

Statement By Toronto Mayoral Candidate Rocco Rossi

Re: "Transit City Plus"

Toronto
May 4, 2010

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Good morning and thank you all for coming.

Building on my record so far in this election, I am pleased to add further detail to my vision for Toronto's transit future.

I was the first candidate to call for a pause on the mayor's streetcar plan.

I was the first candidate to say we should get the politicians off the TTC board and replace them with private sector expertise.

And today I am the first candidate to present a balanced and integrated transit plan to the people of Toronto.

Transit is central to our future as a city and region.

And building mass transit takes money, partnership and leadership.

Take any one of these away and the formula fails -- as it did in March when the provincial government delayed several LRT lines that had already been approved.

That decision was a wake up call to Torontonians.

We realized we were no longer masters in our own house, but subject to the whims of a government with a large deficit.

In a few weeks Metrolinx will publish its revised list of transit priorities in light of the funding pullback.

But Metrolinx is not the only agency looking towards the future.

The people of Toronto are looking for a leader with a vision and a plan for transit.

So today I want to share with Torontonians and with Metrolinx my vision...and my plan...for a new era of transit in Toronto.

My vision is for Toronto to once again become a transit leader in North America.

And my plan is to put our own money on the table so that we are never again subject to the feast or famine approach of higher levels of government.

This approach requires Torontonians to make a choice.

Our long term debt is about three billion dollars.

Every year, we spend \$450 million to carry that debt. If interest rates rise as forecast, that number will rise too.

Yet, the City of Toronto is rich in assets. Together, we own a lot of stuff.

Many of these assets are central to the operation of the city, like our waste water plants.

And many are not, like Toronto Hydro.

This morning the Toronto Board of Trade recommended that our next mayor consider selling Toronto Hydro to help pay down the debt and fund a new era of investment in infrastructure.

That just happens to echo what I have been saying since this campaign began.

If we can agree in this election to sell some of the things we own but no longer need, we will not only be debt free...we will be at least \$450 million a year richer.

We can then invest that \$450 million a year in the priorities we all share.

We're getting one million new people in the next ten years.

That's either a fabulous economic opportunity or a recipe for disaster.

We have a plan on the books, Transit City, that will see LRT expansion to meet this growth.

This plan, which I call Streetcar City, has been delayed by at least two years and I believe it will not do the job.

Torontonians are telling me they want more than streetcars.

Torontonians want subways, and as their mayor, I will deliver.

So today I am announcing my plan for Transit City Plus.

It's a plan that goes beyond Streetcar City and puts Toronto back on the road to excellence in transit.

Under Transit City Plus, a Rossi administration will invest 4.5 billion dollars over ten years for mass transit in Toronto.

That's 4.5 billion dollars for more subways, more rail and more buses, first class technology and first class customer service.

Our goal has to be a transit system so good that when you wake up in the morning, you reach for your transit pass instead of your car keys.

A system so good it drives our economy and quality of life -- creating jobs and opportunities downtown and in North York, Scarborough and Etobicoke.

So my Transit City Plus plan aims high. Here are some of the details.

Priority Number One: The city gets back into building subways.

This city loves subways. They suit our climate. They are fast.

But they are also expensive, take a long time to build and require transit supportive zoning and density each step of the way.

So here's my solution.

We make tunnelling the new normal. We commit to continuous tunnelling, like Madrid, to reduce the expense of starting and stopping. The technology to do so was created right here in Toronto.

We go slow and steady, building two kilometres and opening one new station a year on average.

This approach give us time to match density with construction so that we have the riders and we have the building and development fees that make the stations self-sustaining.

And while we're building subways, we're increasing bus service in the inner suburbs of Scarborough, Etobicoke and North York.

Priority Number Two: Transit City Plus would build a closer relationship with Metrolinx.

I want to put Toronto back into the "GTA" where it belongs.

Part of that is making sure we have a regional transit system that meets our needs and the needs of our entire region.

That is why we simply have to do a better job of partnering the TTC to Metrolinx – both in terms of how we plan the system, how we operate the system and how we pay for it.

So instead of building our own downtown relief lines, at least right away, downtown commuters should be able to board a Go Train at Union and head to Main Street or Dundas West, for the price of a TTC fare.

And anyone who tells me common sense solutions like this can never work will never work for me.

Priority Number Three: Transit City Plus will also drive technological investment forward.

That means so long to paper tickets and transfers and hello to Smart Cards, electronic maps, GPS and the use of debit and credit cards at the fare box.

Priority Four: At a time of record provincial deficits, we need to be imaginative and innovative to get these projects moving. That means exploring alternative financial arrangements, air rights, and land value capture.

Priority Number Five: Customer Service. Transit City Plus would put the word customer back in customer service, taking the rider's view to ensure a first class travel experience.

Torontonians pay handsomely for the TTC, both through their taxes and at the fare box. They deserve clean, well-lit stations and vehicles, and service with a smile.

Those are the highlights of my plan.

Over the next six months I'll be talking in more detail about what I've unveiled here today.

Obviously, we need a closer relationship with Metrolinx and the province, and an agreement for secure and stable operating funding.

We need a skills based board on the TTC.

But what sets my plan apart from my opponents is that it ends the culture of dependency and puts our own money on the table.

Some of my opponents, including the front runner, are musing about financing future transit expansion with road tolls.

A Rossi administration will not impose road tolls.

After seven years of drift, Torontonians' idea of change is not someone who will reach into their pockets yet again.

We have another approach.

Since declaring my candidacy five months ago, I have been saying that it is time we thought about selling some of the things we own, but do not need, like Toronto Hydro, to help us buy things we need, but do not own. Like subways.

Paying off our debt will free up \$450 million per year -- which is, by coincidence, the cost of two new kilometres of track and one new station every year.

Some of my opponents have said to their shame that if we sell Toronto Hydro that the price of electricity will rise, or service will suffer.

It's fearmongering of the worst sort, because they know it's not true.

Electricity is a sector tightly regulated by the province.

Price, supply and operating conditions are all set by Queen's Park and they would not change, if together, we decided to sell Toronto Hydro.

So Torontonians have a choice.

We can keep a lot of money tied up in things that give us very little return, like the \$25 million we got from Toronto Hydro last year.

We can go on as before, captive to our creditors.

Or we can chart a new course.

We can continue paying debt. Or we can start digging.

It's up to us.

But the important thing for Metrolinx and for Torontonians to know is this.

Campaigns matter. And what the candidates are saying about transit matters.

George Smitherman thinks if you're for subways you're against transit.

Rob Ford wants to build subways and hopes the private sector will step up.

Neither Mr. Smitherman or Mr. Ford have a plan to pay off our debt or lay down track.

Neither gentleman wants to be too specific, too early.

I'm not a career politician. I'm not going to play the same old campaign games.

I've put my cards on the table today because I want Torontonians and Metrolinx to know what's possible with a different type of mayor at City Hall.

It's time to restore our reputation as a great transit city.

It's time for Toronto to become an equal partner in planning, paying for and building transit.

We share a dream of a great city served by great transit.

And today, I have shared a plan on how, together, we can turn that dream into reality.

Thank you.

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