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Chair

Mr. Merv Tweed

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to meeting number 10 of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

The orders of the day are before us. We have the report issued by the subcommittee that met on Monday. I believe that everybody has a copy in French and English, and I would ask members to look at this. There was quite a bit of discussion on the agreements that we came to on that particular day.

I'll open up the floor for comments.

Mr. Nicholls, go ahead please.

[Translation]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Chair, we'd have liked it if the study of the bill had been a little longer. We're a bit disappointed that only about three sessions remain to study the bill. We really haven't had the time to call witnesses such as representatives of the Union des municipalités du Québec, the mayors of Quebec municipalities, and the mayors of big cities like Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto. I think that's a shortcoming...

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Richards, on a point of order.

Mr. Blake Richards: We're discussing committee business at the present time, correct?

The Chair: We're discussing the report that's in front of us, yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes. Should we not be in camera for that discussion?

The Chair: We're not obligated to be in camera, but if it's a motion we would have to entertain it.

Mr. Richards?

Mr. Blake Richards: I move that we go in camera for the discussion of committee business.

The Chair: There's a motion on the floor that we move in camera to discuss the subcommittee's report. It's non-debatable, so I will call the vote now. All those in favour? All those opposed?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: With that, I'm going to take a two-minute recess and ask everyone in the back not affiliated with the discussion, to leave, please. We won't be long. We'll come back out to get you.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

• (1535)

(Pause)

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you. Welcome back to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. Our orders of the day are pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), a study of the national public transit strategy.

Joining us today from Metrolinx is Bruce McCuaig, president and chief executive officer, and Dina Graser, acting vice-president, strategic communications.

Welcome. I know that you have a visual presentation. I will ask you to start and then we'll move to committee questions.

Mr. Bruce McCuaig (President and Chief Executive Officer, Metrolinx): Thank you very much. It's a real pleasure to be here today and an honour to appear before the committee.

I have a short presentation that will take me about 10 minutes, and then I think there's an opportunity to engage in a bit of a discussion and to dialogue after that.

In the first few slides, we really just talk a little bit about who Metrolinx is and what our role is in transportation planning for the greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

As you can see in slide 3, we're a relatively young organization. We were created only in 2006.

We were created to develop a more modern, more efficient, and more integrated transportation system for the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. We have three key words that drive our activities.

First of all, we're planning for the future. We're thinking in the short, the medium, and the long term, and we think typically in 25-year horizons. We deliver—and our objective is to deliver—quality transportation projects on time and on budget.

We also are responsible for the delivery of direct services to the public. You may be familiar with the GO Transit service, for example, the regional rail and bus service in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

We are a multimodal agency. We deal with all modes of transport. But today's focus really is to talk a little bit about the transit system, and I'm going to focus my remarks to that.

We have three operating divisions at Metrolinx. GO Transit is our rail and bus service that crosses the area. PRESTO deals with the smart-card-integrated system that allows people to pay for their transit fares on multiple transit systems. Our newest division is the Air Rail Link, which I'll talk about in just a few moments.

GO Transit is the largest part of our organization. It was launched in 1967 and came into Metrolinx as part of the organization in 2009. We carry about 59 million passengers on an annual basis. This means that about 150,000 passengers are carried into downtown Toronto each and every workday, and it has been growing very quickly over the past five years. We've had a ridership increase of about 21%, which works out to about 5% in each of the past five years. This year to date we're growing at about 8%.

We're proud of our 94% on-time performance, and we're also proud that one of our leadership responsibilities in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area is to raise the bar in customer service and improve the customer experience. We've issued what we've called a Passenger Charter. It gives a series of promises to our customers about the level of service they can expect from us.

We're using key performance indicators to report publicly, in a very transparent fashion, on how we're achieving against the promises we've made. We believe that's part of our role and responsibility: to drive change in the transit world in the region.

The PRESTO system is smart-card technology. It came into the Metrolinx organization in 2011. I'm pleased to say that we've rolled out this system across the entire GO rail and bus network, as well as in all of the local transit systems in what's called the 905 area, the regional or suburban transit systems in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. We are currently at 12 TTC subway stations as well.

We are going to be deploying PRESTO here in Ottawa starting in the spring. We're in the final stages of negotiations with the TTC about deploying PRESTO on the balance of the TTC system over the next few years.

There currently are about 90,000 customers who have PRESTO in their wallets and purses. This is a significant information technology project that we've been able to deliver on time and on budget.

The Air Rail Link is a project that's under construction right now. Our objective is to have an operating air-rail link between Union Station, in downtown Toronto, and Pearson International Airport, by the spring of 2015. This will provide a reliable, fast, and comfortable level of service between the two largest passenger transportation hubs in Canada, with service every 15 minutes and travel time of approximately 25 minutes door to door.

The region that we're serving is a large, diverse, and growing area. There are currently about 6 million people in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, which stretches from Hamilton in the west, through to the Oshawa-Clarington area in the east, and up to Barrie in the north. We have linkages to the areas immediately outside the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. We provide service to places like Niagara Falls, Barrie, Peterborough, Kitchener-Waterloo, and so on.

Because we're a transportation agency, we have to look at all modes of transport, particularly from central and eastern Canada. This is an important goods-movement corridor, with all rail corridors

and road-based corridors heading toward the U.S. markets through the greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

We're growing by about 100,000 to 150,000 people each and every year. There are 10 transit agencies, and integrating and coordinating our activities is one of the big objectives that we have as an organization, in addition to making sure our connections are made to the surrounding area as well.

● (1550)

Just to give you a bit of a sense of the challenge we're facing, this slide shows an image from 2001, and the blue area does not necessarily represent good transportation service. These are areas where we're having congestion in peak periods. We estimated that in 2001 the impact on the regional gross domestic product was approximately \$6 billion and resulted in 26,000 fewer jobs in the regional economy, and that's on an annual basis. That occurs each and every year.

We've also done forecasts to 2031, which is our planning horizon, of what it would look like if we did a business as usual approach. If we continue to invest in transportation at the rate we're investing, what would happen to our transportation system, based upon population and economic activity?

In that timeframe, we would have 2.6 million more people moving into this region. There would be about seven million more trips because of people travelling both to and from work, on leisure trips, and for other family reasons. Our current travel time in the region is estimated at 82 minutes a day, which, we're not proud to say, is among the highest in North America. In a business as usual environment, we estimate that our average annual commute times would grow to about 109 minutes each and every day, for both transit and road-based transport, and that \$6 billion impact on our regional GDP would increase to about \$15 billion, again in a business as usual context.

We clearly don't want to see that happen. We do have a plan, which we call "The Big Move", which is about how we make sure that our future in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area is a more positive one, both for the region and in terms of the contributions we make to the national economy as well. We do have the largest transit expansion program in Canadian history under way right now.

Our 25-year integrated transportation plan is, again, a multimodal one, but we have four key transit-related goals. Our first goal is to double the mode share that transit has of daily trips. Our second goal is to triple the length of rapid transit in the region, which would include the subway system, the GO rail network, light rail transit, bus rapid transit, and those kinds of dedicated transit routes. Our third goal is to have 75% of the region's population living within two kilometres of transit, because accessibility to transit is a key determinant of people's use of transit, and it also makes sure that underserved communities have access to transit—to give them access to employment opportunities, for example. Our fourth key transit-related goal is to reduce commuting times.

I mentioned a few moments ago that business as usual would take us to an average commute time, on a daily basis, of about 109 minutes. If we implement the Big Move, as we've outlined it, we would drop that down to about 79 minutes, which you might say is not that great an improvement over the existing 82 minutes, but if you factor in the fact that we're also absorbing 100,000 to 150,000 people every year.... Keeping up with growth is a significant objective for us.

The final thing I would present as an objective is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Transportation is the single largest source of emissions to the environment. We estimate that we can reduce our urban transportation emissions by 40%.

The next slide really shows what we have today, which is a radial system that brings people very efficiently to downtown Toronto and has served that marketplace very well. What we want to move to in 2031 is something that imposes an east-west and north-south grid of transit services. That would essentially continue to serve the downtown area but, more importantly, would extend services to all the new employment areas that have been growing up all around the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, so that we would be serving not just the downtown Toronto area but the other employment nodes we have.

We have seven major projects under way right now to kickstart the implementation of our Big Move. This amounts to about a \$16-billion investment and an unprecedented amount of work.

