, and is an opinion held nearly unanimously among experts interviewed for this study. This urgency is more pronounced in the Greater Toronto Area, where deteriorating and crowded facilities and modernization projects compete for funds with emerging visions like *The Big Move*, advanced by Metrolinx; *Transit City*, envisioned by former Mayor Miller; and *Transportation City*, championed by Mayor Ford. How, then, can Toronto and our regional partners proceed? Do we neglect a series of lines just to be able to afford another? Do we commit ourselves to a significant loan, and put future generations, like the author and his colleagues, in what will seem like eternal ‘debt’ courtesy of our predecessors? Or do we pursue more innovative means, such as a suite of alternative funding mechanisms that could possibly pay a portion of our overall needs?

### **Funding alternatives, struggle with acceptance, understanding**

The literature appears favourable to exploring alternative funding mechanisms, as does the expert panel that the author consulted. The most relevant source would be the report released by the Toronto Board of Trade (2010), with respect to the 16 funding tools. Despite the possibilities, the biggest roadblocks to employing these mechanisms remains the ‘usual suspects’ – provincial politicians who prefer not to ‘stir the pot’ before their own election; municipal officials who remain mum, as they decipher the intentions of a still-new mayor; and the public, who appear simply confused at what these mechanisms mean, not only by definition, but also the potential effects on their wallets at the pump, at the vehicle registry, and on their payroll. Given these important considerations, officials must themselves go at length in understanding how

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

these funding tools affect the City, its economy and its residents; as well as accompany staffs in debunking myths and misconceptions that circulate among the public today. Moreover, policies and safeguards must also be introduced alongside the implementation of any funding mechanism, such that no single or identifiable group will become unfairly targeted.

### **Operations and governance**

*Key: The relevant literature and experts discuss a wealth of strategies and approaches that can make more efficient the operations and governance of transit systems, but their application appear hampered by officials who exhibit uncertainty, or enjoy the status quo.*

### **A case of “innovation-phobia” at the local level**

While some interviewees discussed the benefits and challenges associated with innovative technologies and operations processes, some argue that decision makers and union members remain cautious with these ideas. According to interviewed officials, they cite issues of political uncertainty and costs as prime reasons for their hesitation. Moreover, academics postulate that unions would object to innovation, provided that their job securities may be at stake with the introduction of labour-replacing technologies, among others. How do planners reconcile this desire for technical improvements, but yet keep the buy-in and appreciation of those who make decisions and operate our systems? Given that innovative technologies and operational processes are a critical means in achieving efficient and effective transit services,

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

those leading the charge must examine these struggles in light with the prospective benefits, and help decision makers overcome their phobia with innovation.

### **Experts open to mixed-delivery, where both public and private partners have roles**

Many experts interviewed held the view that it is highly appropriate to examine a mixed-delivery model of governance for transit in the Greater Toronto Region. This claim is premised on the notion that our present form may ‘work’, but ‘others out there’ have evolved to become more effective and successful in delivering transit infrastructures and services. Looking to these local successes, namely YRT in the Regional Municipality of York (for the operations end), as well as TransLink (their equivalent of our Metrolinx) in British Columbia (for the governance structure aspect), present providers like the TTC-City of Toronto and GO Transit-Metrolinx could garner clues as to how best advance proposed infrastructure plans, as well as devise appropriate institutions and structures to govern planned and implemented facilities and services. While concerns have been advanced in the literature and the interviews have confirmed legitimate concerns with regards to potential liabilities and risks associated with mixed-delivery, one public staffer assert that these matters could feasibly be addressed using a system of incentives and penalties, which encourage actors to ‘always be on their feet’, as well as education and engagement campaigns, which helps clarify and put away any misconceptions. To begin all of this conversation, officials must convene a forum with internal and external stakeholders to seriously contemplate if there remains any reason that ‘transit’ in Toronto should remain as a service deliverable exclusively under the public context, and in near-exclusive case

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

elsewhere in the region. If the responses are no, or not necessarily – then a genuine discussion must be had by relevant actors to determine the best way forward.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS  
IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

## **Chapter 6 – Recommendations**

The previous chapter raised important observations from the expert panel survey, as well as drew out critical disconnects between theoretical positions and day-to-day, ground-level realities. To help participants internalize these observations, as well as reconcile these disconnects, recommendations are provided here at the regional level to GO Transit and Metrolinx, and at the local level to the TTC and the City of Toronto.

