

March 25, 2024

Dear Mayor Morgan and Members of City Council,

I am writing to share my personal feedback on the mode share target for the Mobility Master Plan. I consent to have this submission appear on the public meeting agenda, and am circulating this correspondence to all members of the Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee. I will also note that due to timing constraints beyond our control, the Environmental Stewardship and Action Community Advisory Committee, of which I am the chair and whose mandate includes acting as a resource with respect to the Climate Emergency Action Plan and related policies and strategies, will unfortunately not have an opportunity to provide feedback on this report before you reach a decision.

In summary, I have three recommendations:

1. **Adopt mode share option 3** in line with the staff's recommendation and feedback from 82% of consulted Londoners OR adopt a higher, evidence-based target for non-vehicular forms of transportation including active transportation and transit that exceeds option 3.
2. **Consider the longer-term value-for-money** with respect to where investments in transportation infrastructure will provide the greatest return and minimize the overall burden on taxpayers.
3. **Commit to a proportional intensification target of 60-70%** (per the staff report) to support mode share option 3 providing more Londoners with safe, affordable places to live that are closer to where they work and the amenities they need, while minimizing development on greenfield land that is more expensive to service.

Londoners are asking you plan aspirationally

While mode share option 3 is the best option currently on the table, in my opinion the goals it sets for increasing active transportation (cycling and pedestrian) to 21% and transit to 14% are still too low, while goals for reducing personal vehicle (driver) to 50% and personal vehicle (passenger) to 15% are too high. The City can and should aim to do better than planning for most of its population to commute in cars indefinitely. Indeed, according to the staff report, nearly 7/10 of consulted Londoners agree the mode share target is not aspirational enough, with 65% of respondents prioritizing improvements to the frequency, convenience, reliability and coverage of public transit.

The target set by the Mobility Master Plan will provide the floor for future planning decisions and is thus necessary to shift us away from a transportation system driven by convenience and unsustainable consumption of fossil fuels. The importance of this decision cannot be overstated: by choosing an ambitious mode share target, you have a unique opportunity to influence the trajectory of planning and quality of life for decades into the future. You can empower Londoners to choose their transportation differently by providing viable alternatives to cars and structuring growth around a pragmatic target consistent with what the community is asking for.

We cannot afford the status quo

The mode share target is based on the percent of trips of residents by transportation type. London currently has a mode share of 77% personal vehicles and 23% active transportation and transit combined. This status quo is unacceptable and increasingly unaffordable. It is simply not feasible for London to remain a car-centric city because Londoners cannot afford the costs. As a fellow student put it to me recently, needing a car to move around in London really sucks.

The economic costs of owning a vehicle are a major and growing source of pressure on families, and unfortunately they are not going to decrease. The price of gas is not expected to come back down, while electric vehicles remain out of reach for most (and as the report notes, EVs are not a panacea). The Government of Canada is [following the lead of other countries](#) to enact incremental carbon pricing as an efficient, market-driven system¹ for curtailing greenhouse gas emissions, in keeping with legally-binding international agreements to mitigate climate change. This is expected to have trickle-down effects on the affordability of existing carbon-intensive forms of vehicular transportation.

¹ The Conservative Case for Carbon Dividends (2017)

<https://www.clcouncil.org/media/2017/03/The-Conservative-Case-for-Carbon-Dividends.pdf>

Fiscal costs to the City associated with maintaining extensive transportation infrastructure for cars are already staggering, and should be minimized in planning growth wherever possible. There are myriad indirect costs of our “car culture” in London including impacts to human health, such as [microplastics from tires](#) coursing through the watershed and our bloodstreams, and impervious surfaces that [exacerbate risks of flood hazards and extreme heat](#).

Intensification needs to match the mode share target

Recognizing the many linkages between mobility, intensification, the rising cost of living, availability of housing, and unprecedented population growth, choosing mode share option 3 or a higher target for non-vehicular transportation is the ONLY viable pathway to ensure that these pieces can fit together in alignment with objectives of the current City of London Strategic Plan and the Climate Emergency Action Plan. The London Plan currently sets an intensification target of 45% of new units to be located within the built area boundary, but this does not reflect the projected rate of increase to population (58%) and daily trips to London (49%) by 2050. London is already growing faster today than the London Plan accounts for. A 60-70% intensification target is necessary to prioritize density and affordability, while limiting impacts to prime agricultural areas on the perimeter of the City, per the London Plan Place Type Policies (e.g., section 1127)

While I understand there are concerns about offloading residential developments to smaller surrounding municipalities, I think London City Council needs to base its planning decisions on what it can control within its own jurisdiction. For better or worse, the City cannot plan residential development on a regional basis, as that is not the purview of our single-tier municipal government. However, perhaps London can set an example by working with neighboring municipalities to adopt compatible policies that prioritize intensification over sprawl wherever possible.

The bigger picture: planning for the challenges ahead

Humanity has a narrowing window of opportunity to mitigate catastrophic global warming by curbing greenhouse gas emissions caused by our technology. As science-based projections warn us, the costs of failing to limit warming immediately will devastate our economies and prospects of a liveable, equitable future. For example, [a new paper](#) in the journal Nature Communications Earth & Environment projects that by 2035 (just two City Council terms from now) climate change could raise inflation by 1-3% per year in addition to concurrent pressures.

In London the greatest source of greenhouse gas emissions is from cars. Canada has among the [highest rates of carbon emissions per capita](#) in the entire world. Canadians use more carbon to maintain their lifestyle than people living in China, United States, Russia, and other developing countries that are far more susceptible to the hazards of climate change like natural disasters and sea level rise. While it might not seem like what we do in London will impact the trajectory of planetary warming, we are the fastest-growing city in Ontario and in a relatively stable region of the world that will likely [attract significant numbers of climate migrants and refugees into the future](#). [A recent study](#) found that Ontario municipalities are not prepared for increased migration. However, if the city can adopt proactive strategies to prepare for this challenge, it could also be an opportunity for sustainable economic and community growth. London, already one of Ontario and Canada’s fastest growing regions, could serve as a model for strategic, ethical, and sustainable strategies for welcoming mass climate-induced migration. Rather than further straining systems, proactive strategies could have a positive ripple effect across the region and serve as an example for how growth need not correlate with increased carbon emissions.

Other major cities are shifting away from car dependency, and so should we. It is essential that the mode share target identified in the Mobility Master Plan minimizes the amount of newcomers to London being locked into transportation deserts and relying on unsustainable car use for their day-to-day mobility needs. The decision to move away from car-centric planning is not an easy one, and so I thank you for your leadership and vision in making London a more liveable city for current and future generations.

Brendon Samuels

Chair, Environmental Stewardship and Action Community Advisory Committee