

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Metrolinx document condemned by Miller, other board members

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An internal Metrolinx document advising the province's Toronto-area transportation agency to "salt" consultation sessions with supporters was "unacceptable," Mayor David Miller says.

Mr. Miller, who has clashed with Metrolinx over his Transit City light-rail plan, is one of the 11 mostly local politicians who sit on the board of the regional agency assigned to stickhandle billions in new public transit investments.

He said he was surprised and disappointed by the document, revealed in *The Globe and Mail*, which was never submitted to the board or made official Metrolinx policy.

"It's very good that we have elected representatives on the board," Mr. Miller said. "Had this gotten to the board, we would have stopped it."

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Reports have surfaced that Premier Dalton McGuinty has been urged to replace the existing Metrolinx board with appointees from the private sector, something the mayor says he has made clear the city would find unacceptable.

The *Globe* obtained a confidential draft of a Metrolinx communications strategy dating from last July that contained this paragraph: "Our consultation period needs to be tightly structured and telescoped. The last thing we need is for this to be hijacked by nimbies or local politicians on the make. These should be mainly informational briefings. We should salt the sessions with supporters. An orgy of consultation will mire this in controversy and delay."

Rob MacIsaac, the president of Hamilton's Mohawk College and the chairman of Metrolinx's board, said that while he wrote much of the document, the offending paragraph does not reflect his views and was written by a consultant he would not name.

He said this piece of advice was rejected, and pointed to documents that show how feedback from the public consultations Metrolinx held on its massive transportation plan, released last fall, resulted in changes to the plan.

Metrolinx board member Gary Carr, the chairman of Halton Region, said the language in the document runs counter to everything Metrolinx has done so far: "We have really bent over backwards to have public consultations. ... It's the complete opposite of what the board has been doing and saying."

But Toronto City Councillor Norm Kelly, who also sits on the Metrolinx board, said he had little problem with the document's language, saying it was meant to stimulate debate and that opponents of projects usually stack meetings, too.

"You could say, look, let's make sure we have knowledgeable people in the audience," Mr. Kelly said. "... All sides play the game."

Board member Paul Bedford, the former chief planner of the city of Toronto, praised the consultations Metrolinx has held and condemned the document: "It's so naive that it's stupid, frankly."

Board member and Toronto Transit Commission chairman Adam Giambrone said the language in the document was inappropriate: "When documents like that are released, they are not likely to instill confidence in the public."

The revelation of aborted consultation strategy comes as Metrolinx faces complaints over its consultation process from a community group in Weston that opposes the planned express train from Union Station to Pearson International Airport because of the increased train traffic it will drive through their community.

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