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Wednesday 10 May 2006

Mercredi 10 mai 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

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L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 10 May 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 10 mai 2006

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREATER TORONTO
TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY
ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LA RÉGIE
DES TRANSPORTS DU GRAND TORONTO

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 4, 2006, on the motion for second reading of Bill 104, An Act to establish the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority and to repeal the GO Transit Act, 2001 / Projet de loi 104, Loi visant à créer la Régie des transports du grand Toronto et à abroger la Loi de 2001 sur le Réseau GO.

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: With great fanfare, I'd to announce that it is the birthday today of the illustrious member from Trinity–Spadina. So we should all honour him on his birthday and ensure that the debate is short and sweet, because he has a big party to go to, so he'll be out of here very quickly. Happy birthday. Bon compleanno.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Although that is not a point of order, the Chair joins with the members in wishing the member for Trinity–Spadina a happy birthday.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: You're not in your seat.

Further debate? The birthday boy, the member for Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): I want to thank Michael Colle and my friend for announcing that. Generally I like to keep it under the radar. It's not something that one likes to celebrate as you get older. In fact my mother, Maddalena, doesn't like to talk about birthday parties. She's 95.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): How old are you?

Mr. Marchese: I'm just a bit over 50.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: How much older?

Mr. Marchese: I'm 54 years old. It is scary. I know we're debating Bill 104, the Greater Toronto Transporting Authority, but I've got to tell on the record that I don't like getting old. I have to say this.

Hon. Mr. Colle: Il e una vergonia.

Mr. Marchese: Una vergonia indeed. The Hansard person won't be able to spell that one.

I think that as you get older you want to celebrate your birthdays less and less. Isn't that true?

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: No, Maria? God bless you, then, because you would be one of the few who enjoys aging with dignity. That's beautiful, Maria.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): God bless.

Mr. Marchese: And God bless.

Interjection: How old are you?

Mr. Marchese: I just announced that earlier.

I want to take a few minutes, because my friends are squeezing me for time. Have you noticed? I don't want to be courteous to them for having a mere 15 minutes or so. I want to talk about the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, Bill 104. To the folks out there, we're on live. This is May 10. Remember that date. May 10, almost 10 to 7. Wednesday night. And they are tuning in because this is one of the most important political channels you could be watching. I know there are multiple choices for the viewers but this is one of the best.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: People tune in from all over—Peterborough, Ottawa—from all over the place—Thunder Bay, everywhere. You get people calling you from all over the place.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Rosario, I thought you were going to tell us about your mother. You were talking about your mother.

Mr. Marchese: No, I want to talk about the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority. Does anybody remember the Greater Toronto Services Board by any chance? Who remembers that?

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot): I remember.

Mr. Marchese: Former city councillor, you would remember it. Mayor from Ancaster, Flamborough—

Mr. McMeekin: I was the day mayor, not the nightmare.

Mr. Marchese: The day mayor. Oh, there are two types? I didn't know.

Interjection: He was the nightmare.

1850

Mr. Marchese: A nightmare. No, no, he's a good guy.

I remember the Greater Toronto Services Board existed for a long, long while under the tutelage of one Gordon Chong, whom I respect. But I can't recall one single thing they did that was fruitful. It reminds me a bit

of the bill that we are about to debate, the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority. I mention it because I wanted you to remember the Greater Toronto Services Board, and I also wanted to remind you that Monsieur Chong said that this board, the one he served as chair for, should be disbanded. Why? Because it had no authority to do anything.

Hon. Mr. Colle: Gordon?

Mr. Marchese: Gordon Chong. He said, "Let's disband it." He was the chair. So frustrated was he at not being able to do anything because he had no powers that he finally said, "We've got to disband it." He's a good guy, Councillor Mike Colle. He joined you for a long time.

Hon. Mr. Colle: But he was a dentist, an excellent dentist.