I'll just very quickly list the projects: the crosstown light rail transit, which is a project that spans 25 kilometres across midtown Toronto; York Viva bus rapid transit along Yonge Street and Highway 7 in York Region; the Air Rail Link, which I mentioned earlier on; a total refurbishment of Union Station; the 403 transitway in Mississauga; the subway extension of the Spadina line to Vaughan Corporate Centre; and the Brampton Züm system. This is a start towards the implementation of our transportation plan. It will be transformative in and of itself, but the key point is that we need to continue to invest in the transportation system for the future.

• (1555)

To give you a sense of where the funding is coming from for the \$16-billion investment, we have about \$14 billion of that coming from the provincial government and just over \$1 billion from each of the federal and municipal governments.

I'd like to extend our appreciation to the federal government for the level of investment that has occurred over the last few years. It

has been a great start to help us move on the implementation of the Big Move.

These funds do not include the numerous other small and medium-sized projects that are scattered across the region as well.

How do we move towards a more sustainable system? My premise is that there are unique challenges faced by the large city regions in Canada. The greater Toronto and Hamilton area, greater Montreal, and Metro Vancouver all face challenges from a transportation perspective that are different from those of other major cities.

Those challenges are caused by the geography and the size of the area we're dealing with, the scope of the population and the employment activity, and the complexity and the governance issues when we're dealing with multiple municipalities. In essence, we've outgrown the ability to solve our transportation challenges on a municipality-by-municipality basis. We need a regional solution to what is really a regional challenge.

We also have these city regions that in essence are our flagships globally. Supporting them is really important in terms of projecting the Canadian economy and what Canada is all about.

We also represent the area where about two-thirds of our transit ridership exists, and it also represents the biggest opportunity to increase transit ridership because of the strong connections among higher densities, mixed land use, and the transportation system.

The importance to the Canadian economy is really about congestion and relieving congestion in getting goods and services moving and also in the direct employment we can create through the implementation of the Big Move. We estimate that there will be about 430,000 new jobs, \$21 billion in employment income, and GDP growth of a significant amount, as well as tax revenues going to all levels of government.

We realize, though, that at the same time there are significant fiscal realities that we must address. All levels of government are facing challenges right now. Municipalities lack the revenue capacity to make large investments in the transit and transportation systems. We are looking at alternative ways to raise revenue, because we are aware that governments at all levels have limited opportunity to make contributions through traditional revenue sources.

We do recognize that there's a role for the private sector, where appropriate, through alternative financing procurement. We believe that there's a need to use a suite of delivery models, from traditional methods of building, designing, and constructing transit through to alternative financing and procurement based on the nature of the project. We also believe that it's important for everybody to come to the table to deal with what is a large regional challenge that requires a regional solution.

We're very unique in that we have in our legislation for Metrolinx a clause that directs us to report to the province and the municipalities, by June 2013, with an investment strategy, which would include proposals for revenue-generating tools that may be used by the province and municipalities to support the implementation of the plan. Right now we are in the process of completing our global scan of how other jurisdictions have been using different revenue tools. Our next step is to engage with stakeholders and the public as to how we might apply some of these lessons and best practices from around the world in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

We believe the issue is urgent and the time is right to take action in terms of a national approach to transit infrastructure. We know through the research we do that transportation is the number one top-of-mind issue for residents in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. The quality of the transportation system is a bigger concern to residents in the GTHA than the quality of health care or the quality of education. Reducing congestion on major highways is the number one priority, followed by improving mobility and expanding the public transit system, and there is widespread public support for solving our transportation challenges through a long-term plan that's dealt with on a regional basis.

Finally, the issue is urgent and the time is right for action. The need is significant. We are facing relentless growth. Again, 100,000 to 150,000 people are moving into the region on an annual basis. We are dealing with the fact that we have a generation of under-investment that we're also recovering from in terms of the state of good repair and catching up in terms of the expansion of the system.

The costs of inaction are quite severe, we believe, in terms of lost productivity to the economy, job loss, taxes, and investment. We believe the benefits of action are worth it to all levels of government. It helps to position our global cities in the world economy and it improves the quality of life for millions of Canadians.

•(1600)

That concludes my opening remarks. I'll be happy to take any questions from you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Sullivan, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Thank you.

Thanks to all of you for being here.

You're aware that the nature of this bill that has been presented is to try to create a national strategy, a strategy that guides the formation of public transit at the local, regional, and inter-regional levels, but from a national perspective, because there's a significant amount of federal money in most large public transit projects. In addition, there is a gas tax that is headed off to municipalities, which is a significant amount of money, and essentially there may be more money in the future.

One of the things that the bill would attempt to do is to coordinate transit in a much better way than has been done. I think you're all too aware of what happens when there is political infighting over transit projects: we have a ditch dug on Eglinton Avenue that's filled in later in the mid-1990s, and also, part of your plan for light rail all over

Toronto has now been axed by the recently elected mayor of the City of Toronto.

Part of what we've heard other witnesses say is that creating some transparency and some accountability in transit decisions would be a good thing. Do you agree that a national strategy would be helpful?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Thanks for the question.

I think it's a really important point to look at the need for some national strategies for how we deal with our public transportation requirements in the nation. I would say that a principle-based approach for dealing with a national transit strategy is something that the committee should be thinking very clearly about.

It's important to have a broad-based consensus about the need for investment in public transit and to recognize nationally the importance of public transit to our economy and to our quality of life in our urban centres. It's really important to take a principle-based approach, without a national strategy getting into the details of local decision-making in terms of what makes sense in a particular regional or community context.

Here are some of the principles you might want to think about in the context of national transit strategies.

One would be about the need to be thinking in the long term. This might be something that you look to the local community or the regional transportation authority for in asking where is their long-term strategy or plan for the area.

Another is predictability in terms of an ongoing investment in transit and transportation. Flexibility for local choice is another one: in the end, this is all about giving residents in communities choice about how they move around the community. Another is accountability: it's really important to give the tools to local communities and regional authorities and then hold them accountable for delivering on the outcomes that they said they would deliver on.

Another principle is to have decisions made at the lowest possible level, because that's where you get the right match between the needs of the community and the nature of the projects and the investments. You've mentioned transparency in decision-making, and there should also be an evidence-based decision-making process so that you can demonstrate why you're making choices between different projects.

I think those are important principles, which we've been trying to apply in developing the Big Move in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area and in trying to implement it over the past few years. If we are studying a national transit strategy, I think those are elements that would be important for such a strategy.

•(1605)

Mr. Mike Sullivan: You developed a mechanism within Metrolinx for choosing which projects go first—or maybe for proving that the projects have value. I'm not sure what the term is; I call it cost-benefit-analysis, but you have a different term for it.

That's one of the things we've heard about throughout this: how do we put a value on the investment? In other words, there are two things. Is there a net dollar value and is there a net social value? Also, are we creating infrastructure that cities are not going to be able to afford to maintain, so that therefore they are going to be looking for handouts in the future to operate the system or to maintain the system. Have you any comments on that?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: That is an excellent question. At Metrolinx, we basically look at it in three ways in terms of how we make project selection decisions in the end.

The first level is the plan stage, when we look at all the needs—the linkages and the land use—and try to identify what the overall plan is for moving forward in the short, medium, and long term. The second stage I would call the program level, when we go through a process that we've called our prioritization process. We look at the social, economic, and environmental benefits of different projects, and compare them to each other so that we can provide some advice to our board of directors about which projects provide the most value in the end. Value isn't just in the sense of the dollar value, but in terms of the whole range of social value, environmental value, and economic value.

Then at the project level, we also have business-case analysis that we do—I think that's what you referred to—where we look at the cost benefit. We basically use that tool to look at different ways of delivering a project. If you adjust the project in a certain fashion; or if there are different values or results you get from that adjustment that are better than the original concept; or if you stage it differently; what are the different impacts of your phasing plan? If you deliver it in different models, what's the value you get from your different delivery mechanism?

There's a plan level we do, with prioritization among projects, and then business-case analysis within a project. It's important to be thinking about an evidence-based approach at all of those levels.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: I can't ignore one of the issues that we've dealt with in Toronto for the last eight or nine years, and that's the Air Rail Link and the use of diesel to get there. I'm aware that it's not a project that was one Metrolinx itself wanted to do, and that the province kind of handed it to them and told them to do it. Again, it's not a benefit-case analysis that drove you to do that. It was the province saying they needed the project done.