However, readers must be cautioned that these suggestions are not without difficulties of their own, and these suggestions alone may not solve entirely the notions that fuel the political economy of mass transit infrastructure investments, as well as their associated governance structures. Taking into consideration these suggestions, though, is arguably better than going business-as-usual at an issue that is so critical to the well-being of our region.

### **To GO Transit and Metrolinx**

1. **Think potential** - continue to devise a comprehensive investment strategy that considers, advocates for and takes advantage of current and untapped financing sources.
2. **Think leadership** – lead the charge in the formation of a relevant transit governance framework, and contribute capable and accountable leaders that can guide this framework from concept to reality.

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

3. **Think smart** - develop a progressive advancement strategy that transforms the organization into a proactive, innovative, and effective leader in visioning, planning and delivering quality transit in the region.
4. **Think results** - establish a robust implementation plan that takes into consideration realities and opportunities, and delivers results as promised in collaboration with internal and external stakeholders.
5. **Think follow-up** – introduce a post-implementation review process that examines practice and opportunities, and points out where the agency must change as a prerequisite to continued relevance and success.

### To TTC and the City of Toronto

While the TTC and the City of Toronto should also pursue what was proposed above for GO Transit and Metrolinx, the following priorities should also be addressed.

1. **Respect taxpayers and riding public** – develop an environment where taxpayers voices are legitimized, honoured and respected; and where the riding public experiences comfort, safety and pride when using the TTC.
2. **Listen to specialists and academics** – foster an environment where decision makers respects, recognizes and actively internalizes the knowledge and professional advice held by transit specialists, operators, and academics.



## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

3. **Collaborate with other jurisdictions** –put into common practice the culture of joint planning, investment, and development of plans with other jurisdictions, such that expertise, resources, and outcomes can be optimized and integrated with one another.



## Chapter 7 – Conclusions

Mass transit infrastructure plays a significant role in moving individual households and workers across an interconnected region such as the Greater Toronto Area. Public transit investments have visibly influenced the built environment and how Toronto has developed over time. That said, transit investments are financially, politically, socially and environmentally costly undertakings, and attract a wide, passionate and diverse audience. Politicians, original equipment manufacturers (such as Bombardier, etc.), academics and special interest groups all ‘want a say’ in what type of transit gets planned and built. However, academic and professional literature does not offer much information about how the need for new transit investments is identified, how transit investment decisions are justified, and how recommended transit development alternatives are implemented in Canada.

The experts consulted largely agreed that empirical and technical analyses are reliable means of identifying, justifying and implementing transit investments, prior to any official decision. That said, a procedural disconnect exists in Toronto, as infrastructure investments have been announced prior to any substantial body of study and analysis. Efforts by decision makers to seek external, independent and objective cross-analysis from auditors, academics and other qualified professionals for the proposed investments have thus far been non-existent; and initiatives from these bodies to advance objective studies of their own are being questioned, as their studies appear to toe the line that conforms to the political will. This situation creates inaccurate estimates and projections of travel demand, and leads to over or under investment in public transit. This approach also paints grave concerns of who is calling the shots, as well as what kinds of information decision makers have (or lack) when decisions are made.

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

While planners and allied professionals claim the importance of technical and objective study, and politicians claim that they act in the public interest, the question that is before us is why reliable and refereed analyses are procedurally misplaced in Toronto. Have the professionals become fearful of the potential consequences associated with producing reports that differ from political preferences? Have politicians become fixated on pursuing investments that bring them political success? Furthermore, have ward-city and city-region parochialisms emerged as yet another variable in decision making? Here, the author, via this paper, argues that such is the case, and that an urgent and monumental ‘rethinking’ of how investment decisions are identified, justified and implemented in Toronto is required, and now is the time to do so.