Mr. Marchese: He was a dentist, and an excellent dentist, I have no doubt. Mike Colle knew him as a colleague at Toronto city council, both well-known and with a lot of experience in municipal affairs. He said, "Look, we've got to disband it. It's not doing anything useful." He was willing to disband it even though he was getting, I suspect, good bucks. Most people who are paid the pecunia, the grana, the green stuff would stay on that kind of board forever. If it pays well, people would like to stay on for as long as they could. But not Gordon Chong. He said, "We should disband it." He was right to do so, because if you have no power to do anything, it's best that you simply send it away into a quiet death.

Let's see what we've got now. Here's what we've got:

"With considerable fanfare, the Ontario Transportation Minister Harinder Takhar announced last week the creation of a Greater Toronto Transportation Authority to plan public transit from Hamilton to Oshawa."

Some people say, "There has ... been a need for a single, central authority to oversee and coordinate the jumble of separate transit systems serving this area, including GO Transit and the vast Toronto Transit Commission." That's what some people say. Others say—"The government line—at least—is that a body that sets transportation policies from a regional point of view can"—get this—"curb sprawl, create efficient transit, save money by buying buses in bulk and tackle the congestion issue that drains about \$2 billion a year from the local economy."

The "GTTA will bring the province together with municipalities to develop a seamless and integrated transportation plan for road, rail and transit," declared the Minister of Transportation.

"We know that anyone who has attempted to move across transit jurisdictions within the GTA can attest that the system is balkanized, inefficient and serves as a deterrent to moving people out of cars and into mass transit. We are all familiar with the \$2 billion per year that the present traffic gridlock strips from the GTA economy. This is no small sum, and institutional reform is certainly necessary to reduce it."

We agree. I recall some of the promises that the Liberals made before the election. They said, about the GTA, "An immediate priority for the GTTA will be to

establish within 18 months a seamless, integrated ticket system that will allow users to move easily across the region with one single ticket."

What we know is that they said that the GTA would have a single fare card in existence within 18 months of the legislation being passed, yet government estimates state that full implementation across the GTA will not be in place until 2010. It's a far cry from the Liberal promise that within 18 months we would have one single fare card. Remember, this has been announced in three budgets.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: Oh, that's right: in two throne speeches, and on numerous other occasions. And we've been waiting for something that would be effective for a long, long time.

Here's another promise: "The new GTTA will be given the clout and resources to tackle gridlock and ensure free movement of people and goods in a rapidly growing region." I know the member from Huron-Bruce would remember this promise, because this promise says they will have the requisite resources and clout to ensure a strong regional transit system. The member from Huron-Bruce, who shares my birthday today, will remember that promise. She and I were hoping that the government would be able to give the clout and the resources to this GTTA to allow it to accomplish all of the objectives they set out before the election.

What have we got today? We've got a board that reminds me of the Greater Toronto Services Board that Gordon Chong, the former chair, said we should disband because it has no clout and it has no resources. It has no clout. Ah, but it has the clout to persuade; that's a lot of power. No power, but it has the power to persuade. I'm not sure whether the member from Huron-Bruce thinks that the power to persuade is powerful enough for this GTTA to be able to do what it wants to do, to be able to do what the government wants it to do. How can it do anything if it doesn't have resources and has no money?

Ah, you say, but it can borrow money, right? It can borrow money. Well, how is it going to pay it back? How is it going to raise it?

And so what does it mean to have a Greater Toronto Transportation Authority that mimics so poorly the former Greater Toronto Services Board, which can't do anything? We were hoping that this bill would soar like an eagle, but it's going to flop like a turkey. It's an empty vessel that cannot get anywhere. It's like a car without any gas in that tank. It can't do anything. So how can you be proud of this initiative?

I understand the fanfare. I understand that you want to make it appear like you're really going to deal with a whole lot of things, like curb urban sprawl, create efficient transit, save money by buying buses in bulk, yet it cannot force any local authority from the various regions to do anything, except perhaps persuade them to do something. Member from Huron-Bruce, you understand what I'm saying, I hope, because we've got something in common today. I'm not sure we have the same views, but we do have something in common today.

So what I want the government to do is to be bold, to show leadership. This bill has no backbone, and a bill without a backbone cannot be construed to be leadership by this government.

