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Mercredi
22 novembre 2023

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Clerk: Trevor Day

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 22 November 2023 / Mercredi 22 novembre 2023

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES ET VISITEURS

Mr. Joel Harden..... 6447

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES / RAPPORTS DE COMITÉS

Standing Committee on Social Policy

Mr. Brian Riddell..... 6447

Report adopted..... 6447

INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS / DÉPÔT DE PROJETS DE LOI ÉMANANT DU GOUVERNEMENT

Building Infrastructure Safely Act, 2023, Bill 153, Mr. McCarthy / Loi de 2023 sur la construction sécuritaire des infrastructures, projet de loi 153, M. McCarthy

First reading agreed to..... 6447

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy..... 6447

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Hospital services

Mr. Wayne Gates..... 6447

Hospital services

Mr. Jeff Burch..... 6448

Hospital services

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam..... 6448

Hospital services

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky..... 6448

Labour legislation

Ms. Chandra Pasma..... 6449

Hospital services

Mme France Gélinas..... 6449

Hospital services

Mr. Jeff Burch..... 6449

Injured workers

Ms. Doly Begum..... 6449

Hospital services

Ms. Sandy Shaw..... 6450

Visitors

Ms. Doly Begum..... 6450

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Transportation for the Future Act, 2023, Bill 131, Miss Surma / Loi de 2023 pour un réseau de transport orienté vers l'avenir, projet de loi 131, Mlle Surma

Hon. Kinga Surma..... 6450

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam..... 6455

Mr. Joel Harden..... 6458

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy..... 6458

Mr. Joel Harden..... 6458

Mr. Andrew Dowie..... 6459

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam..... 6459

Mr. Joel Harden..... 6459

Mr. Anthony Leardi..... 6468

Mme France Gélinas..... 6468

Mr. Anthony Leardi..... 6468

Ms. Peggy Sattler..... 6469

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu..... 6469

Mme France Gélinas..... 6469

Mr. Logan Kanapathi..... 6469

Mr. Terence Kernaghan..... 6471

Mr. Andrew Dowie..... 6472

Ms. Jennifer K. French..... 6472

Mrs. Robin Martin..... 6472

Ms. Peggy Sattler..... 6472

Ms. Catherine Fife..... 6473

Mr. Anthony Leardi..... 6475

Ms. Jennifer K. French..... 6475

Ms. Natalie Pierre..... 6476

Mr. Chris Glover..... 6476

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy..... 6476

MPP Andrea Hazell..... 6477

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon..... 6477

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy..... 6478

Ms. Catherine Fife..... 6478

Mrs. Robin Martin..... 6479

Mr. Terence Kernaghan..... 6479

Mme Lucille Collard..... 6479

Ms. Doly Begum..... 6480

Mr. Anthony Leardi..... 6482

Mr. Chris Glover..... 6483

Mr. Anthony Leardi..... 6483

Ms. Catherine Fife..... 6483

Mrs. Robin Martin..... 6483

Mrs. Daisy Wai..... 6484

Mr. Terence Kernaghan..... 6485

Ms. Natalie Pierre..... 6485

Ms. Catherine Fife	6485
Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	6485
Third reading debate deemed adjourned.....	6487
Transportation for the Future Act, 2023, Bill 131, Miss Surma / Loi de 2023 pour un réseau de transport orienté vers l'avenir, projet de loi 131, Mlle Surma	
Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	6487
Mrs. Robin Martin	6488
Ms. Doly Begum.....	6489
Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy.....	6489
Ms. Catherine Fife	6489
Mr. Andrew Dowie.....	6490
Ms. Jennifer K. French	6490
Mr. Andrew Dowie.....	6492
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens.....	6493
Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy.....	6493
Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	6493
Mr. Anthony Leardi.....	6494
Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	6494
Mr. Lorne Coe	6496
Ms. Jennifer K. French	6496
Mr. Andrew Dowie.....	6496
Ms. Catherine Fife	6496
Mr. Lorne Coe	6497
Mr. Amarjot Sandhu.....	6497
Vote deferred	6498

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 22 November 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 22 novembre 2023

*Report continued from volume A.
The House recessed from 1155 to 1300.*

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Joel Harden: I just had occasion to run into someone who I hope will be in the chamber soon: Amber Bramer, who works for supportive housing with the Shepherds of Good Hope back home. I'm very happy that she's in this building today. She does a lot of great work back home.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Brian Riddell: Speaker, I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Wai Lam (William) Wong): Your committee begs to report the following bill, without amendment:

Bill 135, An Act to amend the Connecting Care Act, 2019 with respect to home and community care services and health governance and to make related amendments to other acts.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE SAFELY ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 SUR LA CONSTRUCTION SÉCURITAIRE DES INFRASTRUCTURES

Mr. McCarthy moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 153, An Act to amend the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012 / Projet de loi 153, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2012 sur un système d'information sur les infrastructures souterraines en Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the minister care to briefly explain his bill?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Building Infrastructure Safely Act, 2023, if passed, would, among other things, prohibit underground infrastructure owners and operators from charging a fee to identify the location of their underground infrastructure.

It would also remove the requirement for underground infrastructure owners and operators to compensate excavators through the Ontario Land Tribunal for a loss or an expense incurred because the owner or operator failed to provide locates within legislated time limits.

The bill would also expand regulation-making powers and some of the powers and obligations of Ontario One Call, one of the administrative authorities under the authority of the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Wayne Gates: I have 4,000 petitions here with me today:

"Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to restore 24/7 urgent care services at the Fort Erie and Port Colborne hospitals:

"Whereas it is within the legislated powers of the Minister of Health and Ontario Health to require public hospitals to provide particular services and the level of those services;

"Whereas the Niagara Health System has closed the urgent care centres at the Douglas Memorial Hospital and at the Port Colborne Hospital from 10 p.m. to 10 a.m.;

"Whereas the Welland Hospital has also had recent service cuts resulting in no emergent and urgent care from 4 p.m. to 8 a.m. Monday to Friday and none on the weekends;

"Whereas these cuts and closures result in poor or no access to urgent care for more than 100,000 people in south Niagara overnight;

"Whereas more than 20,000 people living in Fort Erie, Port Colborne and southeast Wainfleet do not have a family doctor;

"Whereas there is limited taxi service and none at night and no public transit services at night. These, combined with increased travel time and long waits in the emergency departments of the remaining hospitals in north Niagara,

mean that residents from Fort Erie, Port Colborne and the southeast region of Wainfleet face serious health risks due to the time to get medical help at the St. Catharines and Niagara Falls hospitals, as well as financial hardship;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to immediately work with Niagara Health to restore the urgent and emergent care service in the NHS hospitals in south Niagara to operate 24/7.”

I’ll sign my name to the petition.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Jeff Burch: This petition is to save the Welland Hospital.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the current restructuring plan approved by the Ontario Ministry of Health includes removal of the emergency department, emergency surgical services and associated beds and ambulances service from the Welland hospital site once the Niagara Falls site is complete, creating inequity of hospital and emergency service in the Niagara region and a significant negative impact on hospital and emergency outcomes for the citizens of Welland, Port Colborne and all Niagara;

“Whereas the NHS is already experiencing a 911 crisis in EMS, a shortage of beds and unacceptable off-loading delays in its emergency departments across the region;

“Whereas the population in the Welland hospital catchment area is both aging and growing;

“Whereas the Ontario Legislature passed a motion by Niagara Centre MPP Jeff Burch on April 13, 2022, to include a full emergency department and associated beds in the rebuild of the Welland hospital;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To work with the Ontario Ministry of Health and the Niagara Health System to implement motion 47 ... to maintain the Welland hospital emergency department and adjust its hospital plan accordingly.”

I sign this and send it to the desk.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: This petition reads:

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to restore 24/7 urgent care services at the Fort Erie and Port Colborne hospitals:

“Whereas it is within the legislated powers of the Minister of Health and Ontario Health to require public hospitals to provide particular services and the level of those services;

“Whereas the Niagara Health System has closed their urgent care centres at the Douglas Memorial Hospital and the Port Colborne Hospital from 10 p.m. to 10 a.m.;

“Whereas the Welland Hospital has also had recent service cuts resulting in no emergent and urgent care from 4 p.m. to 8 a.m. Monday to Friday and none on the weekends;

“Whereas these cuts and closures result in poor or no access to urgent care for more than 100,000 people in south Niagara overnight;

“Whereas more than 20,000 people living in Fort Erie, Port Colborne and southeast Wainfleet do not have a family doctor;

“Whereas there is limited taxi service and none at night and no public transit services at night. These, combined with increased travel time and long waits in the emergency departments of the remaining hospitals in north Niagara mean that residents from Fort Erie, Port Colborne and the southeast region of Wainfleet face serious health risks due to the time to get medical help at the St. Catharines and Niagara Falls hospitals, as well as financial hardship;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to immediately work with Niagara Health to restore the urgent and emergent care services in the NHS hospitals in south Niagara to operate 24/7.”

I’ll proudly affix my signature to these petitions and return them to the centre table with page Martel.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I have thousands of petitions here, entitled “To Restore 24/7 Urgent Care Services at the Fort Erie and Port Colborne Hospitals.”

1310

“Whereas it is within the legislated powers of the Minister of Health and Ontario Health to require public hospitals to provide particular services and the level of those services;

“Whereas the Niagara Health System has closed the urgent care centres at the Douglas Memorial Hospital and the Port Colborne Hospital from 10 p.m. to 10 a.m.;

“Whereas the Welland Hospital has also had recent service cuts resulting in no emergent and urgent care from 4 p.m. to 8 a.m. Monday to Friday and none on the weekends;

“Whereas these cuts and closures result in poor or no access to urgent care for more than 100,000 people in south Niagara overnight;

“Whereas more than 20,000 people living in Fort Erie, Port Colborne and southeast Wainfleet do not have a family doctor;

“Whereas there is limited taxi service and none at night and no public transit services at night. These, combined with increased travel time and long waits in the emergency departments of the remaining hospitals in north Niagara, mean that residents from Fort Erie, Port Colborne and the southeast region of Wainfleet face serious health risks due to the time to get medical help at the St. Catharines and Niagara Falls hospitals, as well as financial hardship;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to immediately work with Niagara Health to restore the urgent and emergent care services in the NHS hospitals in south Niagara to operate 24/7.”

I fully support this petition. I believe everybody should have access to health care. I will sign it and send it to the Clerks.

LABOUR LEGISLATION

Ms. Chandra Pasma: It's my honour to rise on behalf of the residents of Ottawa West–Nepean to table this petition entitled “Pass Anti-Scab Labour Legislation.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the use of replacement workers undermines workers’ collective power, unnecessarily prolongs labour disputes, and removes the essential power that the withdrawal of labour is supposed to give workers to help end a dispute, that is, the ability to apply economic pressure;

“Whereas the use of scab labour contributes to higher-conflict picket lines, jeopardizes workplace safety, destabilizes normalized labour relations between workers and their employers and removes the employer incentive to negotiate and settle fair contracts; and

“Whereas strong and fair anti-scab legislation will help lead to shorter labour disputes, safer workplaces, and less hostile picket lines;

“Whereas similar legislation has been introduced in British Columbia and Quebec with no increases to the number of strike or lockout days;

“Whereas Ontario had anti-scab legislation under an NDP government, that was unfortunately ripped away from workers by the Harris Conservatives;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To prohibit employers from using replacement labour for the duration of any legal strike or lockout, except for very limited use to undertake essential maintenance work to protect the safety and integrity of the workplace;

“To prohibit employers from using both external and internal replacement workers;

“To include significant financial penalties for employers who defy the anti-scab legislation; and

“To support Ontario’s workers and pass anti-scab labour legislation, like the Ontario NDP Bill 90, the Anti-Scab Labour Act, 2023.”

I wholeheartedly endorse this petition, Speaker. I will add my name to it and send it to the table with page Chloe.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank the good people of Niagara and around for these petitions.

“To Restore 24/7 Urgent Care Services at the Fort Erie and Port Colborne Hospitals.

“Whereas it is within the legislated powers of the Minister of Health and Ontario Health to require public hospitals to provide particular services and the level of those services;

“Whereas the Niagara Health System has closed the urgent care centres at the Douglas Memorial Hospital and the Port Colborne Hospital from 10 p.m. to 10 a.m.;

“Whereas the Welland Hospital has also had recent service cuts resulting in no emergent and urgent care from 4 p.m. to 8 a.m. Monday to Friday and none on the weekends;

“Whereas these cuts and closures result in poor or no access to urgent care for more than 100,000 people in south Niagara overnight;

“Whereas more than 20,000 people living in Fort Erie, Port Colborne and southeast Wainfleet do not have a family” physician;

“Whereas there is limited taxi service and none at night and no public transit services at night. These, combined with increased travel time and long waits in the emergency departments of the remaining hospitals in north Niagara, mean that residents from Fort Erie, Port Colborne and the southeast region of Wainfleet face serious health risks due to the time to get medical help at the St. Catharines and Niagara Falls hospitals, as well as financial hardship;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“Immediately work with Niagara Health to restore the urgent and emergent care services in the NHS hospitals in south Niagara to operate 24/7.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and ask my good page Elliott to bring it to the table.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Jeff Burch: My petition is “Support the Port Colborne Urgent Care ...