Likewise, respondents also commented extensively on alternative funding and governance mechanisms. In summary, experts responded significantly that finding alternative ways of funding transit (and other) infrastructures is essential, and the feasibilities of various funding tools should be approached in a more objective light than it is today. Likewise, experts also pondered how transit agencies and institutions might be shaped in the region. While privatization has become a sensitive topic, many exhibited openness in placing operational roles to competitive tender – provided that government retained control over policy, evaluation and monitoring. Regardless, experts assert that now is the time for intentional and meaningful dialogue among all parties concerned. Given that transit investments require billions in tax-payers money, it is prudent that everyone should be aware of the benefits and consequences of such investments, while leaving no opportunity for innovation and best-practices unturned. Overall, the author asserts that the governance structure must also be smart and proactive,

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

capable of delivering results. All of this, as the author and some experts assert, must begin with bold, visionary and accountable leadership.

While transit investments are exciting and can be immensely beneficial, one wrong move can indeed jeopardize the region's well-being for a markedly long period of time. Many eyes are on decision makers of this region, but until then, *fingers can only be kept crossed*.



# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

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# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MASS TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

## **Appendix**

The interview package that was presented to experts at the panel interview is attached in the following pages.

Tommy Au  
Urban and Regional Planning  
The Political Economy of Mass Transit Infrastructure Investments in the GTA

## INTERVIEW PACKAGE

Dear Sir or Madam:

My name is Tommy Au and I am a second-year Master of Planning student at the School of Urban & Regional Planning at Ryerson University.

I am currently working on my Masters Research Paper regarding the political economy and governance of mass transit systems – that is, the decision making process and the arrangements that manage and ensure the delivery and provision of mass transit services. Particularly, I am focusing on recent proposals and infrastructure investment decisions in the Toronto region.

To help advance my research, I would like to interview you on the aforementioned matter. The formal interview will be a maximum of 30 minutes, where our dialogue will follow from a pre-determined questionnaire, as well as any opinions or views that you may hold. If appropriate, you may be invited to participate in a maximum of two (2) 30-minute follow-up interviews. Formal and any follow-up interviews may take place at Ryerson University, or at a location convenient to you. Follow-up interviews may also take place via telephone.

Given that this research is targeted to obtain sentiments and responses from stakeholders, such as municipal councillors, transport academics, professionals, as well as special interest groups, you must necessarily qualify or be part of the aforementioned groups in order to participate. Moreover, you must be of legal age, and must reside, represent, be employed or generally conduct their business, research or activities within the GTA.

If you are interested in and are eligible to participate in my study, or would like more information about my study, please do not hesitate to contact me via this email or contact me via telephone at 416-979-5000 x 13833. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Murtaza Haider at [Murtaza.Haider@ryerson.ca](mailto:Murtaza.Haider@ryerson.ca), or 416-979-5000 x 2480.

An informed consent form is required and must be signed by you before we can proceed with the interview. Upon receiving your written consent, we can then make arrangements for administering the interview.

Thank you in advance,

Tommy Au, B.A.  
Student, Master of Planning  
School of Urban & Regional Planning  
Ryerson University

Tel: 1-416-979-5000 (Ext. 13833)  
Cell: 1-647-268-2688  
E-mail: [tommy.au@ryerson.ca](mailto:tommy.au@ryerson.ca)  
Mail: Unit 712, P.O. Box 142, 240 Jarvis Street, Toronto ON M5B 2L1

**Ryerson University  
Consent Agreement**

**The Political Economy of Mass Transit Infrastructure Investments in the GTA**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

**Investigators:**

The Principal investigator for this research is Tommy Au, B.A. Tommy completed his Bachelor of Arts in Urban Studies and Transportation Studies from the University of Calgary in 2009, and is currently a masters' student enrolled in the Master of Planning (Urban Development) program at the School of Urban and Regional Planning, Ryerson University. His supervisor is Murtaza Haider, PhD, Associate Professor of the Ted Rogers School of Retail Management and Director, Institute of Housing and Mobility at Ryerson University.