1900

Yes, of course there are a lot of municipalities that support this in the GTA, because it doesn't frighten anybody, because it doesn't do anything. It's likely not to do anything. And yes, the government and others can say, "Well, it's an initiative; it's an important step." Well, so too was the Greater Toronto Services Board. It was an important step but it went nowhere. And we've had to now create something different with similar powers—that is, no powers—and we're hoping that because it's a Liberal government, it might work differently than the one proposed by the Conservative government. I just don't see the difference. Perhaps the Liberal members, if they have the time, the inclination tonight to—even two minutes; I'm not saying 15 because that would be too much—but even two minutes to simply indicate to the member from Trinity–Spadina that what I'm saying is wrong, mistaken, that, oh yes, I am just too negative and that past experience by the Tories doesn't prove that a similar initiative by the Liberals wouldn't lead to something different or to something better. But please: two minutes to show, to tell me and the viewers watching, that this initiative by the Liberals is different, that it does have clout even though it has no clout; that it does have power even though it doesn't have any power; that it does have resources even though it has no resources. Please help me. And help the citizens of Ontario to understand why I could be so mistaken about this bill.

That is my contribution for the evening. I thank Mike Colle for mentioning my birthday today: 54 years today—it's scary—and getting older. Sixteen years in this chamber. My goodness. Thank you, Speaker, for your attention.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair extends the birthday greetings offered earlier to the member for Trinity–Spadina to the member for Huron–Bruce. The Chair also offers the suggestion to both members that despite the perceived drawbacks of growing older, it certainly beats the alternative.

Questions and comments? Further debate.

Mr. Flynn: I'm delighted to join the debate on a bill that, for somebody who has served in local politics for a long time, I never thought I'd see this day coming. I never thought I'd see a government that had the courage to actually bring forward a GTTA.

I suffered on council under the NDP government: lots of great ideas, no money, and drove us into debt. Then I sat under the Progressive Conservative government. They came up with this wonderful idea called the GTSB. It had a very compact 42-member board. It was given responsibilities for transit, transportation, social housing; anything under the sun was given to this GTSB, and it was supposed to solve all the problems we have in the GTA.

Some of us on council at the time said, "Why don't you ask this board to just get its mind around transit?"

Why don't you just ask this board to do a good job of implementing a seamless transit system within the GTA?" Many of us at the local level, and this is where this is going to impact the most—in the towns and cities around the greater Toronto area—most of us understood that the previous way of growth under the previous government, certainly under the Tory government, was that if you could get hydro to a house, if you could get sewers to a house, if you could get a street in front of the house and get some drinking water, you could build that house. It didn't matter that you were bringing new people to a community and there was no plan for new schools, there was no plan for new hospitals, there was no plan for roads, no plan for recreational facilities, ice rinks, and certainly what was most outstanding was that there was absolutely no plan for a transit system. Some of us said, "We need to change that. If we're going to grow and we know we're going to grow as a community"—and certainly this government has done a wonderful job with its Places to Grow initiative and actually managing and getting control of that problem we have when we're trying to tie services to growth.

There's a hodgepodge of services out there right now. You can look at the region of York. They're responsible for the transit system in a regional way. You can look at the region of Halton, and each town and city has its own transit system. So you really get a mishmash. If somebody is trying to get across the community, if somebody is trying to travel from Burlington to Etobicoke, they simply can't do it in a seamless way. They need to change. Or from Hamilton to Oshawa, for example; I don't know how long that would take you. I'm not even sure if you can get there, but certainly you couldn't get there in the seamless way that's envisioned by this.

We've got a \$1.3-billion investment in transit that this government is proposing. That's going to be used to purchase new buses. When you think about the provincial gas tax that municipalities had been asking for year after year—previous governments talked about it, but no one had the courage to do it—this government did it. Just those two major investments that this government has implemented to date have resulted in a reduction of about 18 million commuter trips per year.

People talk about the economic impact of congestion. Anybody who drives in from an area like Oakville, which I do quite often—the cost of congestion in Toronto these days is estimated to be about \$1.6 billion annually. I suspect it's actually far more than that and it's going to climb to over \$21 billion, if left alone.

