



# BRIEFING

Transportation Association of Canada

Association des transports du Canada

May 1992

## CREATING A COMMON VISION – THE URBAN MOBILITY CHALLENGE

*Congestion is threatening the quality of life and economic vitality of Canada's major urban areas. At many times and in many places "urban mobility" has become a contradiction of terms. Pollution, frustration and waste are eroding the social and economic viability of the nation's cities. The crunch is coming at the same time that many municipalities across Canada are facing severe budget constraints.*

*Proposed solutions abound: infrastructure upgrading, traffic management, enhanced transit, demand management and land use planning. However, at the core of the problem is a fundamental institutional challenge. The many players in each urban area need to create one unique, common vision of what their urban area will look like in the future and how it will function. Without that, it is very difficult for the decision making process to plan, fund and deliver the necessary transportation systems.*

*Meeting the challenge of creating a common vision will have profound social implications. It will require: much greater public awareness, understanding and support; the combined determination of government agencies, private companies and citizens; and political will to follow through.*

*This briefing has been prepared as a service of the TAC Urban Transportation Council, to raise awareness and focus national attention on the urban mobility challenge facing us all. The information presented here is based on surveys and round table discussion by Council members, supplemented by a review of Canadian and international literature. It does not necessarily represent the official views or policies of the Transportation Association of Canada.*

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### TRAFFIC CONGESTION RESULTS IN POLLUTION, LOST TIME, MONEY AND FUEL, AND A LOWER QUALITY OF URBAN LIFE...

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Traffic congestion is a problem that affects the lives of all residents of large urban areas. It is a worldwide phenomenon. Today, no major urban centre - including those in Canada - is immune to its effects.

The results are many and all adverse:

- wasted fuel and inefficient operation of motor vehicles.
- wasted time for drivers and passengers.
- increased operating and maintenance costs for motor vehicles.
- higher roadway maintenance costs.
- less effective public transit services.
- air and noise pollution.
- increased accidents.
- increased costs to the health care system from air pollution, driver stress and accidents.
- the spread of "urban blight", when homeowners move to cleaner, quieter, safer neighbourhoods.

- less competitive cities, as industries seek sites with better access and tax bases are eroded.

- a lower quality of urban life.

Today's problems have been developing over the past 40 years. Strong economies in the 1950s and 1960s encouraged people to seek new lifestyles and provided the means of achieving them: suburban development, increased automobile ownership and roadway construction. This coincided with population growth and major shifts from rural to urban areas. The difficulty of providing effective public transit to the suburbs plus the freedom and mobility of the personal automobile exacerbated the "rush hour".

Through the 1970s and 1980s demand for transport facilities and services continued to grow. The number of registered automobiles, registered trucks and licensed drivers in Canada all doubled. But capacity could not keep pace. Urban land for transport use became scarcer. New pressures were put on the public purse for non transport activities. Environmental concerns began to cause delay or cancellation of major transport projects.

The number of vehicles per kilometer of roadway doubled, demand increasingly exceeded capacity, transit could not fill the gap, and an urban mobility crisis emerged.

#### THE COST OF CONGESTION ADDS:

- \$1.9 Billion/year - or an extra 40% - to goods movement through the Greater Toronto Area.
- \$40-\$50 Million/year to goods movement in the National Capital Region.
- \$39-\$51 Million/year to commuter movement in the National Capital Region.
- US \$9 Billion/year to the motoring public on U.S. urban freeways.
- £15 Billion/year to the British economy.

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## **BETTER INFRASTRUCTURE, TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT, TRANSIT SERVICES, DEMAND MANAGEMENT AND LAND USE PLANNING ARE ALL BEING PROPOSED ...**

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As the 1990s begin, all government budgets in Canada are under pressure. Many municipalities are especially hard hit as provinces reduce transfer payments. Some face the prospects of increasing taxes while decreasing services. In this financial environment, solutions to urban mobility problems must be especially innovative, sophisticated, integrated and cost effective.

Many possible actions are being proposed. They are generally designed to:

- increase road capacity through rehabilitation and new construction (Infrastructure).
- make the best use of the available road system (Traffic Management).
- encourage people to shift from private auto to public transit (Transit Services).
- encourage or mandate modal shifts or new travel habits (Demand Management).
- modify land use to change demand patterns and achieve more coordinated, integrated land use/transport systems in the future (Land Use Planning).

Inherent in most of these schemes is the need for funding which may be achieved through some combination of transit fares, fuel taxes, sales taxes, municipal taxes, roadway pricing, parking fees, general tax revenues, bonds, and contributions by developers. Also inherent is the understanding that the private automobile (its manufacture, sale, service and use) is a major element of the national economy and personal lifestyles, and any integrated solutions must provide for it.