“Whereas the Niagara Health System reduced overnight service hours at urgent care centres in Fort Erie and Port Colborne starting July 5, 2023;

“Whereas the current Niagara Health System restructuring plan approved by the Ontario Ministry of Health does not include Port Colborne urgent care centre, creating inequity of health care services in south Niagara;

“Whereas the NHS is already experiencing a 911 crisis in EMS, a shortage of beds and unacceptable off-loading delays in its emergency departments across the region;

“Whereas the population in the Port Colborne urgent care catchment area is both aging and growing;

“Whereas the Ontario Legislature passed motion 47 from the 42nd Parliament by Niagara Centre MPP Jeff Burch on April 13, 2022, to provide a firm funding commitment and clear timeline for capital and operational support of the Niagara Health System as part of an overall effort to serve the growing population of the region, increase hospital capacity, create jobs and offer the important, high-level front-line services to people of Niagara in need;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To work with the Ontario Ministry of Health and the Niagara Health System to ensure 24-hour services are maintained at the Port Colborne urgent care centre.”

I’ll affix my name and send it to the Clerk.

INJURED WORKERS

Ms. Doly Begum: I have a petition here.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas about 200,000 to 300,000 people in Ontario are injured on the job every year;

“Whereas over a century ago, workers in Ontario who were injured on the job gave up the right to sue their employers, in exchange for a system that would provide them with just compensation;

“Whereas decades of cost-cutting have pushed injured workers into poverty and onto publicly funded social assistance programs, and have gradually curtailed the rights of injured workers;

“Whereas injured workers have the right to quality and timely medical care, compensation for lost wages and protection from discrimination;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to change the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to accomplish the following for injured workers in Ontario:

“Eliminate the practice of ‘deeming’ or ‘determining,’ which bases compensation on phantom jobs that injured workers do not actually have;

“Ensure that the WSIB prioritizes and respects the medical opinions of the health care providers who treat the injured worker directly;

“Prevent compensation from being reduced or denied based on ‘pre-existing conditions’ that never affected the worker’s ability to function prior to the work injury.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature to it and give it to page Martel to take it to the Clerks.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a petition entitled “To Restore 24/7 Urgent Care Services at the Fort Erie and Port Colborne Hospitals.

“Whereas it is within the legislated powers of the Minister of Health and Ontario Health to require public hospitals to provide particular services and the level of those services;

“Whereas the Niagara Health System has closed the urgent care centres at the Douglas Memorial Hospital and the Port Colborne Hospital from 10 p.m. to 10 a.m.;

“Whereas the Welland Hospital has also had recent service cuts resulting in no emergency and urgent care from 4 p.m. to 8 a.m. Monday to Friday and none on the weekends;

“Whereas these cuts and closures result in poor or no access to urgent care for more than 100,000 people living in south Niagara overnight;

“Whereas more than 20,000 people living in Fort Erie, Port Colborne and southeast Wainfleet do not have a family doctor;

“Whereas there is limited taxi service and none at night and no public transit services at night. These, combined with increased travel time and long waits in the emergency departments of the remaining hospitals in north Niagara, mean that residents from Fort Erie, Port Colborne and the southeast region of Wainfleet face serious health risks due to the time to get medical help at the St. Catharines and Niagara Falls hospitals, as well as financial hardship;

1320

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to immediately work with Niagara Health

to restore the urgent and emergent care services in the NHS hospitals in south Niagara to operate 24/7.”

I’m going to add my name to the thousands and thousands of people that have signed this petition. It’s a fundamental right that people have access to emergency care.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time we have available for petitions.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Scarborough Southwest has a point of order.

Ms. Doly Begum: It is my pleasure to introduce some special guests to the Legislature this afternoon. If you’ll join me in welcoming Mr. Abul Kashem Haq, Ms. Shimme Begum and Mr. Afnan Haq, who is visiting us all the way from New York. Welcome to the Legislature.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TRANSPORTATION FOR THE FUTURE ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 POUR UN RÉSEAU DE TRANSPORT ORIENTÉ VERS L’AVENIR

Miss Surma moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 131, An Act to enact the GO Transit Station Funding Act, 2023 and to amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006 / Projet de loi 131, Loi édictant la Loi de 2023 sur le financement des stations du réseau GO et modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la cité de Toronto.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the Minister of Infrastructure care to lead off the debate?

Hon. Kinga Surma: I’m happy to rise for the third reading of the Transportation for the Future Act, 2023, and I will be sharing my time with the Associate Minister of Transportation, the member from Scarborough–Rouge Park.

Our proposed legislation comes at a time when Ontario’s population continues to grow rapidly. I touched on that subject yesterday. We know that the greater Golden Horseshoe is one of the fastest-growing regions in North America. Now more than ever, we need to ensure that our infrastructure grows along with it. To meet the demands of this growth, we need to continue to invest in infrastructure to support the delivery of critical services for the hard-working people of this province, such as schools that help our children grow and thrive, hospitals and long-term-care homes that care for our loved ones, homes in which we raise our families and transit that we rely on every day to get to where we need to go safely and on time.

With population growth comes more traffic, congestion and increased pressure on a limited supply of housing. Our province faces increasing risks and pressures on the capacity of its infrastructure if we do not make critical

investments today to keep up with the growing demand. Our communities cannot and should not wait any longer. This legislation, if passed, would help more GO Transit stations and spur more housing and mixed-use communities around transit, bringing us one step closer to our goal of building at least 1.5 million homes by 2031.

Our proposed legislation would, if passed, create a station contribution fee as an innovative new tool that municipalities can use to help spur the construction of new GO Transit stations, leading to accelerated transit expansion and vibrant mixed-used communities with more jobs and much-needed housing. If adopted, our legislation would allow municipalities to recover costs from funding the design and construction of new GO Transit stations. This station contribution fee would apply to new developments within areas identified by municipalities surrounding these new GO stations, with revenue collected over time as transit-oriented communities are built around them. The municipality would only collect the fee until full station costs are recovered. It's a win-win for all parties involved. It would not only spur more transit stations, with more housing and jobs around these stations, but it would also see these new stations built at little cost to the province and taxpayers.

This tool could help deliver new stations all across the region, from the Lakeshore East extension into Bowmanville to Lakeshore West into Niagara, and along the Milton line. It would increase transit use among residents, improving the quality of life in communities across the greater Golden Horseshoe. It would mean a healthier population and better air quality, as fewer people sit in cars for hours and opt to take public transit instead.

Plus, the creation of transit-oriented communities around the stations would encourage more walkable and bikeable public areas. Increased transit use would also help people travel more safely and reduce accidents on the road. Residents would have better and easier access to vital services in their region, whether travelling to the doctor's office or visiting their local community centre.

There are also economic incentives to passing this legislation. It would help ease congestion on our streets, which, if not addressed, could lead to billions of dollars in lost GDP every year due to delays in the movement of people and goods. It would boost local economies near these stations, helping businesses to attract more customers. It would help residents who may not have access or be able to use a car, not to mention help increase the supply of much-needed housing. From individuals to families, businesses to the environment, everyone benefits from more transit stations and vibrant mixed-use communities that are built around them.

It's also important to note that, if passed, this would be a completely voluntary tool that the government is making available to municipalities that wish to expedite the process for building new GO stations. This would give municipalities the flexibility to determine what works best for them. When not used, the province would continue to use the market-driven approach where partnerships with third parties are sought to fund the construction of new stations.

We would ensure that this tool is used in a transparent way. Municipalities will be required to conduct a background study and also consult with the community on it before submitting a proposal to the province. The decision will lie with the province to approve the use of the station contribution fee for each municipality, and the province would only approve the use of the tool where the municipality is in a strong financial position.

This proposed tool, if adopted by municipalities, would help accelerate transit expansion and unlock significant housing opportunities all across the greater Golden Horseshoe. It will help address the challenges associated with the typical market-driven approaches that require a single landowner and building partner, especially for communities outside of Toronto. If adopted, this proposed tool would apply to those looking to redevelop within specific areas around new GO stations, which means that funding contributions are spread out among many benefiting parties instead of just one. It would also help provide more certainty around the timing and delivery of the stations, and it would help municipalities take a more active role in transit expansion and delivery.

It's important to see various levels of government and our private sector partners working together to build better transit and create vibrant mixed-use communities along transit lines while addressing one of the biggest issues of our time by spurring the creation of more housing. In fact, it was municipalities that requested this new optional funding tool. Over the last several months, we consulted with a number of municipalities, and many have indicated their support for such a tool to help them expedite transit expansion in their jurisdictions.

1330

Durham region, for example, has been a leading proponent of this type of revenue tool to help fund four proposed new stations on the Bowmanville extension along the Lakeshore East GO rail line, including the Thorton's Corners East, Ritson, Courtice and Bowmanville stations. Durham region recently described the proposed legislation as bringing it "one step closer to delivering four new stations along the GO Lakeshore East extension." They said:

"This legislation ensures a fair contribution from real estate development near transit rather than placing the burden on the local tax base.

"Stations operating with frequent and reliable service have been proven to attract more cost-effective and environmentally sustainable housing because it supports transit-oriented development."

They go on to say that transit-oriented communities "seek to achieve more housing faster. It's based on the idea that growth and development should take place near rapid transit options and stations, because such transit attracts a mix of homes, businesses, offices, parks and more.

"Transit-oriented development helps create vibrant, livable, and sustainable communities—all located near rapid transit stations."

As you can see, Durham region supports this proposed legislation to build critical transit infrastructure in their communities.

We also heard from community builders and landowners, through our posting on the regulatory registry, who supported the proposed legislation, with one saying, “Bill 131 has the potential to provide a meaningful framework which will allow local governments working with community landowners to realize new and expanded GO transit in support of the delivery of the significant community growth and development of housing this province urgently needs.”

This tool promotes cost-sharing of the station among multiple builders and developments instead of just one.

Meanwhile, the mayor of Clarington, Adrian Foster recently said of the proposed station contribution fee, “This is a huge step forward to finally connect our community through the rest of the GTA through GO Transit.

“I am thrilled to hear about this innovative tool for building new GO train stations.

“The faster the two stations planned for Clarington can be built, the quicker the GO train can come here, bringing better transit options for our residents and a better quality of life.”

The mayor goes on to say, “I also want to thank the Ontario government for their determination to complete the GO Lakeshore East extension and strengthen the economic potential of Clarington and Durham region. We are finally making significant progress in bringing the GO train to Bowmanville. I look forward to the announcement of the target date, so people know when to expect to get on the train at the new stations.”

It’s clear that many municipalities want and need this tool. If this legislation passes, we will again reconnect with those municipalities with positive business cases for a GO station to discuss implementation details and initiate a robust consultation program as we develop the enabling regulation required to implement this proposed tool. By taking these steps, we are strengthening and connecting communities, expanding and integrating Ontario’s transit network, supporting economic growth and creating more jobs and housing.

This proposed tool complements the existing work that we’ve done to build transit-oriented communities all across the greater Golden Horseshoe. Work is already underway to deliver transit-oriented communities along the new Ontario Line, Yonge North subway extension and Scarborough subway extension, creating approximately 79,000 new jobs and about 54,000 new residential units, including affordable housing. Just last month, we were excited to announce transit-oriented communities proposed at five stations on the Ontario Line, including the Eastern Avenue transit-oriented community located near the future East Harbor Transit Hub, along with the Gerrard-Carlaw South, Pape, Cosburn, and Thorncliffe Park transit-oriented communities.

We also announced that we are proposing to build the first transit-oriented community on the Scarborough subway extension, close to the Lawrence and McCowan stations. The development proposals are currently being reviewed by the city of Toronto. Following this review, the province will engage with the public, stakeholders and

First Nations to gather feedback on the plans. Other transit-oriented communities proposed on the future Ontario Line include those at East Harbor, Corktown, Exhibition, King-Bathurst, Queen-Spadina, and Gerrard-Carlaw, and those at the future Bridge and High Tech stations on the Yonge North subway extension.

These transit-oriented communities will bring more housing and jobs, public space and parks, access to retail and community amenities, and more—all next to transit stations. Some will serve as transit hubs to local TTC bus, streetcar and subway service. We’re continuing to work closely with the city of Toronto and York region to identify and plan additional opportunities to bring more transit-oriented communities to our subway stations. We are also creating new housing and mixed-use communities around GO and light rail transit stations around the greater Golden Horseshoe, such as the proposed Woodbine GO station. We’re also looking at several more potential sites in many communities, which could result in new GO stations built by third parties, saving taxpayer dollars.

Building Ontario through critical transit projects is key to supporting our economy, alleviating gridlock, connecting more people to housing, and creating thousands of new jobs in our local communities. With the rapid rise in population in cities along with changing trends such as shifting work-life patterns and new technologies, we must upgrade our existing transit system. That’s why our government is investing \$70.5 billion over the next decade on transit.

We are continuing to transform the GO transit rail network into a modern, reliable, and fully integrated rapid transit network. Investments to expand GO Transit service will create 8,300 annual jobs in the first 12 years of construction and delivery. And we’re making great progress, Madam Speaker. This April, we hit another significant milestone by completing major construction on the Davenport Diamond’s new elevated guideway that now lifts the Barrie GO line above the freight train tracks.

GO trains are also now travelling along this infrastructure, which will help reduce traffic congestion for one of the busiest train intersections on the continent. This guideway also provides pedestrians and cyclists with more connections by allowing GO trains to seamlessly travel above the existing traffic. In June, we awarded the contract to advance planning to extend GO service to Bowmanville. We’re investing \$730 million to extend the Lakeshore East GO line to Durham, bringing service to Bowmanville.

