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Etobicoke Guardian

Transit pledge tops \$11.5 billion

Councillors herald Etobicoke light rail projects

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Etobicoke will get light rail transit lines extending into Mississauga from Kipling subway and east into the downtown core from the under-served northwest corner of the city under a \$17.5 billion provincial funding deal.

Premier Dalton McGuinty unveiled plans Friday afternoon to spend \$11.5 billion over 12 years on more than 50 Greater Toronto Area-wide public-transit projects, which includes the full funding of Toronto's Transit City light rail plan. The plan requires \$6 billion in federal funding, as of yet uncommitted.

Work on the projects is set to start next year, McGuinty said, adding two-thirds of the construction will be completed by 2015.

"Transforming our system will not happen overnight, but it must be done," said Transportation Minister and Etobicoke Centre MPP Donna Cansfield. "We need to develop a sustainable transportation system which gets people out of their cars and onto transit to reduce congestion and improve our environment."

Ward 5 Councillor Peter Milczyn, who has pushed for extending the Bloor subway west into Mississauga, largely to take Mississauga commuters headed downtown off Etobicoke arterial roads such as Dundas Street West, was enthusiastic.

"An above-ground subway is a great way for people from Etobicoke to get to places in Mississauga without driving and vice-versa," the Etobicoke-Lakeshore councillor said. "A few Mississauga councillors I spoke with at the announcement are very enthusiastic, which they weren't a few years ago."

Opposition politicians NDP MPP Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth) and Progressive Conservative MPP Joyce Savoline (Burlington) were quick to accuse the government of making opportunistic election promises.

But, Michael Roschlau, president and CEO of Canadian Urban Transit Association, hailed the announcement as unprecedented: "This is the boldest, most visionary development in the history of the Greater Toronto Area and will transform the region into a community where public transit makes a real difference," Roschlau said in a statement.

Milczyn also expressed excitement that the premier's pledge to cover two-thirds of the plan's cost - a level unheard of since the 1990s - means the message that municipalities can't afford to pay for transit improvements has finally been heard.

"We've been telling the province for years we can't raise money for transit projects through (increased) property taxes," Milczyn said. "This is a major step forward. Hopefully, all future provincial governments - regardless of political stripe - will accept it and move forward on it."

The Greater Toronto Transportation Authority is expected to finalize its implementation plan early next year, complete with prioritization and staging of projects, a Ministry of Transportation staffer said.

In lakefront Etobicoke, the plan will create a waterfront west light rail transit from Union Station to Long Branch and electrify the busy Lakeshore GO Train corridor.

Central Etobicoke is set to gain intra- and inter-city connections with light rail rapid transit along Eglinton Avenue from Renforth Drive to Kennedy Road in Scarborough, and west along Dundas Street into Mississauga. GO Bus rapid transit is planned to create two local links to York University: one from Renforth Drive, the other along Hwy. 427 at Renforth to Hwy. 407.

Northwest Etobicoke commuters - long-frustrated by the indirect and long ride to downtown Toronto - will gain light rapid rail transit along Finch Avenue West from Hwy. 27 to Yonge Street.

Ward 1 Councillor Suzan Hall (Etobicoke North) has advocated for a designated bus lane or light rail transit on Hwy. 27 to connect north Etobicoke to the Bloor-Danforth subway line and downtown Toronto. That study is set to begin, states a report filed at the TTC committee last week, Hall said.

"It is fantastic. It sets a goal. I hope they're going to be able to follow it through," Hall said.

Business owners in north Etobicoke have been clamouring for a transit solution for years, Hall has said.

North Etobicoke is home to a vast number of industrial employers, as well as Pearson International Airport, Humber College and Woodbine Entertainment, which plans to open a \$350-million sports and entertainment complex expected to generate thousands of jobs - and commuters.

McGuinty's announcement also includes a long-awaited rail link from Pearson airport to Union Station.