I know that Metrolinx has now conducted a study and has said that if we want to electrify these services—because Canada will be the only country on the planet with an air-rail link that's diesel—it's going to take us a long time. The study came back and said that it will take 32 years to electrify all of the GO transit system. If there were federal money in electrification, could that timeframe and the health of citizens be improved?

•(1610)

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: I have a couple of points I would suggest. One is that the Air Rail Link, we believe, is a very important project for the regional economy. It is part of the Big Move. When we look at cities around the world, especially global cities that have a financial services core, we see that an air-rail link between their downtown area and their international airport is critical. It is a

common element and is something that we're missing in the Toronto region.

About 5 million trips occur every year between downtown Toronto and Pearson airport. Right now, the only choice is getting into a car, taxi, or limousine. We're going to be providing a reliable alternative choice for the first time, which is going to take a lot of cars off the road. We think it's a really great project.

In terms of electrification, we did do a very comprehensive study of the alternative ways we could look at electrification of the entire network. We took a report to our board of directors that recommended we look at the electrification of what we call the Lakeshore corridor in the Toronto region and the Georgetown quarter, which would include the Air Rail Link.

The board endorsed that strategy. We got an endorsement from the province to start the environmental assessment work for the electrification of the first step, which is the Air Rail Link. We would anticipate that, subject to subsequent funding decisions, we could move to electrify the Air Rail Link in about seven years, but it's a long-term process to electrify an entire system.

There could very well be a role for the federal government in terms of participating in the process of electrification of the GO Transit rail network.

The key thing is to get through the environmental assessment process first and get an endorsement that this is a project that we're going to pursue in terms of the Air Rail Link. Then that would be a good time to be looking for partners with regard to how we might deliver on that project.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Coderre.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I invite you to put on your headphones; we have to give the interpreters something to do.

[*English*]

Congratulations. I really enjoyed that, and not because I'm from Montreal and I don't know what's going on in Toronto.

I really enjoyed this. This is the real thing. This is exactly the kind of witness we need today for a future strategy.

[*Translation*]

What I'm wondering may be a neophyte's question. Obviously, our experience is different with the Société de transport de Montréal. Greater Montreal's political reality is certainly different from that of the agglomeration of Toronto and Hamilton.

I put the question to you out of curiosity. There are no politicians on your board of directors. In the end, did it turn out to be the only way, that is, excluding politicians from the process, because they were all promoting their own particular project, you could talk about such a large region as Toronto and Hamilton, and public transit? I'd like you to tell me about this.

Accountability is essential. Mayors get elected to represent a particular population. There are real needs with regard to public transit services. How do you explain the fact that there are no politicians involved in the process? How can you speak on behalf of a large region and establish priorities and make sure you're protecting people's sensitivities and take into account the needs of every part of the region?

[English]

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Thank you very much for the question.

That's a really important question, because we take our accountability to the public and to the municipalities very seriously. Fundamentally, we can't deliver on our objectives as a corporation unless we have a strong partnership with our municipalities and, in the end, with the public we're serving.

MetroLinx originally started with a board of directors that was largely comprised of municipal politicians. The mayors of many of the municipalities in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area were on the board, and they were very successful, in 2006 through to 2008, in coming up with a first for the greater Toronto and Hamilton area: a regional transportation plan. We have never had, in this region, a comprehensive plan that all the municipalities bought into. They were given the task to come up with a plan and they succeeded. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the mayors and councillors who were on the board at that time.

The province took a look at how MetroLinx was going to evolve in the future and, first of all, merged it with GO Transit, an operating agency. They felt that it was time to switch from planned development to delivery of specific projects. They felt it was appropriate to bring in public-spirited citizens to help remove some of the tension around decision-making about which projects go first, second, third, and fourth, and to bring a very deliberate approach to how we build the infrastructure going forward.

That doesn't mean we conduct our work in secret. Our meetings are basically built into two elements. We have a public session, where the media and the public are fully engaged and hear about the work of MetroLinx, as everyone else does. Then we have a closed session, like any public agency tends to have to talk about contractual or commercial or property issues and things of that nature.

We've tried to maintain our accountability and we've tried to be true to the government objective of moving forward with delivery.

The other thing we were able to do when we brought in the public-minded citizens was to identify specific skill sets. We have a member of our board who is the leader at the Four Seasons Sheraton for customer service. Nick Mutton chairs our customer service committee and has been very successful in raising the level of customer satisfaction in our operating arm—

• (1615)

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: I don't want to be rude, but I'm going to interrupt you, because I've only got seven minutes. I'll come back to you later on this.

One may not be in favour of a decision. For example, in Scarborough, people think that what should have been done wasn't done. Obviously the role of municipal politicians is to ensure service and monitor the quality of the environment and the quality of life of their citizens. If one isn't in favour of a position, is it possible to intervene? I imagine you have an ombudsman, or something like that. It's important, in terms of the National Public Transit Strategy.

If politicians are excluded at some point to ensure delivery of service, are there any executory or extraordinary measures enabling one's opinion to be heard, so that there is that democratic balance between the elected representative and the representative of your organization?

[English]

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Those are very good points. First of all, all of our planning work is done in public, so the public has a complete opportunity to participate, provide their input, and raise any concerns through the process. Those processes are ultimately approved under various environmental legislation. Sometimes that's federal. Sometimes that's provincial. Sometimes it's both.

As I said earlier on, it's impossible to deliver a project in a local municipality if you don't have the support of the local municipality. We have to work very closely, in context, with agencies like the Toronto Transit Commission and the City of Toronto to make sure that what we're doing on the Eglinton Crosstown project, for example, is coincident with their local aspirations as well.

If we don't do that, we're going to fail on the delivery of the projects.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: I'd have a lot of questions for you. I don't know whether we'll have an opportunity to speak a second time around. Here's a more specific question, to find out how the system might work.

Let's say there's an HST between Quebec City and Windsor. The Conservatives don't want one, but we think it's a good idea. So the train has to go through your region. How would this affect the administration or feasibility of the project? For example, would MetroLinx have anything to say and would it take part in management of the project? Or would you be completely excluded from the project and just be able to give your opinion on the matter?

[English]

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: I would expect that MetroLinx would be a consulting partner with whoever is the proponent of a project like that. The nature of that project will span a huge geographic area and I would assume that some kind of special purpose agency would need to be responsible for the delivery of that.

I would expect, as they're studying, reviewing, and planning the project through the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, that MetroLinx would be involved in that process and would have an opportunity to be engaged and provide comment to it. I wouldn't see that we would be the lead. I don't see that we would have an approval authority over it. We would have an inputting authority.

•(1620)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Right.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Albas, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to show my appreciation to our guests who have come forward today. As Mr. Coderre has recently pointed out, it's a unique viewpoint because it sounds like you're doing this job at a very high level and for a large amount of people.

I come from a rural area. In fact, I served as a municipal councillor, so I've had some experience with public transit, albeit not at the multimodal and many-faceted way that you do. Even though I'm familiar with the Metro Vancouver model and some of the pros and cons that go along with that, I hope you won't mind if I ask a few questions specific to your operations today.

What are some of the specific transit challenges faced by a region the size of the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, in your opinion, and what do you see as a potential solutions to some of these challenges?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Thanks for the question.

It's interesting. Large parts of the greater Toronto and Hamilton area actually are quite rural in nature. We have rural transportation issues that we need to deal with as well, so we can probably relate much more closely than you would expect.

The specific challenges in a place like the greater Toronto and Hamilton area I would say are similar to those of Vancouver and Montreal. First of all, it's the geographic scope. City regions span multiple municipalities and thousands of square kilometres of territory. It can be hundreds of kilometres, in some cases, in linear distances. The geography is just immense.

The size of the system is at an order of magnitude that is different from other areas. They have commuter rail systems. They have regional bus systems. They have subways, in some cases, and light rail transit. They have a variety of modes. It's not simply a bus-based transport system or a bus-based and light rail transit system. There are multiple modes of technology. The size of the system is big.

The complexity of integrating multiple municipalities makes it different from a lot of other kinds of communities in the country. Ottawa, for example—a very complex, large urban area with about a million people, if you consider the span across the river—is basically a uni-city and can deal with its transportation challenges within a single municipal council. Obviously they also speak to the folks across the river in Quebec, but they have much more span and control over their decisions in that area.

In the Toronto and Hamilton area, we have 30 municipalities. We have 10 transit agencies. We have multiple transportation road authorities we deal with. The complexity of getting them all to move in the same direction makes it significantly different.

