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Via e-mail

Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee  
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May 24, 2016

Dear Members of the Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee:

Re: RESUBMITTING - Shift Rapid Transit - Business Case - Public Meeting to be held 26 May 2016.

The following letter is a submission regarding the proposal on Rapid Transit for London, namely the suggesting to seek funding for an all-bus LRT system for London. I request that this letter be placed on the Agenda for the meeting.

### **Light Rail – the best decision for building our lower-tax future**

I ask that London's City Council reaffirm its commitment to light rail in its transit reform and infrastructure funding proposals, and thereby make the best decision to build our future.

I have followed London planning issues closely for many years, having studied urban history in my university days. In the past few years I was very active with a group that successfully opposed a Wal-Mart being located near the top of the Meadowlily Woods ESA.

Londoners were recently treated to the sudden proposal that the City recant light rail as part of the “hybrid” bus/light rail LRT system that Londoners had every reason to believe Council had committed to.

While press reports have been marginally clear on revealing the rationale for the proposed about-face, the best possible assemblage of logic appears to suggest the proposed change is due to an asserted lack of user demand rendering light-rail too costly. Opposing this logic assemblage is that the basic facts of the business case are unchanged from when it was first issued.

### **Why light rail is the best decision**

It needs to be understood that Ontario issued its Provincial Policy Statement (2014) and earlier versions as planning statements to direct planning decisions by Ontario planning authorities, such as municipal govern-

ments. The PPS covers municipal planning such as City plans. Planning decisions must be “consistent” with the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS). The PPS is required to be read as a whole, and while its policies don't apply to every situation, its tone and tenor certainly convey the basic principle of efficient compact urban development as echoed by The London Plan.

### **Light rail best achieves provincial planning consistency and lowers taxes**

As Ontario notes “In keeping with Ontario’s policy-led planning system, the municipal official plan is one of the most important vehicles for implementation of the PPS.”<sup>1</sup> Transit reform is included in The London Plan and therefore it's fair to look at the Province's goals of land use in the context of London's transit choice.

The PPS seeks compact urban development within urban growth boundaries. Doing so curbs or eliminates urban sprawl. Capping urban sprawl isn't something you do for sport. You cap urban sprawl because building inward and upward in place of sprawl puts more people on each unit of land—yielding greater tax revenue for that land to support the expensive urban infrastructure that goes with it.

You want light rail because light rail reduces urban sprawl and so reduces taxes over time; buses on the other hand are historically associated with urban sprawl and higher taxes.

You don't want all-bus transit. Buses are the past, *not* the future.

#### **If you recant light rail you are in effect sending a higher tax bill to Londoners.**

Light rail generates its user base over time; it may be necessary to build a system discretionary users will want to use before you see a market for the product. I live in Old South because I own a car but also use buses a lot. Old South is well-served by London's otherwise frankly inadequate network of infrequent, very noisy and uncomfortable buses.

You won't convince me as a service-experienced long-time bus user—and I suspect the many potential discretionary users—that London will ever engineer a City bus that provides the needed appeal of light rail coaches able to build the bus user base. You *can* get there with comfortable, quiet, durable light-rail coaches.

### **Evidence of Light-Rail Funding Hesitance Absent**

A May 14, 2016 *London Free Press* article questioned claims that federal and provincial authorities have been at all hesitant to fund London's light-rail inclusive transit proposal. In response to the suggestion that London might get no funding at all “if it seeks too much from Ottawa and Queen’s Park,” the article noted that **the suggestion “raised eyebrows on several fronts”**:

- **Some provincial bureaucrats are bewildered by that suggestion, saying it's unlikely.**
- Ontario's transportation minister, **Steven Del Duca**, says he'll “**look forward to reviewing whichever proposal city council decides upon.**”
- London MPP Deb Matthews, Ontario's deputy premier, says **it's “never a take-it-or-leave-it situation.”**

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Ontario, “Applying the Provincial Policy Statement,” Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Provincial Planning and Environmental Services Branch.

- Federal Liberal MP Peter Fragiskatos of London North Centre says **“we’re not out to punish municipalities for asking for funding support.”**

“Before even asking for provincial and federal cash, city brass ask politicians to forget light rail in favour of bus rapid transit” *London Free Press* website, Patrick Maloney, 14 May 2016. Emphasis added to quotes.

Despite being solicited by the newspaper, actual evidence of funding hesitancy has not materialized in the public sphere. And were it to exist I doubt that it would be on the basis of light rail per se being the issue, based on the actual facts published by *The London Free Press*.

### **Choose to Include Light Rail—to benefit London ...and beyond**

What we do know is that if we move people out of cars, London won't need to spend as much on roads; there will be less air pollution; many Londoners will eventually be able to forego the great expense of car ownership.

With light rail London ensures that it maximizes the ability to grow inward and upward and remain consistent with the PPS re The London Plan in terms of an efficient compact urban environment.

Make this decision for the sake of London's enhanced economic future, for the transportation market that light rail will create, for the sound provincial urban planning with which a light rail decision will be consistent. Make it for the broader province-building and nation-building to which light rail in London will contribute.

Your decision will have positives that either echo across the region to build for the future; or not. It's your choice.

Southwestern Ontario badly needs a high-speed rail link through to Toronto. It's difficult to see such a link being perceived as justified with London lacking the complementing efficiency of rail in its own transportation network.

While the supposed hesitancy of light rail funding has no substantive proof, the obligation to good City planning and achieving the most taxpayer affordable urban landscape demand a light rail component in any wise transit plan.

Thanks very much for the opportunity to state my views on this important topic for London's future.

Sincerely,



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