Certainly what this is, in my opinion, and why I think it's so supportable, is that the provincial government is finally acting in a way that's in the best interests of all those people who live within the GTA, implementing a system that will grow over the years, that will be allowed to grow. It's a manageable size of board. It's an 11-member board. It's something that I think is going to do a lot of good for the local community. For those people who choose not to travel by automobile or to own an automobile in this area, it will still allow them to get

around. And it will then allow for further growth to continue in the areas that have approved growth plans in place. You simply can't allow our communities to grow without a proper transit plan in place, and that's something I really think we need to come to grips with.

Previous attempts at this have resulted in mayors, for example, arguing over whose logo should go on the bus. There's been resistance. There's been a little bit of a turf war, a little bit of empire protection perhaps, but what it hasn't resulted in is in a transit system that is seamless and something that is necessary for growth in the GTA.

I want to congratulate the Minister of Transportation on this wonderful initiative. Those of us who have been around local politics for the amount of time I have know how special it is, know how much courage it takes to implement a plan like this, and it's worthy of support of all members of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? Further debate? The member for Erie—Lincoln.

Applause.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie—Lincoln): Thank you. I thought that was my friend the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal applauding.

Applause.

Mr. Hudak: There we go. I was going to say—

Mr. Flynn: We've got to get a bus out to Lincoln. Do you have buses in Lincoln?

Mr. Hudak: No, we have no buses in Lincoln. Fort Erie has public transit and Port Colborne has public transit. The rest of the riding is without public transit.

I'm pleased to speak on this bill to create the greater Toronto transit authority. Mr. Bisson gave me the eye to make sure I didn't dally so much in my comments and got down to brass tacks. I was going to say at the very beginning, that this bill should actually be under the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, coincidentally sitting here next to me, to get things done. Seriously, how many times has this thing been promised?

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: Three, four times. I think my colleague across the floor who will remain anonymous is right. Three or four times at least it's been promised. The current Minister of Transportation would make an announcement, "The GTTA is coming soon. Just don't you worry about it. The GTTA is coming real soon to a neighbourhood near you," and we'd wait in rapt anticipation. It's like waiting for that extra year and a half it took for the Sopranos to get season 6 on to the air. It's finally here and the Sopranos has been good, but I'm not so impressed by this legislation.

Interjection.

1910

Mr. Hudak: No, I've talked about that today.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: James Gandolfini likes the legislation.

Mr. Hudak: I don't know—well, why would he like it?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: He does.

Mr. Hudak: The character of Tony Soprano is a Mafia leader, so I don't know if you want to say that he likes the legislation, unless he wants to move places quicker, I guess.

The point I was going to make is, if the public infrastructure renewal minister was in charge, this baby would have been out there a couple of years ago and we'd actually see some investments being made. But unfortunately, it's over at the "ministry of nothing happens," the Ministry of Transportation. Nothing's happening there. You can drive by the Chalmers headquarters and see nothing coming out of there in terms of legislation, unfortunately.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: Well, maybe you say so.

I'll make some quick comments about the GTTA legislation. What would be a good analogy? You know all the excitement about the new Star Wars movies, seven, eight years in the making? A lot of hype, a lot of special effects—they weren't that good. They're not nearly as good as the original three.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Star Wars III was great.

Mr. Hudak: They weren't as good as the original three. So there was a sense of disappointment when the GTTA came out because, really, this animal is toothless. This animal is a toothless beast. There is no real decision-making mechanism here. There is no ability, in my view, to try to get projects through, to get projects funded. I don't think there is any true funding mechanism described in this legislation. Whereas if you had put it in the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, you could have matched up some of the growth planning. And the study is coming very soon.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: We're hoping.

Mr. Hudak: He's working hard on it. You could have matched that up with some funding mechanisms and actually made some investments in transit and in new highways. Instead, you have this toothless beast in the GTTA.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Any highways in particular?