Speaker, our government has the largest urban-transit-expansion plan in the history of our country. This includes the Ontario Line, the Scarborough subway extension, the Yonge North subway extension, and the Eglinton West extension. Work is well under way on three of the priority subway projects. Tunnelling work is also well under way for the Eglinton West extension and Scarborough subway extension.

1340

Now more than ever, we are investing in infrastructure that will deliver critical services, while creating good jobs

in communities across Ontario. And it's not just transit. Our government is moving forward with the most ambitious capital plan in Ontario's history. We have dedicated more than \$185 billion over the next decade, including \$20.7 billion in 2023-24, highways, transit, hospitals, long-term-care homes, schools, child care spaces and other infrastructure. These investments are fundamental to the province's plan for growth and long-term prosperity.

Infrastructure plays a central role in supporting the quality of life enjoyed by Ontarians. It's what brings us together, connecting us every day to our families, friends, workplaces and activities. Our investments are already getting shovels in the ground on hundreds of priority projects across the province through various provincial and jointly funded programs, many of which are already making a real difference in people's lives.

While we remain hopeful that the federal government will follow through on commitments for new infrastructure funding, we are moving ahead to getting critical infrastructure built that people of Ontario need and depend on. Just this month, our government announced an investment of \$200 million over three years through the new Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund to repair, rehabilitate and expand critical waste water and storm water infrastructure. This program will provide targeted funding for critical water projects that will help protect the health and safety of communities and unlock more housing opportunities in communities across Ontario. This includes a full range of housing options to meet the needs of all Ontarians, such as supportive housing, community housing, market and rental housing, high-rise, low-rise and long-term care.

We are also contributing to the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, which represents up to \$30 billion in combined federal, provincial and partner funding over 10 years for local infrastructure projects, including \$10.2 billion in provincial investments. These include investment streams in public transit, green, community, culture and recreation and rural and northern infrastructure projects.

These projects will make a difference in the daily lives of people all across the province, from a reconstructed road in Georgian Bay to a reconstructed bridge in the township of Chamberlain. They include projects that increase safety and community access to recreational places, such as the YMCA in northern Ontario; the rehabilitation and upgrade of a storm water management facility in Uxbridge, which will protect the surrounding environment from erosion; and investments that will construct dedicated bus rapid transit infrastructure in the city of Pickering.

Our investments are laying the foundation for Ontario's economic growth while supporting critical services for everyone. But it's not just about the brick and mortar; it's about people, the residents who live in these communities. It's about being able to improve economic opportunities. It's about having the infrastructure needed to start a business. It's about being able to connect with others. A perfect example of this is our investment of nearly \$4

billion in high-speed Internet access. As you know, we made a historic commitment to ensure that no matter where you live, every community in Ontario will have access to reliable high-speed Internet by the end of 2025.

To deliver on our ambitious commitment, we have taken bold action. Ontario has finalized agreements with over \$2.4 billion for nearly 200 high-speed Internet and cellular projects across the province that will bring access to more than 500,000 homes and businesses across the province.

We're also speeding up construction of the provincially funded high-speed Internet project in communities through the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021. This legislation is helping to reduce barriers that can cause delays with building high-speed Internet infrastructure.

Our investments are already making a difference. One Ontario resident who spends time in Norfolk county expressed how the high-speed Internet access she received through the SWIFT program has brought her family closer together. She talked about how she's able to video-call her family in the States now and how meaningful and comforting that was to her during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, a local northern business that makes handmade, specialty chocolate was able to get the supports they needed to enhance their online presence just by having access to reliable, high-speed Internet services. This ultimately helped increase their sales not just at home but across Canada.

Another way we're continuing to build Ontario is by delivering major infrastructure projects like bridges, highways, hospitals, subways and correctional facilities by partnering with the private sector.

Infrastructure Ontario's market update demonstrates our ongoing commitment to effectively deliver major and critical infrastructure projects across the province. Our last update in March includes 38 projects, with a value of more than \$35 billion in estimated design and construction costs. Some of the highlights include two projects for which RFPs recently closed, including Ottawa Hospital's new Civic redevelopment, a new campus that will be one of the largest and most modern teaching hospitals in Canada; and the Ontario Line north subway, with two major works packages: Pape tunnel and underground stations, and the elevated guideway and stations contracts.

Our agency, Infrastructure Ontario, has spearheaded innovative approaches to infrastructure delivery. Through the accelerated build pilot program, for example, Lake-ridge Health announced the completion and opening of its new long-term-care home in Ajax in only 13 months of procurement and construction. I think that's record-breaking, if I'm not mistaken. And I'm happy to share that the final three long-term-care homes were completed this year. Humber Meadows long-term-care home started welcoming residents this past spring, and Wellbrook Place east and west towers in Mississauga opened on November 7, which together have added another 952 much-needed long-term-care beds in the GTA.

Another way we are supporting our municipality's infrastructure needs is through our Infrastructure Ontario

loan program. Since inception, the loan program has approved more than \$12 billion in loans to support more than 3,500 projects, ranging from roads, bridges, recreation complexes, affordable housing and long-term-care homes, to the acquisition and installation of capital assets like fire trucks, smart meters, and energy-efficient street lights.

To help the province's small, rural and northern communities, we're providing direct funding through the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, also known as OCIF. This fund helps municipalities renew and rehabilitate critical infrastructure, including road, bridge, water and waste water projects. In 2021, we reaffirmed our commitment to supporting those municipalities by increasing the annual OCIF funding allocation by \$1 billion, bringing our total investment to nearly \$2 billion over five years, starting in year 2022. This past year, we provided \$400 million in OCIF funding. This funding will help communities meet the needs of today while planning for tomorrow.

Another way our government is looking to the future is our historic plan to bring Ontario Place back to life and to revitalize it into a year-round, world-class destination. As we build Ontario Place for the future, we will once again make this a place for Ontarians to enjoy, learn and create lasting memories; a place that's fun for everyone; a place for the people. The plan incorporates the feedback we have heard from the city of Toronto, the public, Indigenous communities and our partners. Once complete, the site will feature approximately 50 acres of free public space for everyone to enjoy. You'll be able to stroll along a new public boulevard, take in the sites from a new pier, relax on a new public beach, and play in a new, one-acre fountain. Families and children will be able to celebrate in new event spaces and enjoy delicious food and beverages all year long.

1350

A new and improved marina will be a lively year-round spot to socialize, grab a meal with your family, enjoy boating, and appreciate the water. The recommended design concepts for the marina include a boardwalk, a pier, and marina village plazas with opportunities for waterside cafes and restaurants. Madam Speaker, does that not sound wonderful?

Visitors will also have the opportunity to experience health and wellness services as part of Therme Canada's new well-being destination. This all-season, family-friendly facility will have something for all ages and interests, including pools and waterslides; botanical spaces to relax, which are desperately needed during our very harsh winters; sports performance and recovery services; and restaurants with exciting dining experiences. Plus, Therme's updated plans will increase free and accessible park and green space on the west island to almost 16 acres, while also expanding access to the waterfront.

Live Nation Canada will revitalize the existing amphitheatre into a modern, sustainable indoor/outdoor live music and entertainment venue that will continue to

provide great experiences for fans and artists alike. Protecting the iconic amphitheatre lawns, the new venue will have an expanded capacity with the ability to host events year-round.

The Ontario Science Centre will also find its new home in a custom-built, state-of-the-art facility, bringing exciting science-based educational programming to the heart of Ontario Place.

Our plan to expand and enhance the public spaces and parklands at Ontario Place as well as a family-friendly water park, wellness facility and a new music and entertainment venue will attract world-class artists and events while also drawing four to six million visitors and tourists to the site annually.

Another way we're helping to build Ontario is by leveraging our government's realty portfolio. Our ministry now leads the government's general real estate portfolio, known as GREP, one of the largest public sector realty portfolios in Canada. We're using surplus government properties in communities across the province to create opportunities for economic development and job creation. Our government continues to identify underused or surplus properties to support our most pressing needs, such as housing and long-term care. This includes, for example, a surplus property sold in Oakville for the development of 640 long-term-care beds. This is part of our promise to make life better for the people of Ontario by working harder, smarter and more efficiently.

This week, the Ontario government also introduced proposed legislation that, if passed, would support priorities that people in Ontario need, like building more housing units, including affordable housing and long-term care. The proposed Improving Real Estate Management Act, 2023, which is also being debated, is part of the government's plan to more efficiently manage real estate, improve economic growth and save taxpayer dollars. The proposed legislation would centralize and/or realign the real estate authority of 10 organizations and one proposed organization. The organizations include museums, convention centre corporations, a science centre and an art gallery.

The proposed legislation, if passed, would also build, in part, on the initial framework created by the Reducing Inefficiencies Act (Infrastructure Statute Law Amendments), 2023, which is not yet in force. That would enable the government to act and direct more as one holistic organization to manage real estate. These proposed changes, if passed, would ensure consistent, efficient and sustainable real estate services that could ultimately unlock cost savings, increase efficiencies and improve accountability.

As the government moves forward with Ontario's plan to build, it is looking at new ways to attract trusted Canadian institutional investors to help build essential infrastructure that would not otherwise get built. The Ontario Infrastructure Bank is a new arm's-length, board-governed agency that will enable public sector pension plans and other trusted institutional investors to further participate in large-scale infrastructure projects across the

province. The government is proposing to provide \$3 billion to the Ontario Infrastructure Bank in initial funding to support its ability to invest in critical infrastructure projects across the province. Institutional investor participation will help the government deliver more infrastructure faster, while leveraging additional capital from investors and helping to maintain a responsible fiscal plan for today and for future generations.

Speaker, our proposed legislation will continue the work that Ontario has done to build infrastructure for the future. I think that everyone here agrees that we need to meet the demands of our fast-growing population by continuing to build more and better infrastructure, and that need is becoming more pressing every single day. We cannot delay. Our province faces increasing risks and pressures to our existing infrastructure. We must make smart, targeted investments and implement smart policies and tools that will help save taxpayer money while building the infrastructure we need today and for years to come. That's why this legislation is so important.

Let's be a province that moves forward, not backwards; a province that implements common-sense policy tools; a province that builds infrastructure that we need so that the people in Ontario can thrive now and for generations to come.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the Associate Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: I would like to thank my honourable colleague the Minister of Infrastructure for her remarks. It's a pleasure to rise to speak in support of Bill 131, specifically on how schedule 1 in this bill makes travel more convenient for transit riders in and around the Toronto region.

Madam Speaker, bus riders travelling over Toronto's border currently face a highly inefficient and inconvenient transit experience. They are forced to get off their bus, which is run by one agency, and then wait for another bus that's operated by a different agency to pick them up. These riders should not need to transfer to another bus, nor should these riders need to be stuck waiting and wondering when the right bus will come, especially during our winter months. Instead, buses should be able to travel across the Toronto border and pick up passengers on either side of the border.

The lack of cross-boundary transit service is due to legislative barriers present in the City of Toronto Act. More specifically, through the City of Toronto Act, 2006, the TTC does not have the ability to negotiate cross-boundary service integration partnerships with its neighbours. This is why those 905 residents commuting to and from the city of Toronto must switch between TTC and MiWay, TTC and Brampton Transit, Durham transit or YRT at Toronto's borders.

Other municipalities allow their transit agencies to operate under an open-door policy within their boundaries. This means their transit systems can pick up or drop off passengers beyond their municipal borders.

Colleagues, riders don't really care about what colour bus they get on. All they care about is getting from point A to point B.

For years, the TTC and the neighbouring municipal transit agencies have been seeking opportunities to integrate services across the GTA and greater Golden Horseshoe. As such, in 2022, the city of Toronto and the TTC made requests to the province to amend the City of Toronto Act so that the city of Toronto can enter into cross-boundary service agreements with neighbouring municipalities.

1400

Madam Speaker, we are happy to be doing exactly what they have asked. Working with our partners, we are the improving transit experience to get it done for the people of Ontario. That is exactly why we are tabling these amendments.

While Bill 131 focuses on cross-boundary service integration, this is not the only way we are improving transit. Our government is making transit more convenient and easier to use by offering riders more ways to pay, following the successful rollout of credit payment on GO Transit and most local transit agencies across the 905 between September 2022 and early 2023. In May of this year we launched debit payment across much of the Presto system, including GO Transit, UP Express, Brampton Transit, Burlington Transit, Durham, Hamilton, MiWay in Mississauga, Oakville Transit and York Region Transit.

These changes allow riders to get on board with just a tap of their debit card, including debit cards stored on a smart phone or smart watch. This upgrade is another milestone for our Presto system. Paying with a debit card or credit card gives transit riders yet another convenient payment option when travelling for work, school, leisure and more, demonstrating our government's commitment to making the transit experience easier for Ontarians no matter where they live. By increasing transit payment options, we gave more people more options to access public transit in ways that work for them.

We are not slowing down when it comes to improving transit for Ontarians. Earlier this summer, we expanded this easier and more convenient way to pay to commuters in Toronto who take the TTC. Since August 15, TTC riders have been able to use their credit or debit card—including cards stored on a smart phone or smart watch, as I mentioned—to pay their fees. This is a game-changer for anyone who uses the TTC and it has made life more convenient for people across the greater Toronto area. Whether Ontarians are travelling for work, appointments or anything in-between, the transit experience should be safe, fast and as convenient as possible.