**Purpose of the Study:**

The research in improving mobility by public transit has primarily been focused on building more public transit facilities, i.e. putting in more transit lines and bus routes. The research on governance structures for public transit utilities to improve operating efficiencies of existing public transit services is rare in general, and is very uncommon for Canadian transit systems. Given that improved operating efficiencies should attract additional ridership and reduce the system's operating costs, one must go beyond the conventional research agendas and explore the governance structures needed to improve public transit operations in Canada.

Recently, proposals and decisions to expand mass transit infrastructures in the Greater Toronto Area have arisen. Namely, Mayor Rob Ford has advanced his Transportation City plan, while the provincial agency, Metrolinx, has moved ahead with a regional transit plan called the Big Move.

While government officials have touted the 'mobility-enhancement' role of these plans, questions arise in terms of how the scale and the elements of the present plans were determined, whether and how the funding was justified, and whether or not the decision makers were fully aware or advised of the issues, barriers, and risks that often influence large-scale infrastructure projects. Further, the absence of even the discussion of a viable, accountable, and clear-cut governance structure for the new transit system is concerning.

This research will begin such conversation, and will uncover and clarify the roles, responsibilities, and contributions required of tax payers, academics, planners, government leaders, and private interests in the provision of mass transit infrastructures in the region.

The number of subjects recruited for this study is anticipated to be less than 30. Given that this research is targeted to obtain sentiments and responses from stakeholders, such as municipal councillors, transport academics, professionals, as well as special interest groups, those recruited to participate must necessarily qualify or be part of the aforementioned groups. Moreover, recruits must be of age (adult, 18+), and must reside, represent, be employed or generally conduct their business, research or activities within the GTA.

**Description of the Study:**

### Study Basics

- This study will begin in January 2011, and is anticipated to conclude by end of April 2011
- This study is part of the Investigator's Master's Research Paper.

### Use and Structure of Questionnaire in Interview Process

- This study will utilize interviews and questionnaires.
- Questions from the questionnaire will guide what will be asked in the interview. Additional questions, however, may emerge following your views or opinions.
- Questions from the questionnaire will be based on two themes: a) governance and b) infrastructure.
- Questions from the questionnaire will include questions such as general knowledge, past experience, opinion, agree-disagree, numerical ranking, multiple choice, or any combination thereof.

### Sample Question:

*Please identify the factors that influence the selection, scale and deployment of any given mass transit mode, routing or technology. (Check all that apply.)*

- ☐ *Pre-existing technology (compatibility / standardization)*
- ☐ *Alternative or improved technology*
- ☐ *Available right-of-way/ Geographic constraints*
- ☐ *Efficiency, speed, and comfort*
- ☐ *Route length / complexity*
- ☐ *Effect on urban form and structure*
- ☐ *Societal needs / Public preferences*
- ☐ *Government policies / objectives*
- ☐ *Market / External influences*
- ☐ *Financial viability*
- ☐ *Other: \_\_\_\_\_*

### Formal Interview

- If you agree to participate, you will be invited to attend one formal interview.
- Your interview may take place at the Ryerson University campus, at the School of Urban and Regional Planning, 105 Bond Street.
- Alternatively, if you prefer, at a location convenient for you (i.e. your place of work).
- The formal interview should last no more than 30 minutes in duration
- Your contributions will be recorded using hand-written or type-written methods only.

### Follow-up Interviews (if required)

- You may be invited for a maximum of two follow-up interviews
- Your interview may take place via telephone or in-person, whichever is convenient for you.
- Follow-up interviews should last no more than 15 minutes in duration
- Your contributions will be recorded using hand-written or type-written methods only.