The other big piece, I would say, is that about two-thirds of the country's transit ridership is in those three cities, those three regions. That's because the connection is very close among land use, density, mixed use, and transit systems. It also provides the greatest opportunity, I think, to increase that transit ridership. Those densities are still going up, and there's still opportunity to get the most out of your transportation system, because there are so many people living in close proximity to the investment you're making.

These are some of the things, I would say, that make the Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal areas different from other cities or urban areas in the country.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you for that.

Can you elaborate a little bit more? You mentioned dealing with all the different agencies and how that can draw difficulties. Can you cite an example?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: I could cite both a road-based and a transit-based example—

Mr. Dan Albas: That would be terrific.

Mr. Bruce McCuaig:—so that you could get a sense of both. It happens on both sides of the equation.

In the Toronto region, one of the main boundaries between the city of Toronto and York Region is Steeles Avenue, which is a major east-west corridor. Actually, one half of the street is a York Region street and the other half is a city of Toronto street. Trying to coordinate the widening and maintenance of that street can be challenging for the municipalities, because they have different visions of where growth is occurring in the two respective municipalities. There may be different views on both sides of the border about the impact on some sensitive environmental features. So it can be very difficult and complex to do something as straightforward as having a comprehensive long-term asset management plan for a shared facility. That's a road-based example.

In terms of a transit-based example, the fastest growing part of our transit ridership is people crossing municipal boundaries. In the Toronto region right now, every time you cross a municipal boundary, you have to pay a second fare, because you're going from, for example, York Region Transit to the Toronto Transit Commission, or you're going from Mississauga Transit to Brampton Transit. So there are integration issues, from a fare perspective, if you just want to cross a boundary.

There are service concerns in terms of coordination of those bus services as they cross municipal boundaries. We have challenges with having what's called a closed door policy. If you're on a Mississauga Transit bus and you cross the border into the city of Toronto, you can no longer pick up passengers in the city of Toronto, even if you're going by bus stops that have people waiting at them.

It's those kinds of coordination and integration issues we're trying to deal with at Metrolinx. The PRESTO smart card, particularly from a transit perspective, is a huge step toward doing that. It allows transit customers to pay their fares with one single card, and it does all the thinking for you.

•(1625)

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Mr. Dan Albas: That's terrific. Thank you.

You mentioned dealing with some of the complex environments and each municipality having its own different plan or vision for its area and its density. What can you tell us about long-term transit or transportation planning in the GTHA?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: The good news is that we have a long-term plan now, called the Big Move, and it was adopted by all of our board members, who at the time were municipal mayors and councillors. By and large, it has held over the past three or four years. There have been challenges about which projects we do, but there haven't been challenges about what the long-term plan is.

If I go back to my comments earlier about the principles, the first principle that I thought important for any study of a national transit strategy is to require local communities, local regions, to have their act together in developing a vision of where they want to go and also a compelling implementation plan of how they want to get there. I think that's something we've been able to build in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

What we haven't been able to build is a medium- and long-term implementation strategy to expand the infrastructure beyond those first seven projects that I identified. Over the next five, six, or seven years as we implement or finish construction of those first seven projects, we need to find strategies to continue to build, or we're going to get swamped by those 100,000 to 150,000 people who keep moving into the region every year, and then all the investment we make will not have the greatest benefit.

Mr. Dan Albas: It sounds to me like your organization has been very successful at collaborating and actually pulling together what it wants to do, on its own.

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: I would agree with everything you said, except for the last three words, "on its own", because I think for us to build a bit of a success story in building infrastructure and getting support, we've had to have the partnership of all the municipalities, the road authorities, and the public, in the end, that this is a vision that we can all buy into.

The Chair: I have to stop you there.

Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing.

The Big Move...that's quite a detailed plan. The priorities are all set and clearly you're examining the business case and how you deliver. You've done all this work without a national public transit strategy, so what's the reason for a national public transit strategy? I

mean, you've done exactly what the Government of Ontario has suggested you do, within its own area of jurisdiction.

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: That's a very good point. I would say we've been able to succeed to the extent possible through the support of the Province of Ontario, which provided \$14 billion of investment towards the implementation of the first round of projects. What we see in our implementation path forward is that we need a level of investment in our transportation system approaching \$4 billion a year, each and every year for the next 10 to 15 years, if we're going to achieve our objectives.

We anticipate that there are two areas we have to work on to be able to achieve that level of investment. We need to continue to get investments from the traditional sources of revenue—federal, provincial, and municipal governments—and we anticipate that would account for about 50% of the needed investment. We also need to deal with the investment strategy requirements that are set out in our legislation. That's what we see as the source for the other 50%.

We see the federal, provincial, and municipal partnership as a way to deal with a significant part of our capital needs going forward.

•(1630)

Mr. Jeff Watson: So when you're talking about partnership and implementation, you're looking for funding, really.

I'm looking at the list of priorities you suggest for a national public transit strategy. You say to think in the long term and to ask where is the local plan. So the federal government, in your estimation, shouldn't be involved in transportation planning when it comes to public transit. Am I reading you correctly on that?

Would you accept the federal government's getting into transportation planning in exchange for funding?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: I would imagine that the federal government would want to make sure that there is a framework for those plans. As to whether the federal government wants to be involved in the development of the plans, I guess my comment would be that I would anticipate there wouldn't be a lot of desire from the federal government to be involved in local decision-making for a variety of different purposes—

Mr. Jeff Watson: I'm not quizzing the federal government. I'm asking you.

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: I would say that we do engage with the federal government on areas that they have a particular interest in. One example would be rail corridors and goods movement; that is a very important area for freight as well as passenger transportation. So there are elements, I would say, that the federal government would need to be involved in.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Okay, on flexibility for choice, you don't want the federal government deciding on which projects to fund. You want that to be left to a different level of government. If I can go a little further, you said that decisions should be made closest to the people. I don't disagree with you on that.

All of these things argue for exactly what many of us on this side of the table think, which is that this is regional, it's municipal, and it's provincial. At the end of the day, all the federal government is being asked to do, in exchange for letting everybody make all the decisions and do all the planning and everything in their own jurisdictions, is to fund this at a higher rate than it has been and in some sustainable fashion over the long term. That's the only thing I continue to hear through all of this.

Convince me that I'm wrong about that. I'm waiting for a really compelling argument as to why the federal government should be having a national public transit strategy. I've been struggling through a whole series of witnesses to come to where the federal government's responsibility and role are. I really think you guys are the perfect example of what the Government of Ontario should be doing with transit in its jurisdiction, which is to create something, do all the coordination, do all the planning.... They're paying the lion's share of that as well, as it's in their jurisdiction, and municipalities obviously have some limitations.

But at the end of the day, everybody's looking for a new funding source that doesn't force the provincial government to change its priorities in spending, to raise taxes, or to call on the municipalities to look outside of traditional property tax bases for tax increases on their level of government. That's what this sounds like to me: if we can tap into another pot of taxpayer money that hasn't been allocated, and it's at the federal level, let's go ahead and tap into that. Am I too cynical?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: If I paraphrase your question, it's what's in it for the federal government? Why would the—

Mr. Jeff Watson: No, no, that's not the question I asked. You can sell me on what this might mean to the Canadian economy and all those other things. Public transit is not in our jurisdiction, and the only role that we're being asked to take on, by witness after witness, is to let everybody else make the decisions—let everybody do whatever—but in exchange, pay more money than we're contributing now. That's really all I'm hearing.

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: First of all, I would offer that what's in it for the federal government is the positioning of the economy to prosper in the future. I think that's what's in it for the federal government.

In terms of the role of the federal government in these processes, yes, obviously a funding role is seen as an important one on the capital side of the equation. I don't know what your previous witnesses have said, but when I look back on the past generation of cost-shared programs with federal, provincial, and municipal governments, I see outcomes that have been less than optimal. It takes a long time: we can't align different mandates and different terms of governments to make effective decision-making.

So some of the principles I've outlined are really to try to drive, in a more effective fashion going forward, how we deliver the infrastructure that is important to these regions in a more efficient fashion.

• (1635)

Mr. Jeff Watson: Am I out of time?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Jeff Watson: All right.

So we're the silent partner who cuts the cheque—that's all.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll now go to Mr. Cash.

Welcome to our committee.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): It's a pleasure to be here, Mr. Chair, and thank you.

It's wonderful to see our friends from Metrolinx.

