

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Minister, the residents of Weston are very concerned about the environmental and safety implications associated with the proposed GO Transit air-rail link project. You yourself have the ability to increase the present class B environmental assessment to a class C assessment if any one of three conditions exist: if there are more than 50 kilometres of rail; if there is something new that GO Transit does not normally do; or if there is serious public controversy. In this case, all three of those situations are in existence. As a matter of fact, on the last one alone the residents had to have their meeting cancelled by the fire marshal two weeks ago because of the size of the crowd. Last week's rescheduled meeting attracted 2,500 residents. If this does not reflect serious public controversy, we are at a loss to understand what does. My question to you is, will you instruct GO Transit to bump up the class B environmental assessment of the GO air-rail link proposal to a full class C environmental assessment?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I want to thank the member for asking this question. We are in the public information sessions at this point in time. The purpose of these public information sessions is to get input from the public.

There have been some concerns expressed, and we are absolutely determined to address those questions for the public. If that requires that we adopt a different environmental assessment process, we will look at that. But at this time, we are at the very initial stages of this process.

Mr. Prue: Minister, you're only going part way. I want you to go all the way here today. Given that one of the proponents of the project, SNC-Lavalin, is also the company hired by GO Transit, to the tune of some \$600,000, to undertake the environmental assessment, the people of Weston are well justified in their concern that the process may not be carried out in a fashion in keeping with the interests of their community. Moving to a full environmental assessment of this project will provide Weston residents the open inquiry that they demand.

In fact, your own colleague in government, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, stated in a letter to the community, "I have written to the Ministers of Transportation and Environment to express my concerns over this proposed new rail service and request consideration for a more detailed and comprehensive evaluation of the impacts of this proposal on our community."

My question to you is direct: Your own minister wants to do it. Will you do it? Will you do it today?

Hon. Mr. Takhar: Let me say this. The Minister of Economic Development has been very active on this file. He has talked to me about the issues of the residents, and we are listening very carefully to what the residents have to say. They also have the option to bump up the environmental assessment process if it's required.

I want to assure the people of Weston that we are absolutely determined to have the proper consultations with the people of the Weston area. Whatever it will require to address their concerns, we are absolutely committed to doing that.