Most of these proposals, used either singly or in combination, can claim some degree of success in one or more cities of the world. Why then, with this impressive array of options to choose from, do we still have traffic congestion and urban mobility problems? The reason lies in three inherent barriers to implementing change.

### **A MENU OF PROPOSED ACTIONS ...**

#### **Upgrade and Expand Infrastructure**

- increase maintenance on existing roads
- upgrade existing roads
- build new roads

#### **Use Traffic Management Techniques**

- install coordinated/computerized traffic signal systems
- create HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle) and reversible traffic lanes
- modify intersection design/use left turn lanes
- improve accident/incident management
- improve parking regulations/management
- use traffic calming designs
- develop/implement IHVS (Intelligent Highway Vehicle Systems)

#### **Enhance and Expand Transit and Rapid Transit Services**

- provide services to new areas
- increase services on existing routes
- use transit priority and HOV lanes
- use transit only streets
- give transit priority at signalized intersections
- introduce new user information systems
- provide more park and ride
- create suburban transit centres
- use abandoned or underutilized rights-of-way for new transit routes
- develop balanced road/transit plans
- develop public information programs
- give transit funding priority

#### **Use Demand Management Techniques**

- encourage/support walking and cycling
- build bikeways and pedestrian malls
- promote/support ride sharing/car pooling/van pooling/dial-a-ride
- encourage staggered/flexible work hours and telecommunications
- control parking supply/modify pricing policies
- impose trip reduction by-laws
- create limited access zones
- introduce area licensing/toll rings or other roadway pricing schemes
- increase fuel taxes/introduce "smog taxes"

#### **Apply Land Use Planning Policies**

- coordinate passenger and goods transport with land use developments
- require compact and pedestrian oriented cluster development at transit nodes, or corridor development along transit routes
- apply zoning and development controls/growth management strategies
- create housing close to employment
- implement "intensification" policies
- use development agreements to help fund transit
- create more pedestrian-friendly streetscapes
- design new subdivisions to be transit friendly

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## **INSTITUTIONAL COMPLEXITY, FUNDING DIFFICULTIES AND PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ARE BARRIERS TO CHANGE...**

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### **Institutional Complexity**

Decision making in any urban area related to land use and transportation is characterized by a large number of independent players. Municipal councils, transport and urban planning officials, transit operators, taxi and trucking companies, private motorists, other road users, parking authorities, persons with disabilities, real estate developers, advocacy groups and the public at large can all be involved at some point. Urban areas are not self contained units. Municipalities control land use planning, while provinces build major components of infrastructure. National and international forces also impact on urban environment.

Each group has its own legitimate and often conflicting goals, aspirations and agendas. In many cases they have little opportunity to deal with each other in an effective way. Eg: Transit operators and real estate developers seldom communicate directly in the early stages of development. If they did, more "transit friendly" subdivisions would result. In extreme cases, the public is confused. They get conflicting signals about roads, cars, transit and the environment. With so many institutions involved, there may be no clear understanding of who is responsible for what, or which direction to take for information, decisions and actions. Elected municipal councils, who must ultimately grapple with the problems of the day, also receive conflicting pressures and signals.

In this environment it is very difficult to implement timely and effective actions in response to the multi disciplinary problems of today's pluralistic society. As a result, it appears that some urban areas have not invested enough in roads and transit over the past 15 years and have not delivered the integrated transport services and facilities that were required.

### **Funding Difficulties**

Urban transportation is not at the top of the public agenda. Jobs, housing, the environment, education, health care and other social services are perceived to have higher priorities. It is therefore not at the top of municipal council agendas either. This makes it difficult for transport to receive its share of attention and funding from limited budgets.

As a result, required funding from conventional sources is often not available. When it is, departments sometimes have trouble in securing funds for specific projects. Many smaller, potentially useful projects can lose out in the negotiations for funds or in the rush to more glamorous mega projects.

Potential new sources of transport funding such as dedicated fuel taxes, roadway pricing and other user fees are controversial. They do not have a widespread tradition in Canada.

Dedicated fuel taxes have been used in the United States for many years, and were even supported in California during the Proposition 13 "tax revolt".

But they have never been part of Canadian federal or provincial fiscal policy, where fuel taxes are counted in general revenues. Two exceptions are recent initiatives in New Brunswick (where a portion of the fuel tax is now dedicated to a road network trust fund), and Nova Scotia (where a portion of the provincial budget is dedicated to a roadway program). Also, in the Greater Vancouver area a dedicated fuel tax is collected at all pumps within a designated BC Transit service area, to be used to support public transit.