My first comment is that we know the GTA is losing about \$6 billion annually right now due to lost productivity due to gridlock. This is a huge economic issue of concern for the region. It should be a concern for our federal government, because if the federal government doesn't have its eyes trained on the economy, then it's not doing its job.

I want you to talk a little bit about that gridlock and the economic costs, because too often our friends on the other side of the room here want to talk about the upfront costs. They don't want to think about the costs down the road. If we're losing \$6 billion in lost productivity, well, that's revenue for the federal government right there.

I want you to talk a little bit about what gridlock does to the economy. What's our problem here with gridlock and why is it so crucial for Canadians to understand the importance of getting people moving?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Thank you for the question.

I would say that fundamentally from an economic perspective it's about two things.

One is that it's about keeping goods and services moving. I mentioned in my presentation that the Toronto region is a funnel through which the central and eastern Canadian economy flows as it approaches the United States.

Whether it's rail-based or road-based, the implications of congestion in places such as Montreal or Toronto and what happens at the 401 and 400 interchanges impact the ability of Oshawa to get just-in-time delivery of its goods. So I think the first thing I would say is that it has a very immediate impact in terms of the productivity of our trading economy.

In terms of the quality-of-life side, which I think is an important part of global cities as well, impacting millions of our citizens, the productivity impact of time not spent at work—or of not spending time with your family, on the other side of the equation—is significant as well. Moving towards being an 82-minute-a-day jurisdiction for the average commute time leaves us in a worse case than Los Angeles, worse than New York, and worse than Chicago. I don't think it's what we want our global cities to be known for.

When we do surveys through the Toronto Board of Trade of both local and international businesses as to what they see as the benefits and the issues with locating in the Toronto region, transportation is always one of the top issues identified. The Toronto region used to be known as “the city that works”, the city with an efficient transportation system. At Metrolinx, we see our object over the next years being to try to get back our reputation, so that transportation would be something you talk about as a reason to come to the region, rather than a barrier. Right now, it's a barrier.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Thank you for that.

As you probably know, there are more high-rise residential buildings—12 storeys and higher—being built in Toronto than in any other city in North America right now. Those people are going to have to move around, and yet, when you talk about coordinating the Big Move... I mean, we had Transit City funded, but then it disappeared, and we have a crosstown line that's going to serve one-tenth of what Transit City would have served, and now we're going to have this massive influx of new people.

I've listened to you very carefully, and again, for some of the members on the other side who may have a rose-coloured view about the perfect system we have in the GTA, you know that this is very complicated and that there have been some difficulties.

But I wanted to talk about transparency. You talked about how, for a couple of years there, Metrolinx did some fantastic things and, coincidentally, elected officials were on the board at that time. Now, they were all punted off, and many of those elected officials had specific expertise in transit. I wonder if there is a correlation today between the loss of a comprehensive light rail system in Toronto and the fact that elected officials with transparency as part of their mandate are not on the board of Metrolinx.

• (1640)

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: I don't see that correlation. What I see, in terms of some of the challenges we've had in continuing to deliver elements of the plan in the city of Toronto, was the election of a new mayor who has priorities that are different from those of the former mayor.

It doesn't matter, I don't think, whether the new mayor was or was not going to be on Metrolinx. I think we needed to be responsive to the community. I guess it's one of the challenges that all transportation agencies face across the country: you need to be responsive to the mandates of the individuals who get elected. That sometimes means that you have to look at adjustments to your plans in the short and the medium term.

The Chair: I have to end it there.

Mr. Merrifield.

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): As a new member, I find this very interesting. It's a sort of blast from the past from the last government, but none the less, transportation is near and dear to my heart and my interests.

When it comes to railway, I know a little bit about moving people and railways, as the minister in charge of VIA, and I do know that if you want to save money, you'll stop running trains; they usually don't make money.

The issue on this one...and I don't think anyone is opposed to doing everything we possibly can to move people by rail, it's certainly efficient.... As the previous questioner, Mr. Cash, has suggested, the development of the GDP and of the community, particularly in high-density areas such as Toronto, is absolutely critical.

The first question I have is about the \$15 billion in the first phase; that was \$14 billion from the province and \$1 billion from the federal government and municipalities. How much of that \$1 billion was from the federal government?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: It's \$14 billion dollars approximately from the provincial government, and about \$1 billion from each of the municipal and the federal governments.

Hon. Rob Merrifield: How much was federal?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: I think it was \$1.1 billion.

Hon. Rob Merrifield: Okay. And your municipality gave how much, then?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: I believe it was \$1.4 billion.

Hon. Rob Merrifield: Do you know whether they use the gas tax money as money for that?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: The gas tax money has been a great success story in terms of investment in local infrastructure. I think the municipalities have been using their gas tax money for a variety of different purposes; part of it has been going to transit, part of it to roads, and part of it to other infrastructure needs.

In the City of Toronto, they have directed their gas tax money largely to transit. As to whether it goes specifically to a cross-town project or they put it into other transit projects that the Toronto Transit Commission is pursuing, I don't have that level of detail about how they disburse the funds.

• (1645)

Hon. Rob Merrifield: I guess the point is that there's a fair amount of federal money going to the municipality.

That leads to the question of the polling you did—which I find interesting—showing that mobility was the number one issue, above education and health care, until you took education and health care away, and then all of a sudden it would change.... Nonetheless, it's very valid in that polling.

The question is, when you're looking at a long-term strategy—and this gets back to a long-term strategy in transit—did you, in the poll, ask the question whether, if it was their number one issue, it was enough of a number one interest for them to be able to support it financially as well?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: What we've learned through our research is that, as you would expect, there is a reluctance on the part of the public to provide additional income or revenue to any level of government. At the same time, we see that it differs according to how the revenue is collected and how it is disbursed.

For example, if you ask the public the question, “Do you support additional revenue generally...?”, the answer is no, but if it's dedicated to transportation and transit, it goes up quite significantly. This is an indication that if the public has some idea of specifically where the investment is going, they have a greater level of support for it.

Hon. Rob Merrifield: Okay.

Let's take your airport link to downtown Toronto. It's a tremendous advantage economically to get a link like that there. I don't know the economics of how it would work. I'm sure you do. But one question would be, would you put a vehicle tax on downtown vehicles to reduce congestion and apply that to the link to the rail? Would that be acceptable? Have you any research or any polling that would suggest that they would be open to that sort of thing?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: We haven't done any research with that specific kind of question. The Air Rail Link is a unique kind of service, because it's not really positioned as a commuter aid for your trip from home to work and back again. It's more a premium-level service to deliver people to the airport as an alternative to a \$50 cab ride.

We actually have a mandate to recover all of our operating costs—and hopefully some of our capital costs—from the fare box on this project, which is quite different from your typical transit service. We're looking at more of a cost-recovery model.

Hon. Rob Merrifield: You talked about electric versus diesel on that route. Is that going to be electric?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: We will be launching the service in 2015 with tier 4 diesel locomotives. That's the highest quality of emissions control. We're in a process to see whether or not we electrify that service in the future.

The Chair: I have to interrupt there.

Hon. Rob Merrifield: If I could just get one more...?

The Chair: I'm going to Ms. Moran, but I know that she is anxiously giving up her time to Mr. Cash.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Thank you. I am going to share my anxiously gotten time with my colleague Mr. Sullivan.

Now, this is a national public transit strategy, and I wanted you to speak to the importance of its being a public transit strategy. We know there's a little mix of private transit in the region, but this is a national public transit strategy. We feel this is central and extremely important, and I wanted to hear your opinion on the public piece of this.

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: When I think of public transit, I think of delivery of service that is affordable, comfortable, frequent, safe and so on and so forth. I think of GO Transit as public transit. Our GO rail system is actually delivered by a private contractor on our behalf.

There are a number of different models that we have used and that we need to continue to look at to find the right mix. I would not say that an alternate delivery model is the best way in all circumstances—that's nowhere near what I would suggest—nor would I

say that a straight, traditional public sector delivery model is the best alternative in all situations. I think each situation needs to be evaluated to determine what makes the most sense and delivers the most effective service to the public.

I see an opportunity for a suite of delivery models. That's what Metrolinx has been looking at since the beginning of the organization. With GO Transit, we've been using alternative delivery models for many years. I don't think the public thinks that the people running that service are any different from the other people employed by Metrolinx.

Mr. Andrew Cash: We have a situation in Toronto where some could describe our transit development as being sort of chaotic and a little disjointed in the sense that we need greater transit expansion. But certainly in Toronto itself, though, the commission can't afford to operate the system as it stands today. So we need more, but we can't afford to operate what we have right now.