### Risks or Discomforts:

Because of the social, economic, and political nature of the questions asked, you may reflect upon previous experiences, beliefs, and viewpoints while responding to a questionnaire or interview. If you

begin to feel uncomfortable, you may discontinue participation, either temporarily or permanently, without penalty.

In a general sense, the reported findings from this study may have potential for some social, economic, or legal implications / influence on how governance in mass transit will be conceived in Toronto and the GTHA in the future.

### **Benefits of the Study:**

The findings and recommendations may be beneficial to subject populations as it will help inform and educate them of different governance structures available, and how relying on these alternatives, may help achieve and arrive at socioeconomic, environmental, political and energy-reduction objectives. However, I cannot guarantee that you will receive any direct, immediate, or financial benefit arising from this research.

### **Confidentiality:**

Hand-written records, as well as electronic records, such as type-written records of all questionnaire or interview sessions held with you will be kept confidential, and this confidentiality will be maintained to the extent allowable by law. The aforementioned data and records will be kept, if in hard copy, under secure lock and key at Ryerson University. If the record is electronic in nature, it will be stored on a physical hard disk, and where possible, backed up on appropriate storage media. Your records will only be accessed by the investigator, and as required to the research supervisor for the purposes of advising and guiding the investigator. From the time of your consent, to the time that the data remains stored by the investigator, you will remain able to review any record obtained as a result of the questionnaire or interview sessions. Your records will remain stored for a period of two years, after which it will be erased from any storage media, or destroyed if in physical (i.e. hard copy) form.

### **Incentives to Participate:**

You will not be paid to participate in this study.

### **Costs and/or Compensation for Participation:**

You will not be paid to participate in this study.

### **Voluntary Nature of Participation:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University, or any of its institutes or departments. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

At any particular point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether.

### **Questions about the Study:**

If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact.

Tommy Au, Principal Investigator

1-416-979-5000 (Ext 13833)  
[Tommy.au@ryerson.ca](mailto:Tommy.au@ryerson.ca)  
Murtaza Haider, PhD, Supervisor  
1-416-979-5000 (Ext 2480)  
[Murtaza.haider@ryerson.ca](mailto:Murtaza.haider@ryerson.ca)

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information.

Research Ethics Board  
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation  
Ryerson University  
350 Victoria Street  
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3  
416-979-5042

**Agreement:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## **Ryerson University Interview Guide**

### **The Political Economy of Mass Transit Infrastructure Investments in the GTA**

This is the interview guide that accompanies the submission for ethics approval.

This document will guide the interviewer and remind him of what must occur during the interview.

- Welcome
- Introduction of Project
- Introduction and completion of Informed Consent Form
- Advise subject of their rights/ opportunities
- Begin questionnaire when subject is ready and forms are complete
- Allow for skipped questions, switch of order if appropriate.
- Allow for elaboration, if required, but steer away from digressions
- Ensure subject offered chance to add or clarify thoughts
- Ensure subject offered chance to ask any outstanding questions
- Thank subject for their participation

# The Political Economy of Mass Transit Infrastructure Investments in the Greater Toronto Area

Information collected will be used to better understand the political economy of governance structures and decision making approaches of mass transit in the Greater Toronto Area.

This Questionnaire should take about 30 minutes of your time, and is intended to guide the interview process.

Your participation is voluntary. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the extent allowable by applicable laws.

For further information please contact the Principal Investigator - Tommy Au at 416-979-5000 x 13833; [tommy.au@ryerson.ca](mailto:tommy.au@ryerson.ca), or his academic supervisor, Murtaza Haider PhD at 416-979-5000 x 2480; [murtaza.haider@ryerson.ca](mailto:murtaza.haider@ryerson.ca).

\* Required

## General Questions

**Have you completed the informed consent form provided to you by the Principal Investigator? \***

Please check yes or no.

