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Metrolinx reaching moment of truth

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As millions of GTA residents move about by train, bus and automobile this week, they're probably not going to be worrying much about a document called the Regional Transportation Plan, or RTP. But on Friday, this grand transportation vision, also known as the Big Move, goes to the provincial planning agency Metrolinx for approval.

The vote is only significant if Metrolinx and all levels of government dedicate enough funds and actually relieve Greater Toronto's worst bottlenecks and most overcrowded transport routes.

Those who are touting projects that cannot demonstrate a real impact ought to heed Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion and her repeated call to focus on "need and priority." This means spending scarce dollars on justified transit upgrades.

Provincial and Metrolinx officials say the Big Move is a living document, that it's not written in stone. Indeed, a lot of it has not even been written. Such is the rush to address decades of neglect that the plan has yet to settle on specific projects or research crucial issues like how goods can be transported without slowing down commuters.

That said, the RTP is the most complete game plan ever devised for this fast-growing region. Planners are considering issues that were previously dealt with separately — if they were thought of at all. The Big Move acknowledges not only the need for much better transit but also good cycling and walking routes, plus the need for smart city building such as promoting condos and shops near transit hubs, as well as a focus on good customer service for transit riders.

The next step is to fill in the plan's holes. One key question involves access to Pearson Airport. Metrolinx must ensure that people in Weston, Brampton and other points along the soon-to-be upgraded Georgetown rail line can get to the airport easily and at a reasonable cost. The Big Move is too vague on this.

The other crucial component: Money. It's not clear whether the initial budget of \$11 billion is enough to make a real difference to commuters, nor if the province can send sufficient funds in the current economic climate.