Mr. Hudak: I'm going to get to that.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: I know my friend from Peterborough is a big fan of the Toronto Star. No, it was Ottawa—Orléans who was talking there. I heard a voice. Ottawa—Orléans doesn't like the Ottawa Citizen but he likes the Toronto Star. Let me read you the Toronto Star editorial of May 1: "The GTTA cannot compel local transit authorities to do anything; it can only advise. It also has no money to put toward needed transit projects and no power to collect taxes.

"Rather than making a bold leap, Queen's Park is proceeding by slow degrees. Instead of creating a strong transit authority that could override established agencies, like the TTC, and decide how best to spend billions of mass transit dollars, the province has opted to start small."

With three years in the making of this legislation, you thought it might be something bold, something that you

could really salute, something that you would say, “Man, it was worth the three years’ wait.” But according to the Toronto Star editorial board, “the province has opted to start small.”

Minister Takhar, in an interesting comment, says “There is a need to ‘walk before we run.’” Holy smokes. It’s barely crawling, let alone walking. Three years in the making, and a rather meagre piece of legislation in its vision has been brought forward.

Glen Grunwald of the Toronto Board of Trade, a wise man, working hard, great experience—

Hon. Mr. Caplan: He’s very tall.

Mr. Hudak: Tall fellow, no doubt, and what he brings in height he also brings in weight to the table in his arguments on behalf of the Toronto Board of Trade. “We’re concerned by the lack of strong financial tools that will provide sustainable revenue,” said Glen Grunwald, president of the Toronto Board of Trade, which has long called for creation of a regional transportation authority.” You’d have thought if you had any fans when the GTTA legislation was brought forward, it would have been the Toronto Board of Trade and Glen Grunwald. I think they actually pulled their support of a press release on this announcement because they were so disappointed with the lack of imagination, the lack of power in this bill.

“The authority will need sufficient funds to tackle major projects and create partnerships. The last thing we want to end up with is a great car that doesn’t have enough gas in the tank.” It’s running on empty already. I added the “running on empty” part, for the sake of Hansard; his quote ends with the word “tank.”

Mr. Leal: Any gridlock in Fort Erie?

Mr. Hudak: But there’s gridlock in the Ministry of Transportation. That’s the point I’m trying to make, I say to my friend from Peterborough.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: I remember being with Mr. McNeely on the finance committee doing some tours across the province. A number of us said that maybe if Mr. McNeely had taken over as Minister of Transportation, there would have been some teeth in this legislation.

Interjections.

Mr. Hudak: I think some of my colleagues agree.

“Instead, the government appears to have decided to leave the money for transit expansion with the operating authorities in the greater Toronto area, including the TTC, while the GTTA will make recommendations on how it is to be spent”—but simply recommendations.

What else can I tell you?

The Globe and Mail, Jeff Gray, April 25:

“During question period in the legislature, Progressive Conservative leader John Tory attacked the plans as just another layer of bureaucracy, saying the proposed legislation lacks teeth and is full of words like coordinate and plan.

“There’s absolutely no powers in there, no language to get anything done,” he said.”

Mr. Tory is right: You’ve created a debating society, but I’m not confident that this structure will actually get projects in the ground.

“Mayor David Miller, who did not attend the news conference”—I think that’s notable— “...poured cold water on visions from Mr. Takhar that the GTTA would quickly remove the boundaries to integrating public transit systems, such as removing the restrictions that keep regional transit systems from both picking up and dropping off passengers within Toronto’s boundaries....

“There are a number of obstacles to that kind of thing, including legislation and collective agreements.... That’s not going to happen immediately. It’s just not practically possible,” Mr Miller said.”

So Mr. Grunwald is not happy and Mr. Miller is not happy.

Ian Urquhart had a very insightful column; my friend from Durham had pointed this out earlier: “Many Questions Surround New Transit Agency,” Toronto Star, April 26. He asks some very, very insightful questions, as Ian Urquhart tends to do: “If so, whose view will prevail if there is a disagreement” among the elements of the GTTA? That’s not clear.

“I put these questions to Takhar and he suggested the GTTA would use its persuasive powers to convince the TTC that one option was better than the other.” Fat chance with this legislation.

“But Takhar also hinted that the GTTA might eventually get access to the federal gasoline tax” etc.

