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## Toronto's transit plans on separate tracks

### Regional draft offers alternative to TTC's light rail network

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**TESS KALINOWSKI**  
TRANSPORTATION REPORTER

It is a competing vision of how to solve Toronto's growing gridlock crisis.

A draft proposal of the Metrolinx regional transportation plan shows a juiced-up version of the planned light rail line across Eglinton, the conversion of the Sheppard subway to light rail and another U-shaped subway that includes Queen St.



TORY ZIMMERMAN/TORONTO STAR  
The Sheppard subway station in Toronto is shown in this file photo.

If the plans were to proceed, the three east-west endeavours could derail significant pieces of the TTC's highly touted Transit City plan to build \$10 billion worth of light rail lines to Toronto's borders.

They're also among a few surprises contained in a preliminary draft of the regional transportation plan by Metrolinx, which has repeatedly promised a bold approach to attacking road congestion in the GTA.

Metrolinx, formerly the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, was created by the province in 2006. Its 11-member board, which includes Mayor David Miller, has been mandated to develop a regional transportation plan designed to be "a seamless, integrated transit network" from Hamilton to Newmarket to Oshawa.

Metrolinx chair Rob MacIsaac stressed yesterday that the versions already circulating among board members and transportation insiders aren't the ones that will be released to the public at the end of the month.

But he expects many of the ideas will be the same.

The plans include campaigns to devote more road space to transit, promote biking and walking, expand GO service around the region to two-way service every 15 minutes, extend major regional highways and build a high-speed rail link between Pearson airport and Union Station.

The early drafts include a map showing a "Metro" line along Eglinton, as well as a light rail line where the Sheppard subway currently exists. Sources have said Metrolinx has been pushing for a subway line along Eglinton.

### METROLINX

- Created in 2006 as the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority to fulfill an election pledge by Premier Dalton McGuinty. Renamed Metrolinx last December.
- At its core is the development of a regional transportation plan, designed to be "a seamless, integrated transit network" from Hamilton to Newmarket to Oshawa, an area comprising nine transit systems handling over 518 million annual passenger trips and some of the busiest roads in the country.

MacIssac denied this. "I do not anticipate we will be recommending a subway on Eglinton," he said, admitting he doesn't want to inflame tensions between the provincial planning agency and Toronto.

"I really want to downplay that we're in a pitched battle with the city. We need to continue to work with them to try so that the regional and local needs are met on Eglinton," said MacIsaac.

Asked whether Metrolinx plans to recommend against portions of the Transit City lines, MacIsaac said, "the heart and soul of Transit City will be in our plan, I predict."

If there's limited money on the table, the last thing the 905-area municipalities are going to want is \$6 billion chewed up by a subway, said Toronto transit advocate Steve Munro. "It's like the Sheppard subway. The problem with these gigantic projects is they use all the money. But what portion of the regional demand does it address?"

One city source, who wouldn't be named, pointed to the draft's designation of Eglinton as a "Metro" line. Metrolinx defines "Metro" as grade-separated electric rail, which can run below ground or elevated such as Vancouver's SkyTrain. But it can also mean light rail on the surface, as the TTC has planned.

But Vancouver-style light rail would never get off the ground since the city owns the road, said the source.

MacIsaac said the idea of a subway line running from Don Mills station down to Queen St., west to Dundas West station is "not inconsistent" with the TTC's plans and only appears under the longer-term 25-year Metrolinx proposals.

TTC chair Adam Giambrone, also on the Metrolinx board, said such a line to relieve overcrowding on the Yonge subway might be appropriate after 2018, when the bulk of the seven proposed Transit City lines would be operational.

"What I can tell you is the city is very committed to implementing Transit City as is," he said. "We want to help accommodate longer distance travel but it can't be at the expense of local travel.

"This is not all about regional express service. If we're serious about getting more people on transit we need good local transit."

Miller said he hadn't read the regional transportation plan draft but told reporters, "it's an issue of meeting transportation demand and being affordable.

"Those are the issues. Can we build rapid transit for Toronto's neighbourhoods in the near future? Is there a way to finance that cost? And does it meet the transportation demands? Those are the questions the TTC asked itself in developing Transit City. And those are certainly the questions I'll look at when I review the draft Metrolinx plan."

The Metrolinx board will discuss the draft plan at a King City retreat tomorrow and Saturday.

Premier Dalton McGuinty also said he had not seen the Metrolinx draft. He noted his government's MoveOntario plan is worth \$17.5 billion, including one-third federal funding that Ottawa has yet to fully commit. "The issue is what's the best way to invest this money," he told reporters.

How Metrolinx proposes to pay for the transit and other improvements is still unclear. Some early

- Has an 11-member board, including two provincial nominees and others from regional and municipal councils in the GTA and Hamilton.

- Responsible for evaluating, prioritizing and recommending implementation plans for 52 rapid transit improvements and expansions across the region as part of the province's MoveOntario 2020, an \$11.5 billion (\$17.5 billion if Ottawa joins in) pledge in 2007 that forms the core of the regional transportation plan.

- Last fall and winter, Metrolinx produced papers on transportation issues, from road tolls and high-speed trains to cycling and sustainability.

- Later this month, it's to release a draft of the transportation plan and detail how to pay for it.

plans value the costs at about \$55 billion. The TTC has suggested an Eglinton subway would cost about \$10 billion.

But MacIsaac said the final version of the regional plan would not be worth \$55 billion.

"We're working within the constraints that we've been given. Although we recognize MoveOntario 2020 is a huge start it's not the end and I don't think anybody ever said it would be," he said.

A draft investment strategy, addressing possible revenue tools such as a gas tax, road tolls and parking levies, is to be released along with the regional transportation plan at the end of the month.

*With files from Paul Moloney and Rob Ferguson*