

WESTON COMMUNITY COALITION
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For Immediate Release . . .

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“PUBLIC-PRIVATE AIR RAIL LINK ... ALL TRACKS LEAD TO EXPROPRIATION”

The Weston Community Coalition has expressed its **deep disappointment** over today’s announcement that the Ontario Government, through its Metrolinx agency, is using scarce tax dollars to fund a rapid transit link **with priority given to Woodbine racetrack**. **“We have been concerned about this plan for some time. Today’s announcement highlights our worst fears, that the prime consideration is to provide an express train for gamblers, rather than real public transit in the city,”** said Mike Sullivan, chair of the Weston Community Coalition.

“We always wondered why **ridership numbers were so low and fares so high** to run mostly empty trains to the airport,” said Sullivan. **“The plan made little sense from a business or public policy perspective.** The train was presented as a **“World Class”** express run between Union Station and the Airport. **Every major city’s train to its airport is electrified, most with stops to reduce car traffic and pollution.** Consistently the plan has refused to consider extra stops in neighbourhoods along the route, to make it useful to ordinary Toronto citizens, stating it would slow the train too much. The addition of a stop at Woodbine, where no one lives, **begs the question: is this a “gamblers’ express?”**

“The Weston Community Coalition is not and has never been opposed to building a rail link to Pearson Airport. We just think it should be done right, the first time, not down the road. If it is to be paid for with public money, it should be public transit, with reasonable fares, electric, and tunneled through residential communities. If the government wants to build an express train to Woodbine with public money, it should allow for public debate on whether that’s a good use of half a billion scarce tax dollars.”

Metrolinx’ announcement today is **eerily similar to a GO transit P3 with a private consortium** first announced in 2003. There are some differences, but the basic structure is the same. The public will pay to put in nearly \$500 million of rail infrastructure. A private consortium will then be given exclusive rights to run trains to Pearson for hefty fares (set at \$20 in 2003). **What about getting the hundreds of workers along the line at the airport and surrounding area to and from work – reducing pollution in a big way? The 90,000 people who work at and around Pearson are being asked to wait for the as-yet unfunded Eglinton streetcar, or other as yet unstarted or unfunded transit projects in the Metrolinx ‘Big Move’ plan.**

“The original plan was to use trains that are 55 years old, run on diesel, with potential safety shortcomings, passing through communities next to schools and will be at fares unusable by most,” said Sullivan. “The town of Weston will lose a key roadway, and while the addition of a stop and a short tunnel is welcome, it is unlikely anyone will pay \$20 to go downtown or to the airport from Weston, so the stop will likely be short-lived. Other communities along the route want to be connected to the airport too, and at a reasonable fare. **Does Toronto want to be the only city in the world running a diesel train to its airport with limited or no public access?”**

The Weston Community Coalition is a collection of concerned citizens and community groups, formed in 2004 when the Environmental Assessment was first launched. Over 2500 people attended a public meeting in the town of Weston in April 2005, to express their displeasure. The EA sat on the desk of the provincial Minister of the Environment from Oct, 2006 to the present, when Metrolinx announced it would be taking over the project using a shorter 6 month EA process, without the ability to look at alternatives.

For further information please contact:

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