Adding the option to tap a debit or credit card on Presto devices across the TTC gives riders more choice in how they pay their fares as they travel throughout the region. More choice is not only what Ontarians need; it's what they deserve.

In addition, we're committed to modernizing services and making it easier to travel across the GTHA. Just last week, our government introduced a free digital version of the Presto card on Google Wallet. That means riders now can tap and ride on GO Transit, the UP Express and local public transit systems throughout the GTHA by accessing this digital Presto card.

But this is not only about convenience; it's also about expedience. In fact, riders using the new Presto on Google Wallet feature can enjoy new card abilities, for example, loading funds instantly from anywhere and setting up multiple fare discounts, especially for youth, students and seniors—they can enjoy their discounts. By offering additional, modern ways to pay for transit, we are making it more convenient and simpler for everyday people to take transit.

In addition to making transit more convenient, we have also made it more affordable. By working together with municipalities and transit partners, we have eliminated double fares between GO transit and local transit throughout the greater Golden Horseshoe. That means when you transfer from a MiWay bus in Mississauga to a GO Transit train, or vice versa, you only pay the GO fare. Our government's introduction of the one-fare program has been a game-changer for commuters around the 905 area, saving riders hundreds of dollars and in some cases thousands of dollars, leaving more money in families' pockets at a time when they need it the most. For example, a Mississauga resident who commutes five days a week using MiWay and GO Transit can now save \$1,600 a year on their transit expenses. These are game-changing savings for riders. Madam Speaker, imagine having an extra \$1,600 each year to pay for your family expenses, save for a trip or invest for the future.

Thanks to the work done by the former Associate Ministers of Transportation from Etobicoke Centre and Willowdale, in collaboration with our municipal and transit partners, these savings are now a reality for so many Ontarians in the greater Golden Horseshoe.

Starting in early 2024, I'm happy to report that riders right here in the city of Toronto will have access to and be able to benefit from our one-fare program. With the introduction of open payment, we have taken a measured, phased approach to the elimination of double fares, starting with the local agencies outside Toronto and working our way up to the TTC, North America's third-largest transit agency.

Over the coming months, our government, Metrolinx, the TTC and all the connecting agencies in the 905 will continue to perform design and assessment work so that our collective systems are aligned for fare integration. And the great news is that our government is fully funding this program. To be clear, what this means for riders is, when connecting between the TTC and neighbouring municipal agencies, plus GO Transit, riders will no longer need to pay double fares. They will pay only need to pay one fare.

Speaker, cutting costs for commuters is important to our government, and that is why we didn't just create the one-fare program for the greater Golden Horseshoe; we went further. In March 2022, we also increased Presto discounts for youth and post-secondary students. These riders now enjoy a 40% discount compared to a full adult fare. This applies to youth and anyone enrolled in post-secondary education who ride GO Transit or take the UP Express.

We also launched an affordability pilot program for low-income riders accessing GO Transit in Peel region.

Today, adult riders who are enrolled in Peel region's Affordable Transit Program are reimbursed 50% of their Presto fare when they travel on GO Transit. This has had tremendous benefits for low-income residents of Peel region, and we look forward to rolling out our affordability pilot program to other cities as soon as possible.

On the topic of affordability, just last month, we reduced the cost of a physical Presto card from \$6 to \$4, cutting the price for commuters so that they pay less money to access the Presto card by one third. What this means is, we are making transit and commuters' transit experience more accessible and convenient, but most importantly, more affordable.

All of these initiatives have made life more affordable for Ontarians and have helped people to get from point A to point B with less stress and less hassle. We have continued to support transit agencies throughout all of these initiatives. As we emerged from the pandemic, municipalities saw an increase in ridership on public transit. With more people returning to public transit, our government was happy to provide municipalities with the funding they needed to accommodate more riders.

In February this year, we were pleased to provide more than \$379 million to help municipalities operate and improve their local transit systems. That funding, which was delivered through the provincial gas tax program, was used to extend service hours, buy transit vehicles, add routes, improve accessibility and upgrade infrastructure. To make up for the reduced gas sales during the pandemic, we provided an additional \$80 million to municipalities to ensure they could continue to support their transit systems as ridership began to increase.

1410

Throughout Ontario, 144 communities across 107 municipalities benefited from this funding, which helped them deliver reliable service to riders at a time when ridership was booming after two years of slowdown. This was just one more example of our commitment to working in co-operation and collaboration with municipalities across the province to improve public transit.

Our government's stellar work to improve public transit doesn't stop there. Not only are we improving the existing transit experience today, we are building the necessary transit infrastructure for the future. In recent years, we have made historic investments in public transit across the province of Ontario. We have done this in collaboration and co-operation with our municipal partners, working together to get Ontarians from point A to point B quickly and safely and to keep our economy growing.

Ontario's population continues to expand at a rapid pace. Every year, we welcome more than 500,000 newcomers to Canada, who mostly settle in Ontario in the GTA. These new Canadians are eager to contribute to our thriving economy and are proud to call Ontario home, but they can't get ahead if they're stuck in gridlock. Whether you are new to the province or you have lived here all your life, you should be able to get where you are going quickly and safely. Our government is making sure that happens.

We are investing more than \$70 billion over the next decade to transform public transit infrastructure through

out the province. Public transit is a key driver for economic growth in Ontario, helping connect people to their destinations, whether they're going to work, school, appointments or running errands. Our government is committed to working with municipalities and providing them with the funding they need to accommodate growing ridership on public transit. This funding helps our municipal partners continue to deliver safe and reliable transit service for people in their communities, benefiting Ontarians across the province, improving their quality of life and helping them contribute to our economy.

Last year, our government achieved several milestones en route to completing the largest transit expansion of its kind in Canadian history, including breaking ground on the Ontario Line. The Ontario Line will add more than 15 kilometres of new subway track to the city of Toronto's transit system. Once complete, the new line will have a total of 15 stations, delivering up to 40 trains per hour, with wait times as short as 90 seconds, and six interchange stations connecting to existing transit lines. It will reduce crowding by as much as 15% at some of the TTC's busiest stations, including Union station, Yonge-Bloor station and Eglinton station. This historic investment in Toronto's transit system will reduce gridlock, get commuters from point A to point B quickly and safely and give more people access to rapid transit within walking distance of their homes; accommodating up to 388,000 riders per day.

Madam Speaker, the progress we have made to date wouldn't have been possible without working in collaboration and co-operation with our partners at the city of Toronto.

Construction for the Ontario Line is currently under way at Exhibition station and at the site of future Corktown and Moss Park stations, and in the joint rail corridor east of the Don River. Contracts have been awarded for the southern portion of the line, which will include four new underground stations, two new underground stations that will connect to existing subway stations, and one above ground station that will integrate with the Exhibition GO station.

In April, our government reached another milestone in our plan to deliver fast and reliable transit for the greater Toronto area when we began issuing requests for proposals to design and build the Pape tunnel, underground stations, and the elevated guideway and stations for the Ontario Line.

The contract for the Pape tunnel and underground stations will deliver three kilometres of twin tunnels and two new stations—one at Cosburn Avenue and another at Pape Avenue, where the all-new Ontario Line will connect to the subway's existing Line 2. The contract will also include the construction of two new portals where the Ontario Line will transition between above ground and underground operations. The contract for the elevated guideway and stations includes a three-kilometre elevated guideway, emergency exit buildings and five above ground stations—two within Metrolinx's existing rail corridor and three along the elevated guideway on the northern part of the route. This is important progress on a mon-

umental project—again, progress that would not have been possible without working in collaboration with our partners.

Speaker, building our province through critical public transit projects such as the Ontario Line is vital to supporting our economy. It's important to remove the gridlock on our roads and create thousands of well-paying, local jobs. The Ontario Line alone will support 4,700 jobs annually during construction over the next decade. It will reduce commute times and connect more people to housing across the greater Golden Horseshoe and beyond. We are making it faster and easier for everyone to access reliable transit in their own neighbourhoods by improving connections to other subway, bus, streetcar, light-rail transit and regional rail services, and we are working with municipal partners in Toronto and the surrounding region to make sure this important work gets done quickly.

Madam Speaker, in our spirit of collaboration and co-operation with our municipal partners and transit agencies, we are living up to our promise to bring more GO Transit trips and more frequent service to communities across the entire GO network. Alongside our municipal partners, the Ontario government is delivering a fast, frequent and reliable transit network to keep the province moving for generations to come. We do this through continued collaboration with all the municipalities and especially the transit agencies. The investments that we are making today, Madam Speaker, will pay dividends for the years to come.

While we were busy announcing major upgrades to GO Transit this summer, we were also busy completing other transit projects. Commuters in Scarborough deserve the same access to reliable public transit as people living in downtown Toronto, and our government is making the critical investments needed to make this a reality. On September 13, Madam Speaker, we were proud to announce the completion of the major infrastructure project at the Milliken and Agincourt GO stations along the Stouffville line. Enhancements at Milliken GO station include an additional track and platform, two new pedestrian tunnels and additional vehicle and cycling lanes on Steeles Avenue. Madam Speaker, commuters at Agincourt GO station will benefit from a brand new station building with modern facilities as well as adding additional platforms and pedestrian tunnels.

Now that these important upgrades are complete, we are already seeing an impact. With more people choosing to call Ontario home every year, building reliable public transportation has never been so important. Upgrades along the Stouffville line will ensure the necessary transit infrastructure is in place to support our growing population while delivering safer, faster and more convenient travel options for commuters.

1420

Our government is building a reliable, world-class public transit network in Toronto and across the greater Golden Horseshoe. As part of our \$70.5-billion investment to build new and improved public transit over the next 10 years, we will be adding 19 train trips along the Stouffville

line. This will add up to 2,000 GO train trips per week, compared with the current level of only 164 trips per week.

We are proud of our work getting these important initiatives underway, and we look forward to continuing to collaborate with our municipal partners to build the best public transit system in the world.

Madam Speaker, there is no greater champion for public transit than our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford. We have a bold vision for the future of the province—a vision we share with all municipalities across Ontario. We are working together to build world-class, fully integrated transit networks that seamlessly connect people to all of their destinations: their homes, their jobs, their schools and their hospitals. Ontarians want choice in how they travel on public transit, and that's exactly what we are giving them by offering more convenient, seamless and, more importantly, affordable transportation.

We could not be prouder of our many priority transit projects for the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. These historic investments are a game-changer for commuters across the region.

I would like to ask members of both sides of the House to support this bill. We especially look forward to working with the city of Toronto on transit fare and service integration that will benefit Ontarians, especially the next generation. It will benefit them for generations to come.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Joel Harden: I listened closely to what my friend said this morning, on our last attempt at debate on Bill 131.

My question to the minister, because I understand schedule 2 of this bill to really be about trying to augment transit-oriented communities that Metrolinx has been discussing for a while. But what I learned in the media a couple of weeks is that Vandyk Properties, which was the first partner for Metrolinx, is currently almost in receivership and owes its two lenders \$203 million. Vandyk Properties was not required to build affordable housing for the sites that were procured, and now they are literally on the brink of bankruptcy.

So my question to the minister is: Are you worried that Metrolinx's inability to define partners in their market model that are viable—is the reason we have this schedule for debate is because the partners Metrolinx has chosen have failed?

Hon. Kinga Surma: No, Madam Speaker; that is, I am not concerned. This tool was asked for by municipalities. It was Durham region that led the way and requested this tool to be considered by government, because they understood that it would help them unlock four stations along the Lakeshore East line. And when we consulted with other municipalities, they agreed that this tool would be useful in helping us unlock those stations. So this came at the request of municipalities and is a completely voluntary tool.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is for the Associate Minister of Transportation. I'd first like to thank

him for his leadership on this transportation file, as well as your commitment to making our transit system safe, fast, convenient and more affordable.

My question to the associate minister is, why is the province bringing forward these amendments now and, specifically, how will my constituents of Newmarket–Aurora and York region benefit from these amendments?

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you to my colleague for that question. First of all, I want to take this opportunity to thank the former Associate Minister of Transportation, the member from Etobicoke Centre and the member from Willowdale for their fantastic work on this file.

To answer the member's question, the reason we are making these amendments on this bill is because the city of Toronto and the TTC have asked for these amendments, and that's exactly what we're delivering. How this will benefit the people is when the rider takes transit, they don't have to get off at the boundary and take another transit in the cold. They can take the bus without the colours changing. They can just go from A to B without changing buses. That will make their transit more seamless.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further question?

Mr. Joel Harden: Back to the minister: I want to just elaborate on some of the revelations we're learning in court about Vandyk. Two lenders, KingSett Mortgage Corp. and Dorr Capital Corp., are filing claims that are over \$203 million. In the court documents, what we are learning is that both of these lenders have lost all confidence in Vandyk's ability to deliver the developments in a timely manner at all. These include Uptowns, Grand Central Mimico, Lakeview and the failure to make monthly interest payments on The Ravine, Uptowns and Heartlake.

For the record, this was the original partner Metrolinx picked for transit-oriented communities. I take the minister's point: Municipalities want these stations built. But it seems like they're getting these powers to use station administration fees because Metrolinx and Phil Verster have failed. So can you clarify for the House that this is before the House because Metrolinx has failed?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Well, first of all, let me correct the record: Vandyk was planning, as negotiated with the city of Toronto and the province of Ontario, affordable housing units at the particular development, so let's just set that record straight.