☐ Yes

☐ No

## Infrastructure Questions

This section includes questions about the processes of identifying the need and scale of mass transit infrastructure and services; the process of justifying the investment and arriving at a decision; the process of implementing the decision; as well as the process of operating the system once the infrastructure is in place.

Mass transit infrastructure, in this context, refers to rail and bus rapid transit based investments. Specifically, those described in the Metrolinx Big Move, as well as related municipal initiatives in Toronto area.

**Transit infrastructure is often implemented on the basis of identified needs and opportunities. Of the following list of determinants, please rank them according to relevance.**

One response per line.

1 Least  
relevant

2

3

4

5 Most  
relevant

Infrequent service  
(service exists, but  
supply lower than  
demand)



	1 Least relevant	2	3	4	5 Most relevant
Inadequate service (service exists, but deficient due to technology i.e. mode; or service design i.e. poor scheduling)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Environmental benefits associated with transit use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Enhanced mobility for 'dependent' user groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**In your view, what are some of the most important factors that influence the selection of any particular transit mode, and the scale for which the service is designed?**

Factors may include, but are not limited to pre-existing technology; rights of way; route length or complexity; effect on urban form; societal need or preferences; government policies or objectives; market influences; and financial viability.

**What are some of the advantages or challenges associated with the present plans and investments in mass transit infrastructure in Toronto?**

**In other words, what are some of the benefits, risks, or barriers that may exist?**

**Do you feel that the public was adequately educated about the present plans and investments in mass transit infrastructure, prior to any official decision or legal/ financial commitment?**

Educated means that the public has been directly or indirectly informed or made aware of the proposed plans.

**Similarly, do you feel that the public was given adequate opportunity to respond and contribute ideas, as well as to give approval to the present plans and investments in mass transit infrastructure?**

Approval means the direct or indirect acknowledgement, authorization, or confirmation of the proposed plans.

**What is your opinion on the funding model pursued by present plans and investments in mass transit infrastructure?**

For information, funding commitments to date have primarily been from public sources.

**What is your perspective on alternative funding mechanisms for infrastructure? What role could these mechanisms play in supporting mass transit in the GTA?**

**Have you any opinion with respect to the proposed implementation strategy or process of present plans and investments in mass transit infrastructure?**

## **Governance Questions**

Governance can be defined as the arrangements and processes that manage and ensure the provision and delivery of a good or service. In this case, the delivery and provision of mass transit

infrastructure in the Greater Toronto Area.

Essentially, governance looks at, and addresses the questions of "who, what, when, where, why, and how" a good or service is provided.

Currently, mass transit in the GTA is mostly a publicly funded and operated service. Alternative forms include, but are not limited to a range of public-private partnerships, as well as privatized offerings.

### How essential are the following aspects of governance?

One response per line.

	1 Less essential	2	3	4	5 Highly essential
Stakeholder participation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Decision making/ selecting the course of action	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Timing of actions/ implementation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reason/ motive behind implementation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Method of implementation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Post-implementation review	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Who are the important or relevant parties in mass transit governance?

Check all that apply.

	1 Not very relevant	2	3	4	5 Very relevant
Transportation engineers/ transit planners	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Urban designers/ planners	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Government or elected officials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Government or public employees	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Specialists/ service operators	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Specialists/ equipment manufacturers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Specialists/ academics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Special interest or advocacy groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tax payers/ public	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transit Unions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Based on your selection above, what are the most important roles, responsibilities, and

**contributions required or expected of the most relevant party (parties)**  
**Party or parties that scored the highest (most relevant)**

**If mass transit services remained a public operation, what areas of attention or improvement, in your opinion, is required to ensure long term success, efficiency, and responsiveness to current and emerging needs?**

**If a proposal was put forth to depart from the current governance structure, which alternative would be most appropriate in managing and meeting the current and future needs of mass transit in the region, and why?**

**What are some of the key advantages or concerns for your suggested alternative?**

**What would the logical steps be to implement or move towards your suggested alternative**

## Closing Question

**Have you any final coments or concerns?**

Regarding the above questions, this research, or in general?

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