This national public transit strategy seeks to address that issue, and I wanted you to speak to the importance of a stable, predictable envelope of funds for operating public transit.

• (1650)

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Thank you.

I've been reflecting back on the questions from Mr. Watson about being more than a silent partner. I think one of the things that we would be looking for in support from the federal government in a national transit strategy is to drive things like quality, standards, innovation, research and development, and to drive forward evidence-based decision-making so that you know you're getting quality projects in the end.

I think those are all things that a national transit strategy can put into the mix to improve the way we manage and deliver our transit services. I think those are all really valuable kinds of tools that we can look to a federal partner for to help us deliver and improve the situation, the customer experience for the people who rely on transit.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Thank you.

If I have any more time, I'd like to pass it on to my colleague.

The Chair: You have 40 seconds, Mr. Sullivan.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: On infrastructure versus operating, one of the things we've heard about is that some municipalities—and some rural municipalities—have difficulty with the expense of putting in the infrastructure in the first place, and they look to other partners, provincial and federal, to help them with that.

But in terms of operating, we don't seem to look to the federal partner for the operating of transit. Is that a fair approximation of how it goes?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: I would say that's fair.

I would say that where we need I think a concerted effort across all orders of government is in the state of good repair and expansion of the service, and I think it should be expected that transit operators and the municipalities or regional authorities responsible for them operate them efficiently within their sources of revenue.

I think a national transit strategy could speak to a role for all orders in the capital side of the equation and not necessarily look to the federal government to contribute on the operating side of the equation.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Toet.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our presenters today.

I have a couple of questions. I'm going to start with one that's somewhat innocuous, but I'm quite curious. In your presentation, you talked about being within two kilometres of 75% of the residents. I'm assuming that's not an arbitrary number and that there's some significance behind the two kilometres. Could you give us a background on that?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Yes, absolutely. It goes to the accessibility of the transit service to the public.

The research shows that the further away you get from a transit service, the less likely a customer is to travel: to walk, ride a bike, or drive a car to the station, whatever the case may be. Two kilometres is the outer edge of that. We identified that as our objective for 75% of the population, recognizing that it would mean that obviously a larger proportion would be within one kilometre and so on and so forth. But that was the basis for the two kilometres.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: You say it's on the outer edge. Do you have any statistics, then, as to what percentage of people on that outer edge would actually be making use of the service?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Absolutely. You'll recall that one of the other objectives was doubling the transit modal share, so the objectives actually work in conjunction with each other. To actually get to a doubling of the transit modal share, you actually need to make that transit closer and more accessible to people, and vice versa, so they're all kind of interconnected and linked and they all work together to achieve the overall objective.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: I'm talking about when you get to the outer edge of that, to the two-kilometre edge: how many people are going to be taking advantage of it?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: I don't know the number. It will differ in different kinds of neighbourhoods. If you're in a highly dense mixed-use neighbourhood in Toronto itself, you'll likely make that trip to the transit service. If you're in a lower density environment—in a rural environment, for example—you're less likely to make that trip to the transit service. It also depends upon the kind of urban form you have in the area.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: I also wanted to touch on the regional solution—you talked quite a few times about it in your presentation—and the need for regional solutions. In the whole context of that, I come back a little bit to the questioning from Mr. Watson. It sounds to me that, from your perspective, you want to see the planning aspect remain in the hands of the regional governments and not have the federal government really involved in that planning.

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: I don't see a particular need for the federal government to get into coming up with the plan for the region. That doesn't mean the federal government should not be involved in

developing the plan for the region. When we developed the Big Move, we engaged with the federal government to get input from different departments and to make sure to identify and deal with any priorities of theirs.

Going back to my comments a few moments ago, rather than the federal government having a direct control over specific project elements of it, I would say that it's more along the lines of what the standards are. How are decisions to be taken? What is the accountability framework that we would expect? What are the outcomes that we're going to hold you accountable to report back to us on? Those are the kinds of things that I would say would be the role for the federal government.

I would also say that's an area where this study should be asking these very questions.

• (1655)

Mr. Lawrence Toet: You mentioned the corridor from the airport to downtown. In that context, you talked about the high-quality solution that Metrolinx was bringing forward there. I'm wondering about that now. You talk about having a high-quality solution, and I'm assuming that you're talking about that in every context, including safety and all the other standards, yet you want the federal government to be able to set those standards for you. I'm just curious: on one point you're saying yes, and on the other point you're saying that you need us to set the standards.

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Well, I think there's some value in having some national standards, a national approach to innovation, and a national approach to improving quality of service. I think that's important. It doesn't matter where you live in this country, I think there should be some expectation for accessibility and mobility within our communities. I think that's something people would look at as a common expectation across Canada.

The other thing I would say is that I have every expectation that we will not achieve our transportation objectives in the absence of a strong partnership with all orders of government. I don't think any one level of government can afford the kinds of solutions that we need to pursue. I think it requires a partnership among all three levels.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: I have one last item. I wanted to pick up a little bit on Mr. Coderre's questioning about the protection of the municipalities within the structure of your plan today. You did address the issue of a particular municipality being involved in their area, but what happens now...? How does the prioritization work right now between those different municipalities? Municipality A wants their project first, municipality B wants theirs, and municipality C wants theirs: how are you working through that process?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: That's a great question. It's a difficult process, as you might expect.

We did three steps. One, we looked around the world to see how other jurisdictions prioritized, and we tried to get some best practices. Then we sat down with each municipality, showed them our proposed methodology, and asked if they had any advice, comments, or concerns with the way in which we were about to undertake this process. The third step was to ask if we could have all of their inputs to the projects in their municipalities and then to say, "Let's agree that these are the right inputs so that when we put them through the decision-making model, we can agree that all the inputs were what we all supported at the outset".

The final step, which is the next piece we have to do, is to sit down with them and say, "Here are the outcomes, this is what it says for our next round of projects in the Toronto region over the next six to fifteen years, and these are the kinds of solutions we think are the priority solutions".

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Nicholls.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Well, Mr. Chair, I'd just like to say that from statements in the House made by members of the government, it's obvious that they're not going to be supporting this bill eventually, no matter what questions we ask here; however, I don't think their constituents would necessarily agree with them.

I have one simple question for Mr. McCuaig before continuing: does Metrolinx offer Sunday service?

• (1700)

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: For GO Transit specifically?

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Or just generally: do you offer Sunday service?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Yes.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Yes. Well, I'm sure that people in Penticton, B.C., might want to have Sunday service. They currently have Sunday service on only one of their lines.

I think the advantages of having a public transit strategy would be, as you said, to share best practices in innovation and high-quality standards across the country, whether you're a large centre or a small centre. Coming up with a permanent investment plan, a federal funding mechanism, working with all levels of government, and establishing accountability measures would mean that all areas in Canada would have the same advantages that Metrolinx has in terms of the partnerships it has built and would benefit from the knowledge of Metrolinx.

I'll look at another city, Cochrane, Alberta, the second-largest and fastest growing centre in the country. They want bus rapid transit to Calgary. Mayor Truper McBride has said that considerable work needs to be undertaken on both the functional and economical aspects of transit. He went on to say, "A vibrant city is based on a strong, vibrant transit system and in every case those are [paid] for, in part, by senior orders of government". He said, "Cochrane is a difficult community for transit because [what] I'd call...poor planning in the past has led to this very pod-like community, and transit doesn't operate too well because there is backtracking...".

If we had a national public transit strategy, do you think Metrolinx would be able to contribute a lot of its knowledge in terms of transit

planning to the rest of the country, to other agencies across the country?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Absolutely: there's great value in sharing what we've learned and also what we've learned from others. I think that's one of the things that is important in the transportation business: to learn from the successes—and sometimes the failures—of other jurisdictions.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: I have a final question. Transit users in south Winnipeg are facing fare increases. When there's no dedicated funding for transit, we often find that the burden is passed on to users in these centres. Without dedicated funding, isn't an increase in transit fares one of the only mechanisms that a transit corporation can use to get the capital it needs?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Typically the transit fares are used virtually exclusively for operating costs. Transit agencies look to other orders of government to provide contributions towards capital, so by and large you see the fare box covering the operating costs of the transit service.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: For low-income users who have no choice—they don't have cars or any other methods of transport—would you agree that raising fares decreases the ridership or at least makes a big dent in their pocketbook when they're already struggling with difficult financial situations?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Yes. It's important to have affordable transportation systems for different parts of the community. There's no question that it's something that Metrolinx and every other transit agency thinks about when it's looking at its cost structures.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Would Metrolinx agree that having a transit strategy in place would allow us, as a country, to plan for initiatives such as subsidizing bus passes and other things such as that? Do you think that kind of planning could be done with other transit agencies across the country to discuss what's gone on, say with BC Transit's U-Pass, or other initiatives undertaken by other transit corporations?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: It provides a venue and an opportunity for all orders of government to sit down and talk about what are the initiatives that could be pursued to make transit more attractive. I think that is an important part of any kind of a venue where the various orders of government sit down to talk about a subject matter.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you very much.