Now, Madam Speaker, I'm not the spokesperson for Vandyk, but we are dealing with tough economic circumstances. We know this. The Minister of Finance has spoken to this on many occasions in this House. We know construction costs have gone up by 43%. That is just the reality that we are living in. Every time someone goes to the grocery store and pays \$8 more for cheese or eggs or whatever it is, we feel that pain too when we pay to build our projects. That is the reality of the situation.

But what is most important is that these tough economic situations will not deter us from building more stations, from collaborating with municipalities, from building GO

rail and subways and public transit, something they do not support.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the minister and the associate minister for their remarks and say, looking back at my municipal career, I see a lot of reasons why municipalities would want to have an opportunity to fund infrastructure, because sometimes just the way the system is designed doesn't lend itself well.

Perhaps this should go to the associate minister: I'm wondering what conversations have been had with the development community and what do they think about this new proposed contribution fee?

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thanks to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh for this question. When it comes to schedule 1, I really want to focus on how much consultation our government has done with our partners, not just the municipal partners or transit partners as I mentioned in my speech, but also with stakeholders to see what they have asked for and what they have been advocating for with our government for years. When it comes to schedule 1, that's exactly what we're delivering, especially when it comes to these charges.

What we are focusing on is to make sure we enhance the experience and also get the job done without any obstacles in the way. As the Minister of Infrastructure mentioned, we will make sure we deliver the projects regardless of any obstacles in our way.

1430

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to the minister and the associate minister for their presentations. My question is regarding the funding model. Originally, what we saw was that Metrolinx was going to allow and encourage developers to pay for the transit-oriented communities in exchange for development rights. Now we're seeing that there's going to be a conversation and a shift to make sure that municipalities can do the same thing to encourage development and municipalities to pay for transit.

I'm just really curious to understand what it is about paying for regional transit that is going to support and provide the economy of the province that this government seems to oppose because if you ask municipalities if they'd like the province to come in and pay for transit, including the construction and building of transit and the ongoing support of transit, they would most likely say yes. So why is it you're against that?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Madam Speaker, I'm sorry, but I have a hard time taking that particular member seriously when they ask me a question about building transit and transit expansion. As a city councillor—horrendous record for any support for expanding the subway system in the city of Toronto. In fact, it took the province years to negotiate with the city of Toronto and the federal government to bring everyone to the table to finally do what should have been done 25 years ago.

Now, Madam Speaker, I will repeat what was in my remarks: Municipalities asked for this. They wanted a voluntary tool to help them build transit-oriented communities in their areas. Now, our government is spending \$70 billion making sure we get to two-way, all-day GO to expand service. It is a very expensive undertaking, as we're investing a historic amount in transportation infrastructure across this province.

But I will not take that particular member seriously, given her record on building absolutely nothing when she was city councillor.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Joel Harden: It's a pleasure to rise in this House for the second time for an hour lead on Bill 131. I'm going to ask the House's indulgence, Speaker—you and all the other members, if I can—because I'm seized with the timely opportunity to read into the record of this place a very important comment for a leader back home, someone who meant a lot to me, who was part of our advocacy network for transit in the city of Ottawa.

Her name was Lynda Kitchikeesic. She just passed away, 58 years old, and Lynda was a survivor of the Sixties Scoop. Lynda was somebody, she told me often, who felt like she was caught between two worlds. She was caught between the Ojibwe world—she was born to an Ojibwe mom in a home in Whitesand First Nation, 200 kilometres north of Thunder Bay, but taken from that home and actually raised in my community where I live in Old Ottawa South. That's where Lynda was raised. What I love about Lynda—there's so many things; I could do the whole hour on Lynda—is the fact that, despite beginning her life with significant trauma, she managed to find a way to use that trauma to inspire her to want to help others. Speaker, I want to read into the record some of what was written in a remarkable piece by Blair Crawford from the Ottawa Citizen yesterday.

Lynda Kitchikeesic was somebody who founded an initiative called the Flotilla for Friendship in the year 2000. It was a partnership with the Ottawa Police Service and Indigenous Friendship Centres where Indigenous youth would paddle-craft in some of Ottawa's waterways, and those of you who've had occasion to visit Ottawa, you'll know that we are blessed with a lot of water. We have the Ottawa River, we have the Gatineau River, we have the Rideau River. Lynda would often take kids—kids at risk, kids who would have run-ins with the justice system—on boat rides, paddle rides with police officers so they could have discussion, understanding, a meal together and, for that work, she was recognized, after 20 years of that work, by the Ottawa Police Service with a citizen's award. Now I want to read out some of what Ottawa police leaders said about Lynda:

“Ms. Kitchikeesic has mentored many police officers and speaks her mind about what is wrong and what is right. She will hold a special place in the history of the Ottawa Police Service.”

“Lynda was a true activist, in the real sense of the word. She was an individual of action and she was not afraid to

rock the boat”—I guess that’s a specific metaphor—said the Ottawa deputy police chief at the time, Larry Hill.

“She really was a good communicator. She was always on point and made sure the message was received. But she’d do it with that 150-watt smile, in a very disarming way.”

Speaker, just so I can, again, for the House, help the House appreciate this remarkable person we just lost—she had a moment in her life when her efforts to try to build those relationships between people doing law enforcement, first response and at-risk Indigenous youth hit attention. In 2015, an RCMP officer who was a friend of Lynda’s said online that the Idle No More movement, of which Lynda was participating at the time, could be likened to a bacteria that was spreading across the country. That was his opinion at the time. But instead of, as is too often the case now—instead of taking to social media and condemning this person for these words, Lynda brought him into her home. She wanted to understand what motivated those remarks. She did not condemn him. In fact, she doubled down in her friendship for him and eventually brought this RCMP officer to meet the great Theresa Spence from Attawapiskat, who was holding her fast steps away from the House of Commons. There was an understanding that some of those comments weren’t helpful to the work being done. That is what a leader does, in my opinion. There’s so little understanding and so much anger and recrimination in our communities these days.

So I thank you, Speaker, and I thank the members of this House for letting me take five minutes of this hour to just acknowledge this remarkable person we’ve lost. I want to hope that even though she’s not here anymore, that spirit of generosity, that spirit of actually using words and using actions to make your communities better across lines that people may think, “Oh, we’re supposed to fight each other, but we’re not”—that is Lynda Kitchikeesic. She was a special person in the city of Ottawa and, I believe, a special person in our country, so if people can join me for a round of applause, I’d really appreciate it.

Applause.

Mr. Joel Harden: Let’s get into Bill 131. I think the minister knows some of what I’m going to say because I’ve said it at second reading and I’ve said it at committee.

There are two schedules to Bill 131. The first schedule has to do with a specific amendment to the City of Toronto Act, which deals with the contracting-out provisions of the Amalgamated Transit Union’s collective agreement with the Toronto Transit Commission, the TTC.

The second schedule of Bill 131 deals with the construction, as the minister said, of critical infrastructure: GO stations. To reflect on this particular schedule, I want to try to bring my own personal experience into this; sometimes it can help, rather than just dwelling in the realm of facts and figures.

As I’m sure many members of this House have done in the last number of weeks since the by-election was declared in Kitchener Centre, I made my way down to Kitchener Centre to campaign for our candidate down there, the great Debbie Chapman. How did I get there? I

took the GO train, which is great, going to Kitchener. It’s very comfortable. The GO train was terrific, clean. The staff were tremendous. There were no problems. It’s the coming back part that’s tricky. That’s why members of this House on the opposition side decided to prioritize an opposition day motion around two-way, all-day service to Kitchener from Toronto.

1440

So I made my way down to Kitchener on the train. I got off the train. I went into the campaign office. I grabbed my clipboard, worked with the team, ran through a couple of apartment buildings, talked to neighbours, went back to the campaign office, went back out again to canvass more of a residential neighbourhood of low-rise homes.

But then, to get home, to get back here to Toronto, where I live when I’m doing this job, was an interesting exercise. Part one was going to the Kitchener GO station, where I catch the number 30 bus to Bramalea GO station. I want it read for the record, that for the amount of people I was with—and I’m an organizer and a Chatty Cathy, so I can’t help but talk to people when I’m standing in a line. So I was standing in a line with people who were all telling me, “Oh, we’re international students. We’ve come to Canada to study at Conestoga College. We’re taking this bus to get back to Brampton to visit with the gurdwaras.” It was a lot of Indo-Canadian folks, or people from India. But guess what? We weren’t in a bus shelter. We weren’t in any kind of heated space. We were standing out in the rain, waiting for the bus. Now, hey, I’m Canadian. I’m used to it. I’m from Ottawa; it’s minus—crazy, parts of the year. This is a modern country, and we are taking a bus from an established city like Kitchener back to Toronto, stopping at Bramalea, where you catch the train, and we were standing out in the rain. There is a VIA train station behind us with an actual building and a place where travellers can sit and staff can work, but the GO Transit stop that Metrolinx presides over is out in the open air.

So I want to just put a bookmark on for a moment when we think about transit infrastructure, because there was absolutely zero transit infrastructure when I started to make my way home last night, talking to some of the new friends I met from Conestoga College.

I want to juxtapose that for a minute to someone who is not covered in this bill. When I think about the transit needs we have, one of the things that I think about the most is management incompetency and executive bloat at Metrolinx. I think about an executive like Phil Verster, who, right now, according to reports, makes over \$1 million a year—his contract was just renewed by the government—for what? For a transit network in which people stand out in the rain in Kitchener? For a light-rail system proposed through the midtown of this city—the Eglinton Crosstown—that is three years late and a billion dollars over budget? For the Ontario Line that I heard the associate minister talk about, the costs for which have run up to a billion dollars a kilometre by the time you get close to Ontario Place?

The minister, in her debate, in questions and answers, was talking about construction costs going up by 43%. It’s

not difficult to do the math on this, Speaker, and to realize that we built the Spadina extension—one of the critical lines for the TTC up to York University and north of that—for \$317 million per kilometre and now we're building subway infrastructure under a public-private partnership model led by Metrolinx and the costs have tripled. Where is the money going?

Ever since I was honoured by our leader to be given the job of transit critic and I've had the chance to consult GTA transit riders, transit workers, that's what they are saying to me: "Joel, where is the money going? How could we have constant construction"—which is part of building infrastructure—"but have no product delivered on time?"

This is the question that is not covered by schedule 2 of this bill. We're talking about building new transit infrastructure but now we're actually asking the cities to bear the risk. We're asking the cities to charge something called a station administration fee that they will then use to pay back the debt that they accrued for transit projects. But Metrolinx is the provincial agency in charge of building provincial infrastructure, not the cities.

My friend the minister and my other friend the associate minister get up in this House and say, "This scheme, Joel, is voluntary. There's no compulsion to build a GO station." Well, talk to people in Bramalea. Talk to people in Bowmanville. Talk to people anywhere along the GO corridor about how voluntary having a GO Transit station is. It's not voluntary. As I said at committee, it's like saying to an asthmatic, "Your puffers are voluntary." It's not voluntary. The amount of congestion that exists on our streets and roads, the urgent need we have to build public transit: This is critical. We need to do it, but we're in a situation in which Metrolinx has abjectly failed and its leader, Mr. Verster, is not being held accountable. In fact, he is being rewarded; he is being rewarded to the tune of \$1 million dollars a year.

Moreover, not covered in schedule 2, when I think about management incompetence and executive bloat, is the fact that Metrolinx has an executive team of 59 vice-presidents—59—and 19 C-suite executives. A C-suite executive is a chief financial officer, chief operating officer. How in heaven's name do we have the need for that many people on the sunshine list supervising a system that couldn't cover transit riders in the open air last night in Kitchener, and can't build a light-rail transit system through the middle of this great city, and is costing subway infrastructure triple the rate of what it cost seven years ago to build subway infrastructure?

Can I just ask members of this House—I'm just wondering, with that many executives, is there a Metrolinx executive hiding under here somewhere? How can they fit them in a building? Is there a vice-president at Metrolinx for coffee? Is there a specific job title? "My job at Metrolinx is to be the VP for coffee runs," or "My job at Metrolinx is to be the VP of dry cleaning." Is there a VP for dry cleaning at Metrolinx? I'm engaging in absurdities, I know, Speaker, to make a point. But the issue here is this: As we let this incompetent management structure continue to fumble the ball, who suffers? That's the big question.

When I was standing in that rainy line last night, talking to those students at Conestoga College, and they were lamenting to me how long it takes them to get them back to the gurdwaras of Brampton and Bramalea and see family members and friends that sponsor them to come here, they were saying, "Yes, I'm angry that the bus service isn't as good as it could be." And when I was informing them about how much Metrolinx executives earn and how much Ontario is spending on management compensation and consultancies, they were getting angrier and angrier. They were saying, "Well, that just doesn't make a lot of sense." And then I said to those people standing in that line—because Ontario politics is often a very "Toronto" world, this great city, the city where I was born, the city where I went to school for many years. But I'm from Ottawa, and the impact in my community with the neglect that we've shown in Ontario to operating funds for transit is severe.

So we're throwing all this money to Metrolinx. We're letting the management caste lavish itself in salaries for performing miserably. But in the last round of budget discussions between the transit agencies and the province, the Ministry of Transportation and the Ministry of Infrastructure, OC Transpo, back home—that's the transit agency back home—has announced to the public that they're going to have to cut service hours in 2024 by 74,000—74,000 fewer service hours. So when someone is waiting for the bus in their community and it doesn't come, or it's late, or they have to walk across their community now to catch a different bus, which could be late, it's not the conductor's fault. It's not the employees' fault. Frankly, it's our fault, in this place.

