

Dear Council,

Thank you for taking the time to consider the public's opinion on this absolutely huge decision affecting the future of our city for well over 50 years down the road. I am in many ways the target market of a rapid transit system: a millennial and a current transit rider. I am also -- in no way coincidentally -- an ardent advocate of a system that incorporates light rail (LRT).

I know that I am in the large majority of under-30 year olds in my stance that BRT maintains the stigma of not only "better buses," but also "a city that thinks buses is good enough." I feel this is a belief that is either not investigated enough (the opinions of the future labour market) or not given enough weight. If (and these numbers are of course fabricated and more divisive than would be accurate) 40% of the city advocates LRT and 60% BRT, but 80% of millennials prefer LRT vs 10% of non-millennials, then under the current process it is the former poll that is used. I believe when deciding for the future of our city, this latter polling (that which focuses on the future labour force, entrepreneurs, and tax base) should carry significantly more weight than the former. With that in mind, I have two important qualitative points: firstly, millennials *vehemently* prefer LRT over BRT (most could care less about BRT); secondly, that this current generation actually tends to choose the city they want to live in before they begin looking for work. If London wants to not only keep Western and Fanshawe graduates, but attract graduates from other top post-secondary institutions, it has to stay competitive with other mid-sized cities' amenities -- transit being top of most graduates' lists.

With all that for said for the qualitative arguments for BRT, I will now dip into the quantitative arguments that have so dominated the decision-making process by hoping to correct some pro-BRT arguments that I believe to grossly misrepresented.

"LRT costs \$380 million dollars more than BRT. That money is better spent on _____!" LRT does cost \$380 million more in up-front costs, however the city of London's share is capped at \$129 million with either plan. London tax payers pay nothing more towards the capital costs with LRT vs BRT.

This money is coming from London taxpayers, whether it's at the municipal, provincial, or federal level." To a degree, yes, but this money is already put in a transit investment pot by both upper levels of government. Out of the *entire* (not per capita) \$380m surcharge for LRT, Londoners (taking into account our population as a proportion of Ontario) will be paying \$10,230,689.71. However while this sounds like a lot of money, this same amount of money will be spent in a different Ontario city if we don't use it -- much like the \$26,922,867.65 London provincial and federal tax dollars going into Hamilton's LRT or \$15,211,420.22 for Kitchener-Waterloo's LRT.

What if we our ridership can't sustain the LRT? We don't want to be saddled with a 'white elephant.' London will be saddled with the operating costs of both projects. Of the two systems, however, light rail has lower operating costs. Given a failure to attract ridership to warrant a 'successful' rapid transit system, for the city of London itself, which city council represents, will be squandering less money than if it went with BRT. BRT is the white elephant, not LRT, as it is more expensive to operate and has a lower capacity ceiling. This is not even taking into account the short lifespan of BRT buses compared to LRT trains (the initial wave of both is covered in the business cases).

BRT has a higher return on investment. BRT does have a higher return on investment, however both hybrid and full-BRT systems have a positive return on investment. Both systems cost Londoners the same amount of money (see three points above). When Londoners' investment is considered, LRT actually has a higher return on investment. Moving beyond return on investment, how many other city-building projects live and die on their business case? Road widening? Car bridges? Bicycle lanes? City parks? I suspect the city could earn a lot of money paving and redeveloping Victoria Park and Ivey Park, but they have qualitative value far beyond their business cases.

BRT is more flexible to represent changing ridership needs. LRT is already off the table for the South-West line, so we are only talking about the North-East line. That line has numerous anchors: Masonville Mall, Western University, downtown, Old East Village, and Fanshawe College. While nothing in life is certain, especially predicting the future, I find it highly unlikely that any of these major landmarks will be moving any time soon.

What about temporary crises? Accidents or sinkholes. This is a transit system that will be in use 365 days a year, for decades into the future. Certainly accidents and disasters will happen, but the percentage of downtime in relation to the amount of operating hours the system will run is miniscule. Meanwhile, while Buses will be able to divert away from permanent BRT lines, they will be using run-of-the-mill roads to do so and will suffer in similar ways to LRT during these same crises. To opt for a lesser system for the occasional inconvenience would be a gross mistake.