This has been very informative today, and I appreciate your being here.

Some of my questions have been touched on to some degree, but I guess it still leaves me with a little grey. It's a very light shade of grey, but there is still some grey there, so I want to get some clarification on a few things.

Metrolinx, I understand that affiliated, we'll say, with the Government of Ontario. What department are you under?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: We're a provincial crown agency. My board of directors reports to the Ontario Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, so you're a provincial crown agency: how are the municipalities involved in the governance of it? They must be involved in some way.

Obviously you're working with them in terms of the planning. I know you touched on it a bit, but I'm left a little bit unsure as to how the governance works on that. Are there representatives from the different municipalities who sit on the governance board of the agency? How does that work, exactly?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Currently the way the board of directors is structured is that the province appoints the board from public-minded individuals from across the greater Toronto and Hamilton region. There are no direct municipal representatives.

How we work with the municipalities is that every day, almost every hour, we have some dialogue that's going on. I'll use an example. In York Region, we're building a bus rapid transit system. We're building it using York Region as our delivery agent. They're the ones who are out there constructing the actual service with their contractor partners on our behalf. We own and will be responsible for the ongoing operation, but they are our agent of delivery.

We have a whole range of different kinds of partnership models where we work very, very closely with the municipalities.

Mr. Blake Richards: So there are various models, but in some cases the municipality is actually responsible for the operation. You've developed the infrastructure itself, whether it be provincially funded.... I suspect in that some cases there's probably municipal funding that goes into that—

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: That's correct.

Mr. Blake Richards: —and there probably has been some federal funding, whether it be a gas tax or otherwise, that has gone into it as well. Is there private sector involvement as well?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: In different municipalities there are different levels of private sector involvement. York Region delivers its bus services using a series of private contractors. I mentioned that GO Transit delivers its rail services through private contractors. You see a variety of different models, used both by Metrolinx and by the local municipalities, in the delivery of their service.

Mr. Blake Richards: So what you're finding, essentially, is that it depends on the different priorities of the various municipalities that are involved in terms of what projects go forward. You have different involvements, whether they be private sector involvements in some cases, and you always have the involvement of the municipality, of course, in some way. It's all determined, really, on the priorities of the municipality.

So it's not the federal government, or in this case, the provincial government, and certainly not the federal NDP, trying to determine this for Cochrane, Alberta, Penticton, B.C., Winnipeg, Manitoba, or Saint-Lazare, Quebec, for example. You're not having a higher level of government trying to determine the priorities of various municipalities. It's based on the priorities of the citizens and the municipalities involved and based on the different models you have. You've essentially tried a number of different models and you do it on that basis.

Is it correct that the priorities are set based on sort of the municipalities...?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: We have the regional transportation plan and the prioritization process that I've spoken about. We do have some projects where there is federal funding involved, and we have governance arrangements with the federal government in those situations.

For example, under the Building Canada fund, we have committees of federal public servants and Metrolinx officials who are involved in projects like the Mississauga Transitway, which is a cost-shared project. In some cases, because of the way the Building Canada fund works, there is direct involvement of the federal department in some of those projects.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes, but what it still boils down to is that every project has to be looked at and determinations have to be made as to the operational money or the infrastructure side of it.

But it all has to be decided based on the priorities of the various areas and what will serve them the best. That's sort of what I understand from what you said. Looking at Canada as an example, certainly for you, when you talk about the plan for the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, obviously I would be interested in your thoughts on that, but I can't imagine that you would suggest that this model might work in a more rural part of the country, for example.

As an example, in my riding I have one community of about 43,000 people. Some do commute to Calgary and there is some transit, which was set up by the community to get people into Calgary and back for their work. There's also a private sector company that provides for that community.

Outside of that area, I have another population of about 90,000 to 100,000, spread out over 27 different communities. Obviously if you do the math on that, you're averaging about 3,000 to 4,000 people per community. It's mostly a rural area, with farms and oil and gas, so obviously a public transit type of solution probably is not something you're going to see in that type of area.

You have a model that's working very well, from the sound of it, for the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, but would you suggest that this necessarily would be something that would be duplicated all over the country?

• (1710)

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: I think the issues in small rural and small urban communities are very different from the issues in large cities and city regions like Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. I think you need to match the solution to the community.

In places like Cochrane, Ontario, if I could use that as an example, there are transit needs. It's a large, dispersed northern community with some urban elements to it, and some rural elements as well, with an aging population, different socio-economic groups who don't have the same access to private automobiles as others, and young people. There's a whole variety of reasons why, even in smaller communities, there's a need for mobility solutions.

I guess the important point is to scale your solutions to your community and come up with the right approach for that locality.

The Chair: I have to stop you there. Thank you.

Watching the clock, I'm going to go for one more round of five minutes for each party.

Ms. Morin, you're first.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): I'm going to continue the discussion about the small regions.

Basically you're recommending that the private sector have a collaborative role with the public sector in terms of commitment. How do you foresee the role of the federal government, with a view to ensuring service for all rural towns? Do we need a long-term strategy? Do we need to make sure all Canadians have access to transport? How do you foresee the federal government's funding for transportation in rural areas?

[*English*]

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Thank you for the question.

A few minutes ago, I mentioned the importance of mobility and how different parts of the country have different mobility requirements. When I look at jurisdictions around the world, what I see is that one of the key areas in which the national government does actually play a role is the area of rural access.

When I think of the United States, for example, there is work under way at the national level, not just about urban transportation issues, but actually about how you ensure, for example, rural safety in our transportation systems. In the event of collisions and crashes along our rural roads and highways, how do you make sure that you can identify, respond, and address the event as quickly as possible? Also, how do you deal with mobility for people who don't have access to the same forms of transportation as others in the community?

Those are the kinds of areas—potentially identifying mobility and accessibility standards for the country as a whole—that could play a role in a national transit strategy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Isabelle Morin: In your investment strategy, you ask for a sharing of responsibilities among all levels of government. It's not just money involved. I think you're actually proposing that the federal government harmonize the vision of public transit held by the various levels of government and the various bodies that gravitate around this issue.

I'd like to hear your comments in this regard.

[*English*]

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: As part of the investment strategy, we see two elements that we need to be pursuing. One is alternative revenue tools that could help us sustain the level of investment required to build our transportation services. The second element is a way in which all levels of government can support elements of the implementation of the regional transportation plan.

The regional transportation plan, if I can use your term, I would see as the harmonizing tool to say that there's a compelling vision of how we want to develop the system and that there are particular elements in the potential projects being funded that make sense for the federal government. Maybe there are other projects that are less

compelling for the federal government. That could hold true for other levels of government as you look at different elements.

I think the role of the transportation plan is to say that here's the suite of projects that we want to move forward with and here are the priorities, so how can we build a partnership—which we can all buy into—to deliver on services that is going to help our economy and is going to help millions of people who live in our communities?

● (1715)

The Chair: You have a few seconds if you want to use them, Mr. Cash.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Okay.

Thank you for being here.

I want to just get back to one last thing around electrification versus diesel. It strikes us—as I know you know—as a little strange that the province would spend money, or that Metrolinx would spend money, on a diesel rail link and then later spend money to electrify it. It seems like a waste of money. If the federal government provided some sort of overarching framework for a national public transit strategy, would we be able to avoid some of this kind of duplication down the road?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Thank you for the question.

We don't think we're duplicating or spending taxpayers' money inappropriately. We think there are some really compelling reasons to move as quickly as we can to deliver the Air Rail Link service.

I mentioned the five million people right now who every year drive between downtown Toronto and Pearson airport.

We also have the Pan Am games coming up. This is one of the only transportation commitments in the Pan Am games bid book that the levels of government endorsed in saying it would be in service in time for the Pan Am games.