Urquhart concludes, “Essentially, the government has decided to create the framework for a regional transportation authority and worry about the details later.” How true but how sad that in the third year of the McGuinty mandate, after announcing this three, four times, whatever, they still don’t have these types of details worked out. It sounds like they had to rush outside the door, right? They wrapped the present nicely, but there’s actually nothing inside the box.

“Toronto city council will appoint four of the 11 board members; the 905 municipalities, five; and the province, two,” Urquhart adds at the end of his column, indicating the lack of confidence he has, as somebody who follows the issue quite closely, that the GTTA will actually accomplish what it has boasted to do.

I know my colleague the critic knows this issue very well and has spoken very eloquently on this and other transportation issues in the House. I won’t belabour some of the points he made except my skepticism that the GTTA is anything more than a toothless entity.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): Aw.

Mr. Hudak: I don’t mean to be skeptical, I say to my friend from Timmins. I think my friend from Timmins probably said similar things. As you know, the member from Timmins, whom I respect greatly and have enjoyed sitting with in the Legislature for a number of years, and I don’t always agree on all the issues.

Mr. Bisson: I thought it was the greater Timmins area, though.

Mr. Hudak: There was something by the Minister of Transportation about running GO Transit to Kenora, in response to the question from the leader of the third party, which was rather interesting.

Let me as well make some comments about, sadly, the lack of activity at the Ministry of Transportation, as I have discussed. We all know what some of the problems are there.

The other project that we have seen absolutely no progress on—in fact, we have gone backwards—is the mid-peninsula corridor. Members here know that the mid-peninsula corridor would be a major artery of investment in tourism for efficient travel through Niagara, through Hamilton, into the GTA. It would help out those constituents in Mississauga as well by taking some of the pressure off the Queen Elizabeth Way. A needs assessment was done in 2001 that clearly demonstrated that the mid-peninsula corridor was needed. Terms of reference were being consulted upon. The next stage was their submission.

When the Dalton McGuinty government took office, one of their first moves, sadly, was to take that needs assessment study, done by Minister Brad Clark at the time, an excellent transportation minister, crumple that up, toss it out the window and start from scratch. Five years of work: lost. Lord knows how many millions of dollars were invested in those studies. All good studies, broad consultations, all tossed out the window. You know why? Because they couldn't make a decision whether to proceed with the highway or not. They're trying to hide behind more studies, at great expense to taxpayers, at great loss of investment to the people of Niagara and Hamilton, because they can't make up their mind.

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I have asked Minister Takhar over and over again about timelines, about his dedication to the project, and over and over again, a lack of answers, and over and over again, the goal posts are reset, so this project moves farther and farther into the future.

It is absolutely incredible for me to contemplate that here we stand in May 2006 and the terms of reference have not yet even been approved by the Ministry of the Environment. I can't blame them, because it took until—what?—December or January for the Minister of Transportation to even submit the things, despite the fact that the consultations had happened in the past, despite the fact that they'd been studied before and despite the fact that the terms of reference had been written years and years ago. But it took until December or January for the minister to submit them, and they still rest there at the Ministry of the Environment.

Minister Takhar, one known for not always keeping promises, told chair Peter Partington and the municipal leaders in Niagara, and I'm sure Hamilton as well, that by February they would be out and we would be moving ahead in 2006. Meanwhile, of course, it was 2001 when the needs assessment was done. Then February came by, February passed, no action. In March, the minister says,

“Don't worry, people of Niagara and Hamilton, don't fret, it will be in March.” March passes, no progress. April passes. Now May. Delay after delay, broken promise after broken promise. I don't know what's happening at the Ministry of Transportation. Lord knows, they weren't working on this GTTA for three years. They've cobbled something together in the last couple of months to put before the House.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: I hope Mr. McNeely is pushing for it. I could really count on his support. I know he's from Ottawa, but I think he cares. I sense that he cares about Niagara and Hamilton. He wants to see that highway proceed. I would call upon him to put his full capacity as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation behind this project and move it forward, because it is shameful, it is sad and it is absolutely unbelievable that we stand here in the third term of the McGuinty government and no progress of note on the mid-peninsula corridor. Think of the loss of investment, think of the loss of jobs.

