

All they want for Christmas is a subway

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A subway line connecting Pearson airport to Union station would best serve Toronto residents, says one local group, recommending 10 stops along their proposed route.

The Weston Community Coalition, which successfully pushed for a full provincial environmental assessment on the privately owned air-rail link earlier this year, is now pushing all three levels of government to make the airport subway a reality.

There are several factors making the airport line more feasible than other proposed subway routes including an extension to York University or an upgrade to the Scarborough line, said Mike Sullivan, Weston Community Coalition chair.

"The right-of-way is already in place," he said, explaining the airport line would take the same route as the existing CN rail corridor.

With no need for major land excavation, homes and businesses along the route would not be disrupted either, Sullivan noted.

Another plus, he added, is that hundreds of millions of dollars from the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government have already been set aside for a transit link from the airport to Union.

The coalition is asking that the current proposal to build a privately owned air-rail link using express train service be scrapped and redirect the money to fund a public rapid transit connection instead, which they expect to be the "cheapest and quickest subway ever constructed."

Ward 11 Councillor Frances Nunziata (York South-Weston) agreed, putting forth a notice of motion last week to look into the option of building an airport subway while the environmental assessment done by GO Transit is currently taking place. The notice of motion passed.

She was notified by the Weston Community Coalition that the City of Toronto had originally requested a rapid transit link in the form of a subway back in 1998.

"I think that would be a better option ... as a city building measure," said Nunziata, noting the air-rail link as currently proposed would only benefit the elite users who can afford the \$20 cost per one-way trip.

"In contrast, the proposed subway would provide affordable transportation to residents from all walks of life, including Humber students and new Canadians, as well as connect established neighbourhoods," she said.

But Ward 15 Councillor Howard Moscoe (Eglinton-Lawrence), who also serves as TTC chair, insisted there's no money in the budget to build any new subway line.

"It's not a reality. And if we had enough money to build a subway ... it (airport subway) wouldn't be my first priority," said Moscoe, adding upgrading the Scarborough line and even talks about extending the Bloor line into Mississauga would take precedence. "There's no money to be made in public transit."

Moscoe noted that just adding four new subway stops to the Spadina line connecting Downsview station to York University would cost \$1.5 billion dollars. Sullivan and Nunziata countered that in the five to six years it would take to build the subway line, the rest of the money could be raised by the three levels of government.

"The provincial and federal government needs to be partners on this," Nunziata said.

Sullivan had already written a letter to Jean Lapierre and Harinder Takhar, the federal and provincial ministers of transportation respectively, in early November. Neither has replied.

Weston Community Coalition members have a number of questions they want to pose to politicians such as why the privately owned air-rail link is heavily subsidized by public dollars.

These and other issues are expected to come up at a scheduled all-candidates meeting on Jan. 16, 7:30 p.m., at Weston Collegiate, 100 Pine St., a week before the federal election date.