I met with the OPTA, the organization representing transit authorities in the province of Ontario, when they were here a couple of weeks ago. They said to me, "Joel, we are at a breaking point. Public transit in Ontario," as they described to me, "is in a death spiral." Those are the words. It sounds hyperbolic, but those are the words they used to me. One part of that spiral is, in recovering from the pandemic, we're trying to encourage more people onto public transit, but the ridership is lower. More people have made the permanent choice to work from home, so that's part of the thing. That's not the transit agency's fault; that's just the new reality. But fares are also going up. Fares are going up because transit agencies aren't getting the funding they need from this House, and service is declining; in Ottawa, 74,000 service hours next year. So that's the death spiral. It contributes to a trend of diminishing returns.

The people I was standing with in the rain last night to get the bus to the Bramalea GO, if we continue on this path we're currently going, can expect to wait longer. It took me two hours and 15 minutes to get from the rainy bus stop with no cover to Union station. They can expect that to only get worse.

And what will the government talk about, Speaker, at every opportunity when we talk about transit? They will talk about record investments, \$70 billion—it gets repeated ad nauseam in this place. But as I've learned with the

Trudeau federal government, it's one thing to announce an intent to do something—their housing plan comes to mind—and it's another thing to actually do it. Meanwhile, as you announced \$70 billion of great aspirations, you have a transit system that currently exists in the province of Ontario—the buses, the streetcars, the subways—that is suffering. It's engaged in this cynical death spiral.

1450

I want to talk about the workers in the system for a moment, Speaker, that I believe are not being served by schedule 2 of this bill. Even though I understand it and I understand how municipalities want that schedule of this bill—they urgently need the capacity to build that infrastructure. I certainly understand when the minister and the associate minister are saying, “Hey, Joel. They asked us. You heard it at committee. They want it.” Of course they want it; they need it. But as the member for Toronto Centre said, if the province came to the table and said, “Do you know what? It's our responsibility to build provincial infrastructure,” I don't think you'd hear many objections at the municipal level. I don't think you'd hear many of them saying, “Oh, that's okay. We'll decide to pay for your infrastructure.”

So, I want to talk about what just happened in Hamilton. I have some Hamilton members sitting right here in front of me. They just went through the experience of hosting the Grey Cup. One of the worries I was hearing about from my friends in ATU 107 prior to the Grey Cup was the potential of a transit strike making that weekend a whole lot worse. Nobody wanted it.

Let me read the gentleman's name into the record: Eric Tuck is the president of ATU Local 107—one of my favourite people I've met in the course of doing this critical role, a wonderful human being. He has been a bus operator for a long time. But what he said in negotiations to the employer and what he said to the media is that his members are being priced out of the community they have served.

There hasn't been a transit strike in the city of Hamilton for the last 25 years, but they just had one, and there was a worry that this could impact into job action, which would disrupt the Grey Cup. That would have been horrible. The Grey Cup is terrific. I watched the game myself. It was great entertainment. I'm sure small businesses and businesses of all kinds in Hamilton did wonderfully out of it. But we were dealing with a situation where the folks who drive and fix the buses in Hamilton's transit system were literally telling their union, “We're being priced out of the neighbourhoods that we serve.”

I wanted to read into the record remarks from Cassie Theaker, who is a bus driver and a single mom, who is a member of ATU 107 and spoke to the media at one of their rallies they held to try to appeal to the public to support them, to appeal to the employer and the province, frankly—not just the employer, because we fund transit from this House—to do whatever they can to help settle this dispute.

Cassie took the microphone, tears in her eyes, and said, “I want people to understand that I make \$72,000 a year

and my money in my bank account is gone after two weeks. When I pay for groceries and gas and the cost of my apartment, it is gone. It is empty.”

Those of us who know folks who work in the public transit system as conductors, mechanics, staff, we know how hard they work. We know what's going on in our communities, particularly with the mental health crisis. And often, as we've discussed in this place, unfortunate situations of violence happen in public transit. Well, who is the first point of contact for that?

There is no transit operator who was able to work from home during the pandemic. There is no mechanic that was able to use Zoom to fix the bus. They went into work every day and risked their lives for us, our collective well-being. And here was Cassie taking the megaphone at the rally, saying, “I don't have any money in my bank account after two weeks.”

It was a moment where I picked up the phone and I called the ATU and I said, “What do you need?” They said, “Joel, we need you to go into that House with those green leather chairs and we need you to say, ‘Fund transit.’” Because Hamilton would not have been in that situation if we agreed to do what this province did once upon a time, and that is to be a 50-50 partner in funding public transit. We've moved away from that. It's more like 70-30. It depends on the jurisdiction you're talking about in Ontario, Speaker, but we have let the fare box play a bigger role. We're gouging the rider, and we have forced the municipalities to play a bigger role. So someone like Cassie is suffering.

Also, it's not just the compensation; it's the conditions of work. She talked to me about what it's like to work split shifts. You drive when people take the bus. The schedules are more active when people take the bus. People aren't taking the bus, necessarily, at noon, so you split your shifts between 6 and 10, and then maybe from 3 to 7, and there's an impact there for family life. If you're someone like Cassie, a single mom with kids, she has got to cover all of that. All that costs money.

But also, because of the strain on service routes, because of the cutbacks to service routes, because of the cutbacks from this House, Cassie described in that same speech what it felt like to have to sit in a bus with a full bladder for two hours to go from one end of Hamilton to the other, with no possibility of a bathroom break.

We heard these words recently too in Peterborough, where my friend Cory MacLeod, who is the president of ATU Local 1320, spoke openly to the media about his members saying the exact same thing. He said to the Peterborough media that his members hadn't had a hot meal on the job in five years, and that's because there's no possibility—there's no microwave available. You take your lunch onto your bus. You eat on your bus in the Canadian winter, in some cases, and you don't get access to bathroom breaks.

We've had “Working for Workers” legislation in this place where the government has said—I believe rightfully—that truckers deserve bathroom breaks; that there's access if they stop their truck on the road, serving our

needs, putting groceries on our shelves through the warehouses. That's a laudable objective, but we have not extended that same courtesy to transit operators.

I think about that, Speaker, and I say to myself, "Why are we not respecting the people who have been doing it for us through the pandemic, who have been moving people around?" I say to myself, "Maybe it's just a matter that the government perhaps believes that you have to keep the system at starvation levels for funding in order for it to perform well." But what I've heard from OC Transpo, from the TTC and from other transit agencies is that, actually, the opposite is true: If you compel transit agencies to reduce service hours, to be tougher in collective bargaining because you don't have the funds available, you lose people. You lose staff, and ultimately transit suffers.

So what's the right way forward? If I were able—and I'm not, Speaker; I wish I were—to rewrite schedule 2 to have it complement what I believe the government is trying to do, I would say to them to hit the pause button on Bill 131 for now, take it off the floor of the House, convene a meeting immediately of Metrolinx executives and read the riot act out to them. Have full public disclosure of all major Metrolinx projects currently under way. Find out where the leaks in buckets are, and make sure that every single dollar being put into provincial transit infrastructure is used properly.

Here's what I know about the Eglinton Crosstown, one project—only one—under Metrolinx's jurisdiction. It is three years late. It is a billion dollars over budget. Mr. Verster stood at a very uncomfortable press conference a month and a half ago and admitted to media that there are 260 deficiencies in that one project, right down to the rails being the wrong size, being not the appropriate fit.

But it was just verbiage. We were not given, as legislators—I was not given, as the critic responsible—any details as to what the problems were. Do you know why I wasn't, Speaker? There's a reason: The Eglinton Crosstown is being built by a private consortium, a public-private partnership, and to compel disclosure from them—the only person who can capably do it in this province is the Auditor General. But for someone like me or a local municipal elected official to procure any information to make informed decisions, you get massive redactions.

I'll reflect on a former city councillor back home and a similar public-private partnership, Catherine McKenney, who used to represent Somerset ward, a fantastic city councillor. Catherine asked for more details on one aspect of the imbroglio that was our Confederation Line, stage 1 of our LRT. In order for Catherine—Councillor McKenney—to be able to find the text of the service agreement, the requirement under the legal agreement with the consortium was that Catherine had to sit in a chair with the paper document on the table, with the ability to take no written notes, to take no pictures, to bring no laptops, , and the city solicitor was sitting over her shoulder as all this happened.

1500

As the document was parsed through, massive redactions—things you couldn't understand. That was the level

of disclosure for the Confederation line and the LRT imbroglio. The members of this House know all too well that we fought for two years for a public inquiry into Ottawa's LRT. Thankfully, we convinced the government to call that inquiry. Justice Hourigan wrote a fantastic report, and now we have an idea of where to lift up the rocks and where some of the problems are. But we do not have that for Metrolinx.

What I read Bill 131 doing in schedule 2—I read Bill 131 as bailing Metrolinx out. We're bailing them out. We're telling them, "You know what? It's okay that you've built this incompetent, highly salaried management-executive culture that can't accomplish its objectives. It's okay that we shower money on this while the transit projects themselves are failing. We're now going to ask the municipal partners to voluntarily opt in to a station administration fee so they can build the infrastructure themselves."

I mean, would that work in any one of our lives? Would we allow any one of our friends to do this? "Oh, I'm sorry, you've made an obligation to me. You owe me \$1,000. But it's okay. I'm actually going to suggest someone else pays me back at a later rate at some point." No, we would never agree to this. But this is precisely what we've agreed to with Mr. Verster and Metrolinx. Schedule 2, while I understand why municipal partners want it, lets Metrolinx off the hook.

Now, in the next half hour that I have left, I want to focus more on schedule 1. Schedule 1 amends the City of Toronto Act to specifically say the contracting-out language of ATU 113's collective agreement with the city of Toronto is null and void on the occasion of the merger of transit authorities for fare integration. That's a lot of verbiage. Let me break it down.

As the associate minister says, riders don't necessarily care about the colour of the bus. If they jump on a bus in Durham and it drops them off in Scarborough, they just want to get from point A to point B. As I've heard the associate minister say many times that they don't care about the colour of the bus; they just want to get from point A to point B. And it's a fair point. But here's the rub: The women and men who have built up ATU 113's collective agreement with the city of Toronto for decades—for decades, they sat at bargaining tables and negotiated in good faith with the TTC—have a very keen interest in making sure that when other transit systems are coming into the city of Toronto, the schedules are not impacted, the service quality is not impacted. So a bus coming from Durham that could be dropping off at Scarborough Town Centre every 45 minutes had better be on the same schedule that a TTC vehicle would be doing. Otherwise, it's an impact on the rider.

We salute the idea of fare integration. Fare integration is a wonderful achievement. We've been fighting for it for over a year and a half. And in my remarks this afternoon, I want to tip my proverbial, invisible hat to TTCriders, to community associations who have pushed for fare integration. It is going to save a significant amount of money for people—over \$50,000, as I understand it—

every day to come into the city of Toronto from outside and the wider GTA, and it's great. I heard the associate minister say the numbers forecasted for him say as much as \$1,600 a year—terrific.

But we can't rob Peter to pay Paul, right? If we're going to allow fare integration to happen, I have asked from the beginning—and I've not had specific clarification—how is the government of Ontario going to kick in more funds into operational transit to make sure the TTC doesn't have a deficit at the end of the day with transit integration?

Moreover, there's been a recent arbitration ruling by Justice William Kaplan, who confirmed that ATU 113 has the right to be at the table any time transit integration is being discussed. That is what Justice Kaplan said very clearly. I asked at committee, is the government aware of this? Does the government intend to make this language null and void in the collective agreement to keep ATU 113 out of the room? No answer. National ATU Canada wrote a letter to this effect asking questions—no answer. ATU 113 wrote a letter to this effect to the government—no answer.

So all you can conclude as a transit worker and as a union representing transit workers is that there's a potential that the government is encouraging the city of Toronto to interfere in free collective bargaining. And for the New Democratic Party, that is a red line: no. Our grandmothers and grandfathers that built up these unions—they did not happen by accident. There was blood, sweat and tears all over this country from the people who made it their job to look out for their co-workers, to improve safety, to improve compensation, to improve the quality of public services and private services. We do not, in one government, get to rip up the paper and just say, "No, no. I'm going to now change the rules of the game." That's a red line.

We saw this red line a year ago when the government decided, in its own calculation, that 55,000 low-paid education workers had no right to strike and were going to have a collective agreement imposed upon them—imposed upon them. And if they decided to strike anyway—because in this country, as I read the charter, free collective bargaining is a charter-protected right—if they decided to defy the government and exercise that right, individual trade unionists would be fined at least \$500 a day and trade union organizations could be fined as much as \$5,000 a day. That was what the government's response was to 55,000 low-paid education workers.

Low-paid: What do I mean by that? I mean educational assistants, early childhood educators, custodians, receptionists, library technicians—that when you looked at the full gamut of all these occupations, many of them work only eight months of the year and take EI in the summer. That's what the compensation actually amounted to.