I know my friend from Brantford, who has seen the benefits of the Mike Harris government's initiative to expand the 403 to Brantford, is also a supporter of the mid-peninsula corridor.

I know the Minister of Public Infrastructure and Renewal is on his feet championing the mid-peninsula corridor. I thank the minister, who I know is a supporter of Highway 406, and call on him to continue using the power he has in cabinet to keep that four-laning south and make sure—please, I don't know if you sit beside the Minister of Transportation in cabinet, if you're close. Lean over to him, whisper and say, “Highway 140 should be the logical extension of Highway 406 south. Move that forward.”

It's welcome. The people of Welland, Pelham, Port Colborne, and particularly Wainfleet and the western part of Fort Erie welcome the notion of four-laning the 406 to Welland and then to Port Colborne through 140, no doubt about it, but they're also wondering what happened to the mid-peninsula corridor. In fact, not only has it been stopped, it's been put in reverse.

Mr. McMeekin: You blew it.

Mr. Hudak: You opposed it. My friend opposed the mid-peninsula corridor—

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: I'll say to my colleague that I think he knows that the Richmond landfill decision was actually finally won by the government. So I don't know of what the member speaks, but I know you opposed the mid-peninsula corridor.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: I say to my colleague—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Erie-Lincoln has the floor.

Mr. Hudak: I sense my colleague is similarly frustrated, like me, about the lack of action of the Minister of

Transportation. I can see that bubbling over here in the Legislative Assembly tonight.

I cannot believe—and I know my friend from Flamborough shares this—that they are actually saying at the Ministry of Transportation, “We’re not even sure if a highway is needed in the first place.” They’re not even sure if there’s a need for a highway in the first place. I know, maybe the member thinks we should go back to carriages. We’ll build a big tunnel under Lake Ontario. We’ll go back to trains. I don’t know where he gets these ideas from, but surely—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot, kindly come to order. The member for Erie–Lincoln has the floor.

Mr. Hudak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member seems to think the Minister of Transportation blew it, and he has. It’s been so many years that nothing has transpired on the mid-peninsula. I know I’ve made my point. I think I’ve solidified that pretty solidly. But the member is correct in saying it’s another screw-up by the Ministry of Transportation. It’s another sad thing. The GTTA is another—the scandals of the Chalmers Group. We don’t want to belabour that point, I think we all know, and the member for Flamborough I don’t even think stood in the House to defend the Minister of Transportation, if I recall, about the scandals of the Chalmers Group. So I think he’s right when he says that there are concerns about the way the Ministry of Transportation is conducting itself under the current minister.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: So as I’m concluding, to my friend from Brant, we are pleased finally to see some piece of legislation coming forward after promise after promise—

Hon. Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): After promise.

Mr. Hudak: —after promise. But some significant disappointment, at least on this side of the House, and I suspect my friend from Sudbury, who fought the Minister of Transportation and said, “No way are you going to toll

Highway 69”—and good for you in fighting the Minister of Transportation for that wacky plan back in 2003-04. Thank God you fought him on that one.

But I will say that I hope through committee hearings on this legislation—and I know my colleague the critic, the member for Durham, will be pushing to actually make sure that this animal has some substance, because as it sits before us today, it is nothing but a toothless beast that will not accomplish what it sets out to do or purports to do. And it’s not just me and it’s not just my friend Monsieur Bisson. Even the Toronto Star, which usually will be a cheerleader for this type of project, is expressing significant discontent with the way this legislation has come forward into the assembly.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your attention. I do hope the Minister of Transportation will move forward with the mid-peninsula highway ASAP.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? Further debate?

Mr. Takhar has moved second reading of Bill 104. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say “aye.”

All those opposed, please say “nay.”

I think the ayes have it. Carried.

Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Speaker, I’d like the bill referred to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs.

Interjections: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: So ordered.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say “aye.”

All those opposed, please say “nay.”

I think the ayes have it. Carried.

This House is adjourned until 10 o’clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1928.

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Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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