Portland, OR has an extensive LRT network that is only 10% used. It seems these networks are only feasible on highly developed corridors. This is exactly why it is proposed we use the LRT on the highly developed corridor of Masonville-Fanshawe. The ridership is already there to support its business case with a positive Return on Investment, and it will do wonders to spur the infill that the London Plan desires.

No matter what we settle on, London is going with a "bold choice" and not simply "good enough." Are we? Our planned North-East corridor is already well above capacity. Something *must* be done. I do not know what other, cheaper, 'less bold' option there is than BRT. BRT is not bold. It is the least bold we can commit towards without actively damaging our city (by doing nothing).

What about autonomous vehicles? Aren't we going with a soon-to-be outdated technology? Buses are a soon-to-be-outdated system. LRT systems are still being built worldwide while many BRT networks are being upgraded to LRT. Will a new technology replace LRT? Will it be autonomous vehicles? Perhaps yes, but perhaps not. Sitting around and waiting isn't helping anyone, and the most likely initial use of autonomous vehicles will be personal vehicles, not mass transit. What we could very well be asking is if autonomous vehicles will be a great supplement to our modern LRT system.

What if our population growth/other aspects of the business case don't meet expectations? What is far more likely (though of course not for certain) is that our business case exceeds expectations. The business case was built using reliable numbers (current growth trajectory and current ridership numbers). A huge infrastructure project with a great rapid transit network will likely improve both those numbers' trajectories.

BRT vehicles are far cheaper to replace than LRT vehicles. London will be on the hook for replacements. BRT vehicles are far cheaper, but also last nearly a third the length of time and we will need far more of them. The BRT business case also uses \$800,000.00 as the BRT bus budget. While this could easily be increased, this price point is the same as our current articulated diesel buses. If we want to use better BRT vehicles, the cost will go up accordingly.

Western and Fanshawe want BRT instead of LRT. The institutions say that they want BRT as it is less disruptive, however the fast student bodies of both strongly prefer LRT. Western and Fanshawe are both going nowhere, but the students and future graduates will be making choices regarding their future city of residence. LRT is a must to keep these recent-graduates. As a recent article once put more eloquently than I can: “Selling a city without rapid transit is like selling a phone without a camera.” He might as well have said LRT transit. When students and graduates are deciding between Hamilton, London, Kitchener-Waterloo, Mississauga, Toronto, or another local city for their career, do we want to be a part of their decision or written off straight from the off?

Our businesses can't wait for the LRT project to finish its lengthy construction projects. Business cycles are short and vicious. The difference between the two construction projects is 8 months. While that is not nothing, we are talking *8 months* out of a 10 year project. Harking back to the “flexibility” argument: do we want to make a 50+ year decision based on 8 months of convenience? Infrastructure projects are inconvenient. That is all the more important we get them right – the first time. If we build a BRT system and upgrade it to LRT, it will take a lot longer than 8 months to modify.

BRT has higher long-term GDP prospects. The difference here comes solely from the extra labour costs involved with the BRT system: drivers. The city is responsible for paying these drivers. This is not a net-benefit to the city, that is just shuffling money around.

I urge council to not spend \$129 million city dollars, and \$500 million taxpayer dollars, on a “good enough” solution that will simply cover our needs without even helping us keep up with our immediate economic neighbours. Sometimes \$500 on a decent purchase is a poor use of your money, while \$880 on a fantastic project is a great use of your money. This is one of those times. If we cannot get the required \$880 million for the Hybrid system, it would make far more sense to keep the LRT portion that most desperately needs a capacity upgrade and scrapping the BRT portion entirely. At least at that point we will have some form of LRT infrastructure to expand upon in the future. If we pass up this golden once-in-a-political-lifetime opportunity for “good enough” we will be stuck regretting what could have been for decades to come – just as we currently are with the infamous ring road debacle.

Thank you for your time,

Jarad Fisher