So the province, in its wisdom at the time, said to those workers, "I know what's best for you. It doesn't matter what you think you deserve at the bargaining table. I'm going to tell you what you're going to get," and we saw what happened. I told the story before at second reading and I will tell it again. I was on my way back from Toronto

to Ottawa and, as is too often the case because it's the scourge of my life, I was on this phone—which is not a prop; it's a phone—and I got a text message. Not from an education worker; I got a text message from a taxi driver I know back home. The taxi driver said to me, "Joel, the plan is to shut down the Ottawa airport." I immediately texted back to this person, "Please take me off this list. I'm an elected official. I don't work for the labour movement anymore"—because I did once upon a time; very proud years of my life.

I talked to that person subsequent to that interaction, and I said, "What were you talking about?" He said, "If the government was going to start fining people \$500 a day, unions \$5,000 a day, legislating people back to work, taxi drivers in the city of Ottawa were prepared to shut down the Ottawa airport." I was like, "What?" He said, "No, we were angry. There's a janitor in my family. There's a custodian in my family. That is not right. They should negotiate at the bargaining table. They should not levy a big hammer from Queen's Park. And if it takes me risking my livelihood, I'm prepared to do it." I was blown away.

I heard the echoes of this elsewhere. I heard the echoes of it from people I know who work in manufacturing in the private sector. I heard the echoes of it from people I know in construction, from people I know who work in health care in the non-essential occupations. So that was quite a choice the government made a year ago.

I will never forget the day; I was here in my place, and I looked up and I saw the members from the Canadian Union of Public Employees and their remarkable local leader of this union, Laura Walton, who is currently, and recently now, the president-elect of the Ontario Federation of Labour. I saw them watch the education minister repeal this bill. I saw them watch the Premier have to apologize for deigning to intrude upon the collective bargaining rights of workers in this province. But here we are a year later, and it would appear my friends in government have learned no lesson, because here we go again.

But here's the one good thing, Speaker, just for the record for people watching this at home—you political nerds watching Legislature television at home: There's a reason I think that even if the government uses its majority to pass this legislation, free collective bargaining for ATU 113 is not going to be ripped up in the city of Toronto, and her name is Mayor Olivia Chow. Because this is somebody who is an advocate for public transit. This is somebody who has spent her life in this city, growing up in St. James Town, a real rags-to-riches story, understanding the value of public transit and what it meant for her and her family—moving to Canada, settling themselves, getting around, doing remarkable things, Olivia and her late husband, Jack, both good friends of mine. I have full confidence that the mayor of Toronto will not use the powers suggested to her in schedule 1 of this bill to rip up the collective bargaining rights of ATU 113.

1510

But do you know what she has done, Speaker? And it's a lesson to this government. The agreement the city of

Toronto has with Metrolinx requires it to spend a certain amount of money to function the transit projects Metrolinx is building, but as I told you earlier, the Eglinton Crosstown is three years late and it's a billion dollars over budget. So there's some money sitting around that was supposed to be used to operate the Eglinton Crosstown LRT. And what have Mayor Chow and her team done? She has signalled to Toronto city council, "We're going to take that money and we're going to invest it in the operating funds of the TTC." The target is to set transit ridership to 91% of pre-pandemic levels. That's leadership. That is a signal to the people working in public transit and the people who rely on it every day that the city of Toronto understands and will fund operationally—not aspirationally, with \$70 billion of something, somewhere—with money available because of the incompetence of Phil Verster and Metrolinx, will fund public transit. That is the good news, political nerds watching at home.

I hope schedule 1 of this bill will not ever be used, but I hope someone at the cabinet table over there, Speaker, will raise this question and say, "You know, we heard Joel Harden ranting and raving in the Legislature the other day, and apparently he's done it a number of times, trying to get our attention that we should not go down in history as the government to try to rip up collective bargaining twice in 12 months."

I know I'm on one side of the political spectrum and they're on another, but it doesn't matter. At the end of the day, Speaker, we should agree that the rules of collective negotiations should be fair for both parties and that when agreements are struck, they should be honoured on both sides. Labour should honour its part of the bargain and the employer should honour its part.

If we think about schedule 1 of this bill—I've urged the government from the beginning to pull it. It's not necessary. You have a letter, an arbitration agreement from William Kaplan that said very clearly that ATU 113 has a right to be at the table when there's any discussion of transit agencies integrating and working together around merged buses coming into new jurisdictions.

I just urged the government, I urged the Minister of Infrastructure and I've urged the transportation minister to work with ATU 113 as a partner. Don't work with them as an adversary, because, frankly, we don't bargain with ATU 113 in this place. That's not our job. We fund public transit. We hope Mayor Chow and her team at the city of Toronto will work with ATU 113 as willing partners—and I don't just hope; I know that will happen. I know that will happen.

In my city, I hope that Mayor Mark Sutcliffe will do the same and Renée Amilcar, who is the general manager of OC Transpo, will do the same with members of ATU 279. We hope Mayor Horwath will do her part to work with ATU 107, and—I apologize; if anybody can shout out the Peterborough mayor's name. I forget that person's name, but all due respect to that office-holder, we expect that mayor to do the same with members of ATU 1320.

Are there going to be disagreements at the bargaining table? Are people going to have to put a little water in their

wine? Yes, that's the collective bargaining process. But what is not the collective bargaining process is someone in a room, somewhere else, changing the rules of the game mid-game. That's wrong.

Down the street from this august building, Speaker, the Ontario Federation of Labour is meeting all week. They're meeting this week. I mentioned Laura Walton, that champion who worked with those fantastic 55,000 education workers, who has just been elected president of the Ontario Federation of Labour. But I guarantee you, as I've been informed—I've been busy this week doing my job here, heading down to Kitchener to do some canvassing—that transit workers, they're represented. Their leadership is there in good numbers, and I've been encouraged, "Joel, deliver this message on our behalf to all the members of the House. Tell them that we love our jobs, but we want to be paid for them. Tell them that we respect the people we serve, but we don't want to be hurt by them, and we don't want to have to be put in situations that are dangerous. We need support. The infrastructure we drive needs renewal."

It's exciting to see the amount of new e-buses that are starting to circulate in this province. We have a fleet that started in Ottawa. There's some in Toronto, as I understand it. The federal government has played a role in coming to the table and enabling that infrastructure to take root. That's terrific. That's growth. That's what we need. But it all doesn't happen if we move away from being an active partner. And for me, an active partner in public transit, at a provincial level, is 50-50 funding—coming back into the game.

Can we grapple with a scenario where the government has committed to spend \$650 million on a parking garage? Correct, member from Spadina-Fort York?

Mr. Chris Glover: It's \$450 million for the parking garage and \$200 million for infrastructure renewal before we hand it over.

Mr. Joel Harden: All right. That wasn't heard, so I'll just say it for the record through the microphone: \$450 million for a parking garage, and the balance of the \$650 million for infrastructure renewal for the project.

Mr. Chris Glover: And then we hand it over.

Mr. Joel Harden: And then we hand it over. So we're spending \$600 million on a luxury spa, with fantastic wellness opportunities for those who can afford it. We're nickel-and-diming Cassie Theaker. We're nickel-and-diming people in Peterborough, people in Ottawa, people in Sudbury, people in Windsor, people in London, people in Kitchener-Waterloo. We are nickel-and-diming the people who operate the public transit systems that are so essential to our communities. It's not right.

I don't know what to make of it, Speaker: a 95-year lease? Again, another one of these private consortium arrangements where we're not allowed to see the evidence. I understand the other day that the architect behind some of it resigned.

Mr. Chris Glover: Yes, a landscape architect.

Mr. Joel Harden: A landscape architect has resigned—afflicted with a crisis of conscience, I'm sure.

I want the government to also be afflicted with a crisis of conscience. I know they may have different ambitions of what infrastructure they want to build than me. Maybe it's rather like—if you've had a friend like this in your life. You're getting bored of your relationship and you want to seek a new partner because that's the new and fancy thing to do. Remember the person who got you where you are in your life. Remember the person who was there, all along.

Aspirations do not get people home safely. Aspirations do not get people around our communities; the system that we've got does.

Let's round this out a little bit. I want to make the case to the government, too, that the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario has given us new reasons to think about why the investments we make in infrastructure matter. The report that they just released, called *Costing Climate Change Impacts to Public Infrastructure*, is talking about \$708 billion in the portfolio of the province that is vulnerable to climate hazards. So in the absence of adaptation—they're making the case in the report released today—we are projected to add \$4 billion every year to what we're currently spending. So the no-adaptation strategy, if we do not decide to adapt our infrastructure to the threat of climate change, that's a 16% increase.

I know my friends in government have been exhorting, very continuously—I give them credit for their consistency on how much they dislike the carbon-pricing regime brought into place by the federal government. It is the end of the world, according to my friends in government, but somehow \$4 billion a year in extra infrastructure costs is not? A 16% increase.

The numbers that Tiff Macklem, the governor of the Bank of Canada, crunched on carbon pricing and the cost of carbon pricing for the country come to less than a tenth of a percentage of the consumer price index—not unimportant. Depending on the average consumer, it could be \$150 a year, according to Governor Macklem. Governments should, if I take the members right—they're always talking about how they have to try save money; powerful paycheques. I get it. But you are putting a lot of emphasis on \$150 a year and no emphasis whatsoever on \$4 billion a year? On what planet does that make any sense? Because the one I am currently living on, according to the estimates that I've seen, is on track for an average warming of 3 degrees Celsius.

1520

The global Conference of the Parties on climate change is happening soon, Speaker. They are calling our country—and, by doing so, our jurisdiction of Ontario—into question as one of the worst climate offenders on the planet. On a per capita basis, we are one of the worst emitters—worst.

Before my friends over there throw Alberta under the bus as being the major driver of that—and it's true—Ontario has to bear some responsibility for that too. Methane gas from natural gas is 70 times the potency of carbon dioxide from greenhouse gas—70 times. So when my friends over there talk about new electrical gas-fired plants in Napanee, a wonderful community—\$400 mil-

lion—there is a reason they have heard from municipalities across Ontario that that is a bad idea. It's a bad idea financially because the tools available to us with energy conservation and smart usage of renewables could save us a lot more. It would be a lot more efficient in the long run.

We have an obligation in this House to think about public transit infrastructure as part of the climate solution. It is part of the climate solution. There are no two ways about this. Transportation costs, according to the estimates that I've seen—before the government fired the Environmental Commissioner early in its mandate; I believe it was 2018 when Dianne Saxe was fired and that office was discontinued—one third of emissions in Ontario are transportation related.

Any time I have taken a car ride down from my home, in Ottawa, to this great city I am reminded of something my friends over there talk about all the time: the chronic problem of congestion, bumper to bumper, and just how frustrated people are. I talked to one member over there the other day and they told me that it was literally a two-hour drive from home to here, and this is from a GTA location—a two-hour drive to the Legislature, a two-hour drive home. How could that do anything but produce a massive migraine? The member from Scarborough Southwest is nodding her head. How could that do anything other than produce a massive migraine?

But think for a moment if we could actually get Metrolinx working competently, if there was bus rapid transit in Scarborough of substance, if there was an actual plan—not an aspirational plan but an actual plan—to build subway extensions to Scarborough with bus rapid transit in the meantime: Think of that member's frustration being cut in half. Think of the smile on that member's face, coming home to greet their family. "I love you, hello. Let's watch Netflix and chill. Let's be happy." Instead of two hours in a car, bumper to bumper, dealing with road violence. I can't even imagine why the members of this government don't get behind operational funding for public transit and more accountability for Metrolinx.

Instead, what we have before us today is a piece of legislation that is bailing Mr. Verster out. As I said, it's not like this guy didn't have a rap sheet from some of his previous jobs. I learned in some of the research we did—we're blessed on this side of the House to have fantastic researchers. I want to shout out for a minute: Mr. John Bowker, who does enormously important work for us. John passed me a note about Mr. Verster's time at ScotRail—

Interjection: Talk about that.

Mr. Joel Harden: I will.

Mr. Verster, it came to be known in Scotland, was earning a housing allowance—despite making a salary of about \$450,000—of \$16,500 a year. It wasn't enough that he was getting paid 450 grand, he got free private health care for himself and his entire family.

I wish I could ask this government to bring to the floor of this House Mr. Verster's compensation agreement, this apparent \$1 million he's got. Wouldn't it be interesting, friends, to find out if he's got a housing allowance right

now working for Metrolinx, to find out if he's actually got free private health care for himself and his whole family? What else is in there? How many steak dinners? How many billables?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Is he earning it?

Mr. Joel Harden: Good question—member from Oshawa is saying, “Is Mr. Verster earning it?” I would say not. He's soaking us. That's what's happening.

It's not as if my friends in the Liberals couldn't have known that they were importing someone who not only had a poor performance record for ScotRail; he had a history of negotiating very lush, very rich taxpayer-funded subsidies for himself. So I have no reason to believe he's doing anything differently here. But the students from Conestoga College I was waiting for the bus with last night in the rain, for a product that Mr. Verster should be providing to them safely and on time with some degree of comfort, they are the ones who suffer.

I'll tell a story from that bus last night, just so there's a little bit of hope tonight and people don't think it's all just invective: I'm sitting on the bus; I get into that bus and a single mother comes on—well, I don't know if she was a single mother. A mother comes onto the bus holding her baby in one of those little carry things that you pop into your car and you carry out. Her three-year-old, who's probably a lot like me at that age, jumping up and down on the spot, is just having a great old time. Immediately, the whole bus, including the conductor, rushes to her aid. Someone grabs the child-carrying thing; someone is playing with the three-year-old; someone gives up their two seats to help the person sit down.