Proponents of road pricing point to its potential to manage demand, increase efficiency through more balanced road/transit systems and generate funding for maintenance and expansion. Others argue that this is a punitive measure against private motorists. Most agree that freedom of mobility should be maintained and that improved modal choice should be the goal.

### **Public Perceptions**

Public support is critical to implementing new solutions. However, few people are in a position to understand the true costs and benefits of present urban transportation systems and new ones being proposed. It is therefore difficult for them to justify new fees, new travel habits or lifestyle changes.

Conflicting views prevail in the public mind. People seek the comfort, privacy and mobility of the personal automobile while expressing desires for less congestion and a cleaner, safer environment. On the other hand, some studies suggest that people get used to congestion and adapt to it as a normal part of daily routine. While Canadians are beginning to suffer from "tax fatigue", some experiences indicate that people are willing to pay for services received.

Lacking a well informed and supportive public, it is difficult to change old habits, move transportation higher on the agenda, implement new solutions and find a way to pay for it all. A basic conflict between individual expectations and urban reality prevents consensus building.

### **MANY PLAYERS ...**

In the Greater Toronto Area there are:

1	Provincial Government
1	Provincial Coordinating Committee
5	Regional Governments
30	Incorporated Area Municipalities
14	Public Transit Operators
83	Licensed Taxi Services
260	For-Hire Trucking Companies
12	Parking Authorities
2.5 million	Licensed Drivers
over 100	Major Developers
over 1,000	Local or Special Interest Groups, and
4.0 million	Residents.

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## COMMON VISIONS ARE THE KEYS TO FUTURE SUCCESS...

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As a result of institutional complexity, funding difficulties and current public perceptions, the urban transportation decision making process is fragmented, based on confrontation and competing agendas, and is slow to respond. At the same time there are strong differences of opinion on the best ways to improve urban transportation, and insufficient public support to move forward. It is therefore difficult to generate the political will to define and finance solutions and to carry them through - especially in the long term.

These are not "technical" problems which can be solved by transportation and urban planning professionals working alone. They are institutional and social problems which must be resolved by all key players working together, before the full benefits of proposed solutions can be realized.

In a large sense we have reached a decision-making gridlock. We cannot move forward together because we have no common agreement on where it is we want to go, how we will get there, or how we will fund it. We have no mutually defined, clearly articulated goals and objectives for the future of our cities or the transportation systems that will serve them - in other words no common vision of the future.

**Therefore, the fundamental challenge facing each Canadian urban area today is to create and agree on one common substantive vision of what its future urban area should be like and how it should function.** Each urban area will need its own unique vision, taking into account its own demographics, land use patterns, transportation systems and resources.

Creating a common vision will require a balanced blending of the often conflicting transportation, land use, political, public lifestyle, fiscal and environmental visions that now exist. This consensus building must involve public education, understanding and input to result in a clear mandate to elected officials and other decision makers.

**Once this is achieved, it should then be possible to develop timely and effective decision making processes to plan and deliver transportation systems compatible with that vision, including realistic means of funding.**

This is a major challenge, but one worthy of the best combined efforts of all urban Canadians. The end benefits are substantial: less pollution, frustration and waste; and safer, more competitive and liveable cities.

This **Briefing** was prepared with inputs from, and was reviewed by, members of the TAC sponsored Urban Transportation Council. For this assistance, TAC is grateful. It was written by John Hartman, Council Secretary and member of the TAC Secretariat staff.

**TAC** is a national non-profit, non-partisan association of more than 550 voluntary corporate members including the federal, all provincial and territorial and many municipal governments, passenger transport services, goods carriers, contractors, manufacturers, consultants, academic and research groups, and others. Its interests cover all modes of transportation. It acts as a neutral forum for the discussion of transportation issues and concerns, and as a technical focus in the roadway transportation area. It was founded in 1914 as the Canadian Good Roads Association, became RTAC in 1970 and TAC in 1990.

The TAC sponsored **Urban Transportation Council** provides a focus for urban congestion and urban mobility issues within the Canadian transportation community.

Its objectives are to:

- identify and prioritize critical urban transportation issues.
- focus attention on those issues.
- produce and distribute impartial, factual information on those issues.
- provide a neutral forum within which active parties to an issue can work cooperatively toward common goals.

Membership consists of: municipal elected officials, municipal transportation planners, municipal urban planners, provincial governments, urban developers, trucking companies, transit operators, motorists, academics and consultants.

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**John Hartman**  
Secretary, Urban Transportation Council

For information about TAC, the benefits of membership and membership application forms contact:

Member Services Manager

**Transportation Association of Canada**  
2323 St. Laurent Blvd.  
Ottawa, ON K1G 4K6  
Tel: (613)736-1350  
Fax: (613)736-1395