So there are some important transportation benefits and some important governance reasons why we should be delivering the project.

That being said, we do need to look at the most effective way to deliver our rail services in an urban environment like the greater Toronto and Hamilton area in the future. That has implications not just for the GO rail service and the Air Rail Link service. That has implications for VIA and that has implications for the freight services. We need to make sure that we are going to be providing an environment in which all the different users of the same corridor can coexist.

We've come up with a concept at Metrolinx that we've called “express rail”, where we can actually move our GO transit service to a point where we can get frequencies up to about every five to ten minutes. You don't actually need to have a rail schedule any more to know when to go catch a train; you just go to the station. To accommodate that level of service, and the passenger ridership that will come with it, requires some significant investments in electrification.

The Chair: Mr. Coderre.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have three short questions.

I suppose that you have links with other agencies, such as the Société de transport de Montréal or the AMT, and that you discuss these things together. What are your relations with these agencies? What are your relations with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario? I imagine that you have specific ongoing relations with these organizations pertaining to public transit files.

[English]

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Absolutely, and there is a discussion that's hosted by the Canadian Urban Transit Association. Most of the 106 transit agencies in Canada are members of that, and it provides a venue for a dialogue.

We work with AMO, but less so with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities since it's the national group, and we work primarily through AMO with FCM.

But there is also an ongoing conversation with AMT in Montreal, TransLink in Vancouver, and Toronto, because we do talk with those three centres about the unique challenges and issues that face the transportation systems in Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto. We try to have a dialogue.

That doesn't eliminate the need for better structure and a more concerted effort to have a dialogue among all orders of government, but we do have a dialogue with our sister agencies around the country.

• (1720)

Hon. Denis Coderre: Regarding procurement now, of course, if we're talking about investment over \$16 billion, does that include the rail and—

[Translation]

the cars?

[English]

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Yes, it does.

Hon. Denis Coderre: And you're in charge? You are doing it? Are you going through the provincial government, or is it through your own organization that you're—

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Some of those projects were cost-shared projects. I mentioned the Spadina subway extension, for example. The TTC is actually delivering that project.

But the bus rapid transit system in York Region, the Eglinton Crosstown LRT in Toronto, the Air Rail Link to Pearson airport, and parts of the Mississauga Transitway are all being done directly through Metrolinx or through our agent.

Hon. Denis Coderre: How do you manage to make sure there is no collusion? Do you have some specific process? Do you have an inspector-general or a comptroller? How does it work?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: We have a number of different mechanisms to exercise control and accountability. One is obviously the competitive nature of the marketplace in general, and we monitor

very closely the number of bids we get in. We do our own estimates of the cost of the work before we put it out on the street, and we compare the tender prices against what the estimates were. If there is a variation—either over or under—we have a review of the basis for those variations.

In many cases, we have a fairness commissioner who is a part of the procurement process and independently does a report to us and to the board about the quality of the procurement we actually went through. We have internal auditors as well as external auditors who come in and give us a review on an ongoing basis. We also have the provincial Auditor General, who comes in and sees us on a periodic basis.

Hon. Denis Coderre: You're making sure, regarding the extras, that it's not the strategy for contracts...?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: In terms of change orders and things of that nature?

Hon. Denis Coderre: Yes.

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Yes. Whenever you're in a construction process—and anyone who has done a renovation of a home realizes this—sometimes the final price is not exactly the same as the original price. We've all experienced that.

Hon. Denis Coderre: You're avoiding a money pit, right?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Yes, we do have procedures built in.

Hon. Denis Coderre: I have one last question.

The other thing that costs a lot is the IT—everything, all the systems, and Wi-Fi and all of that. How do you manage? That's through PRESTO, right?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Information and information technology is actually a place where we need to take a more concerted look. Again, when we look at areas where we need to do a better job, I and IT is one of those areas.

As for intelligent transportation systems, obviously we're implementing PRESTO and we've had some great success with that, but for traveller information and trip planners that are multimodal and work across municipal boundaries, those are all areas for future work, and again, they are areas where the federal government plays a role in terms of developing national standards that then get applied provincially and are disseminated to municipalities and regions.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Do you believe that a national—it's my last question—strategy for public transit should include an IT process?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Absolutely.

Hon. Denis Coderre: That might be the thing the federal government should have jurisdiction over. That's one of its responsibilities, no...?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Intelligent transportation systems are a key part. Whether it's public transit or other forms of transportation, it's a key way of getting more out of the infrastructure we already have. There is a strong role for the federal government to play in establishing standards.

The Chair: With that, thank you.

I'll go to Mr. Watson for our final question.

Hon. Denis Coderre: That question on jurisdiction was for you, Jeff.

Mr. Jeff Watson: My great thanks to my colleague, Mr. Coderre, for his suggestion.

In closing, I just want to zero in on a couple of quick areas. On the funding side, the federal government's funding of public transit over the last number of years has been under the umbrella, if you will, of an omnibus program, the Building Canada plan. It had several components and allowed flexibility so that municipalities could choose what projects and priorities they would prefer to be funding, including public transit.

First of all, in the recent election, we made a commitment. That program has to be replaced in due course. There will be consultations over the next couple of years towards that next long-term infrastructure plan. Should the issue of public transit funding be considered in that process, or should it be done in an ad hoc fashion? That's about the process for coming up with a funding.

Second, should the government depart from the traditional idea that there's an omnibus program with municipal flexibility and choice and have a dedicated fund, in an ongoing long-term fashion, that is specifically for public transit?

I have another important question I want to come back to and get in under the wire.

• (1725)

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: I'll be quick. I'll give you the time to do that.

Yes, I'm aware of the consultation that will be coming up in terms of the renewal or replacement of the Building Canada programs. That is an avenue, clearly, through which municipalities and regional authorities can engage with the federal government about public transit funding going forward. We've already had some introductory conversations with federal officials about what that process may look like, and we will participate in that process.

In terms of the structure of any programs, I would advocate for a dedicated long-term approach. The Building Canada Fund programs—

Mr. Jeff Watson: Just for clarification, would that be in addition to the omnibus infrastructure program needs of large municipalities, for example? Because right now, there's a municipal infrastructure component—

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Right.

Mr. Jeff Watson: —for the large cities. Then there's a sort of rural component. You're asking for something on top of that consideration.

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Yes, I would say that the way I look at the potential federal programs going forward is that there's a base that all communities should have access to, and gas tax funding is an element of that base.

There probably should be some kind of dedicated stream for mid- to large-sized cities and then something separate for regions. That

would be my view, because five-year increments of programs do not allow for the ability to have effective planning for infrastructure that takes you 10 or 12 years to complete.

Mr. Jeff Watson: In fairness, Building Canada was a seven-year program.

On the viability of projects, is viability a consideration in Metrolinx's planning? One of the things we've been talking about is that obviously capital costs are typically not recoverable in public transit projects. The cost recovery of operational funding varies. In some cases, it's high. In some cases, it's low.

There are two ways to ask this question. There's sort of a cost recovery quotient you look at and say, okay, that's a viable project and we're going to go after that. Or do you use different criteria to examine why you choose a specific priority? I'm trying to get a fix on whether we should have a quotient that says whether this is a viable project.

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: We use a mix. We look at each element, each criterion, to see what the value is—for example, in cost recovery—and then how it contributes to the overall mix and relates to the project as a whole.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Are there projects that you've actually conceived of but said no to because they're just not going to be anywhere close to viable economically?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: We do a business case analysis on each project we put forward and we rate them. Some of them have a positive of over 1.0 business case, which means that it's a net contributor. Some of them have a very low value.

We take that information to our board and ultimately to our funding partners and say, “These are our recommendations based on all the analysis we've done on the outcomes that we get from these projects”. We have a pretty good track record of being able to follow through, and all of our partners support the recommendations we identify for them.

• (1730)

Mr. Jeff Watson: Would you be willing to table the criteria you use for decision-making on projects—

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Absolutely.

Mr. Jeff Watson: —those evaluative criteria?

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Absolutely. I mentioned the prioritization framework. We've consulted with our municipal partners on that. I'd be quite happy to table that with you as well.

The Chair: If you could send it to the clerk, we'll distribute it to all members.

With that, I will thank our guest for being here today. It was certainly a very informative meeting. Thank you very much.

Mr. Bruce McCuaig: Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Committee members, we'll resume on Monday after the break. I wish you all a good break in your constituencies.

The meeting is adjourned.

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