That's public transit at its best, and I want to believe that is happening everywhere in Ontario right now. People who use and rely on public transit—it's a community, and people do look out for each other. But it doesn't happen by accident.

I want to think if on that bus last night, a neighbour jumped onto that bus who was in a profound mental health crisis, exhibiting behaviours, lashing out, would we have had the same capacity to jump to the help of that mom, who clearly needed the help—competent mom but who needed the help. No? No.

Things in public infrastructure are never accidental; they are always intentional. We signal our intentions by how well we fund things and how well we hold them accountable for that funding. I gave that conductor full marks last night—great humanity. I give my fellow passengers full marks that night—wonderful. But I would have liked to have waited for that GO bus in a comfortable way. I can't imagine what that station will be like in January. I want to believe that that's possible. If we can spend \$650 million on a 95-year lease with an Austrian conglomerate set to have a super spa—

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Underwater parking.

Mr. Joel Harden: Underwater parking—we sure as heck can fund the buses and trains that get people around. I mean, my goodness.

Let's pull this back to a good place. Let's pull this back to where I started today. Let's pull this back to what Lynda

Kitchikeesic would have done. If we could fire Phil Verster right now and bring Lynda back to life, and she ran Metrolinx, I know the first thing she would do. She would bring all the people running Metrolinx into a large room. She would want to understand how the company is working. She would want to have open consultations with communities. She would want to understand every single facet of how the company worked, because that's how she worked with the Ottawa police.

There were so many situations with urban Indigenous folks in my community having confrontational relationships with the police, and what was her reaction to that? To pour gas onto the fire and call the police names and call urban Indigenous groups who were doing their part names? No, that was not what she did. She jumped into that fray. She built a grassroots organization called the Flotilla for Friendship, and she started nurturing connections between people that made our city better, made our community better, despite herself suffering horrendous harm.

A couple of anecdotes about Lynda: She found out later in life that she had eight siblings, none of whom survived. All died far too young. She left home when she was 15, grappling with the trauma of never knowing her birth mother, hitting the road, and what a road it was. This was someone who was part of the 1960s era—the late 1970s, I should say. Yes, the era in which she hit the road would have been the late 1970s, early 1980s—at 15. She found a way to get in the touring group with the artist known as Prince. She was in George Clinton's Detroit home playing a game of billiards with him. She could talk herself into any kind of situation and connect with people and really bring real exuberance and fun into a room—remarkable life.

Those are the qualities, I'm saying to you now, Speaker, that we need at the top of Metrolinx. We need full disclosure; we need friendship; we need people who are going to build community partnerships that are going to actually help us build infrastructure.

1530

I know if Lynda led Metrolinx, she wouldn't start with the aspirational things of what Metrolinx would do one day if everything works out. She would say, “Hey, how was the system working that we have? Who's driving the bus? Who's working the trains? Who's fixing—let's talk to all the different riders. Let's talk to the international students from Conestoga who have to do that rainy commute. Let's build a bus shelter in there. I don't need 59 vice-presidents; maybe I can handle the three, and maybe we could use some of those funds to actually build something people could use themselves for the company to be better.” That's the way Lynda would run Metrolinx.

I want to say, too, that as we think about public transit, Bill 131, schedules 1 and 2—let's just summarize the steps that I have made. I've made the case again that schedule 1 of this bill is an affront to free collective bargaining. If you think transit workers are going to sit around and watch their collective agreements get ripped up, think again. We've had near transit strikes in Hamilton and Peterborough, and there could be more.

To be clear, as the member from Mushkegowuk—James Bay said earlier today in debate on a different bill, no worker wants to go on strike. It's not a fun thing to do; it's a difficult decision. We shouldn't be putting workers in that decision in the first place. I believe schedule 1 of this bill is an affront to free collective bargaining in this country. I'm sad to say that it wouldn't be the first time under this government that that affront has happened. It happened a year ago for education workers. I hope they've learned the lesson of that period to come into this House today and commit to not doing so.

I have told the minister at committee. I have told the minister in this House. I've told anyone who will listen that it's not necessary. You could utilize the collective agreement that exists. You could make sure that transit workers are at the table to talk about service integration so you could deliver the fare integration that transit riders desperately want: Yes, to save them money—absolutely. You can accomplish that.

Schedule 2 of this bill: Yes, I've heard from municipal leaders, particularity in the greater GTA—I see my friend from Oshawa here; she has certainly heard it—people want GO stations.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Kitchener.

Mr. Joel Harden: People want GO stations in Kitchener. We want GO stations everywhere.

But the notion that these are voluntary decisions—I think the government knows they're not. This is infrastructure people urgently need. It's not voluntary. It should be built. It should be built on time. It should be built to cost.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Schedule 1 of the present act proposes to amend the City of Toronto Act. The City of Toronto Act gives powers to the municipality of the city of Toronto that are different and, I would say, much more expansive and comprehensive than the powers that other municipalities have. For example, the City of Toronto Act gives the city of Toronto council much more power than the municipality of the town of Amherstburg. Does the member think that that's acceptable in the province of Ontario?

Mr. Joel Harden: Well, I guess to really answer, my friend from Essex, I would have to understand what specific powers you're taking issue with under the City of Toronto Act. If it's the revenue generation part—just a head nod would help. If it's the revenue generation part, I can tell you—it's not. Okay.

Look, the City of Toronto Act does many things, but for this particular bill, for this particular discussion, what the government is saying is that the contracting-out language of the collective agreement that ATU 113 has with the TTC will be null and void. That's what schedule 1 contemplates here. So I'm saying to the government that is an aggressive step, it's a confrontational step and it's an unnecessary step.

I'll say it again for the record: You do not need to do it. You do not need to anger the women and the men who

work in public transit in Toronto. They're your partners. They're not your enemies.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank my colleague from Ottawa Centre for a very interesting—I learned a lot during the hour speech. It was also entertaining at times. So thank you for that. It doesn't happen very often.

You make it clear that transit fare integration is something that we support. It is something that users have been wanting for a long time, especially transit riders who travel across municipal boundaries. But then, if the GO expansion depends on local funding, not on community needs but on the communities who are able to attract private investment to develop those GO Transit expansions, what do you figure that will mean for poorer communities? What do you think that will mean for communities who are not as well off as others? If you put an equity lens on that part of the bill, what does that mean?

Mr. Joel Harden: The member from Nickel Belt asks a very good question. If you rely on private industry to come to the table to help you build critical public infrastructure, these are the problems you invite.

I take the point the minister made earlier about affordable housing and Vandyk. We can look into that. We can litigate that. But what we do know is that Vandyk is almost in receivership and owes two lenders \$203 million. This was the original partner for Metrolinx to build transit-oriented communities. So it's clear in this case that the transit-oriented communities strategy of Metrolinx has failed.

And yet we're paying Mr. Verster \$1 million a year. At what point does this guy ever be told, "You've failed. You need to course-correct"? Maybe the public should be involved in building public infrastructure, and not failing public-private partnerships with Vandyk.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Let's try that question again. Maybe I'll ask it in a different way so the member can see what I'm getting at.

The city of Toronto is 2.7 million people and the town of Amherstburg is only 23,000 people. I would say that it's quite reasonable that the city of Toronto should have a different type of municipal government than the town of Amherstburg, given that huge difference in population. That's why the city of Toronto has a totally different act, the City of Toronto Act. I think that's acceptable in the province of Ontario. Does the member think that's acceptable?

Mr. Joel Harden: I guess, if I'm understanding what my friend is saying: Yes, it does need to have particular statutory powers to serve a community of four million people. With all due respect to Amherstburg, I'm from a town of 1,800 people myself originally; they can be beautiful and well-run too.

My point is this, though: Schedule 1 of this bill would give the leadership in the city of Toronto the ability to

abrogate free collective bargaining. I'm quite confident that is not something Mayor Chow would do, and as I understand it, this was a power that earlier mayors had requested. So instead of introducing a tool of provocation into the workplace, introduce tools of partnership. That starts with funding public transit 50-50. The demand for this in particular is \$500 million to make sure the bus comes on time, to make sure the subway comes on time, to make sure it's in good repair and to make sure the people who operate it are well paid. That should be our focus.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I really appreciated the comments from the member for Ottawa Centre and wanted to share some of the experience of Londoners with our public transit system. Like many municipalities, we've been struggling with the loss of revenues and ridership during COVID, and this has worsened long-standing issues with the delivery of paratransit services.

We had a woman with disabilities last month at city council report that she had redialed 834 times in one morning to try and book a paratransit ride. I've heard from seniors who have cancelled their activities at the seniors' centre because they can't get paratransit to and from. Does this bill address any of these issues? And if not, what should the government be doing to ensure improvements in paratransit across the province?

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank the member for London West for introducing the issue of accessible transit into this House. We haven't talked about it yet this afternoon, and it is critical. So 839 times? My goodness. I've heard about this in our home community, for Para Transpo, which is Wheel-Trans in the city of Ottawa. We have to invest as much money into accessible transit as we do into other forms of transit, and the operating transit we have should be accessible too.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act is very clear: By 2025, the province of Ontario needs to be fully accessible. And to the member from London West: We are not funding accessible transit in a way that would allow that to happen.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to the member opposite for his remarks on this bill. Madam Speaker, we are in the middle of a housing crisis, and that is why our government's plan is to build 1.5 million homes in the next 10 years. Also, we're building housing in and around transit.

1540

We are seeing the number of people experiencing homelessness increasing every day, so my question to the member opposite is, can the member opposite explain why we shouldn't be doing everything in our power to create more accessible housing opportunities such as our Transit-Oriented Communities Program?

Mr. Joel Harden: Well, I would agree with the member—we do. We do. We have to be building deeply

affordable housing. The only issue I have is, I don't see the private sector doing that. I don't see the private sector doing it. It's frankly not in the DNA of the private sector in housing to build deeply affordable housing.

This is where, as the member for University–Rosedale has said, as the member for London North Centre has said, we need a public builder in this province again. Under an NDP government in the 1990s, the great Evelyn Gigantes, my neighbour back home, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing under the then NDP government—non-market housing increased under that government by 62%. Many of those homes that were built then are still standing and they're in need of repair.

So, to the member's point, I agree with you. We need more deeply affordable housing. But I do not have any confidence that the private sector can do that. That's not their focus. It should be the state, it should be co-operatives that get that done. That's what we think should happen.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The name of the bill is Transportation for the Future. Did the member see anything in there that would imply that the good people of northern Ontario who I represent will have access to public transit in the future, no matter how far that future is? Is there hope for us to get it? Because I can tell you that the people of Mattagami, Gogama, Biscotasing, Westree, Shining Tree, Cartier, Alban—we don't have public transit. Is there any public transit in the north in the Transportation for the Future Act?

Mr. Joel Harden: Great question—no. What I have heard from small municipalities around Ontario is that they would like to continue pilots that they have done, particularly with seniors and persons with disabilities, to get people out of managed living situations and out into the community. That's one particular focus that some municipalities have told me they are interested in more provincial funding for.

There's a great case for that bus to take people out of that group home, out of that retirement home, out of that seniors' home into the community for an art lesson, for a visit to a farm, for anything like that. That is the role of public transit. It is not just an urban and suburban phenomenon. It is absolutely and must be a rural phenomenon because not everybody can own their own automobile. We have to find ways to get people out of their homes and into the community.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I'm happy to rise today and speak about Bill 131. I'd like to thank the Minister of Infrastructure and the Associate Minister of Transportation and the wonderful PA to this ministry, my colleague from Brampton West, and also my colleague from Brampton East for their hard work on this file.

Speaker, the province of Ontario is growing at an amazing rate. It is well known that our population is expanding rapidly, putting strain upon our housing supply,

our energy and transportation infrastructure and our health care system. If you don't plan, you don't know what you are getting. It's not only just a plan; it's a sound plan. If you don't know what you are going to do—anything: your family planning or business planning or personal planning or city planning or provincial planning. If you are not taking cars off the road, overall, you are not helping Ontario. At the end of the day, it's the quality of life; it's very, very important.

All these factors would be key reasons for this proposed bill in normal times, but when all these factors are now weighing on our society, urgent action is needed. The Transportation for the Future Act, 2023, calls for an expansion of the GO Transit system and for further investment to help build transit-oriented communities, to help ease the strains on the housing market across the greater Golden Horseshoe area. By helping communities construct new GO stations, our government will also help stimulate the growth of transit-oriented communities.

One of my former colleagues from Markham is the longest-serving regional councillor. He's actually passionate about bringing in a policy about transit-oriented communities. He came this afternoon and met me and met the Minister of Transportation. He was talking highly about how this bill aligns with the city of Markham and his vision and York region's vision. That was a good-news story.

By helping construct new GO stations, by making it easier for Ontarians to move around the province, we will stimulate the regrowth of small towns, bring jobs to those outside of the greater Toronto area and continue to keep Ontario as the engine of economic growth in this country. That is all a part of our government's commitment to the people of Ontario to get it done.

We have talked at length of numbers and figures, but what would this proposed bill actually mean for the people of this great province? Allow me to elaborate on the benefits of this bill.

Imagine, if you will, a married couple who work in downtown Toronto. They are raising several young children and have a large home with a backyard where they are able to enjoy the outdoors. Their home is close to schools, groceries and local amenities. But this home is not in one of Toronto's many neighbourhoods—it is nearly 100 kilometres away, in the small towns of Ontario that surround the greater Golden Horseshoe. They travel rapidly and safely from their remote home to their jobs in bigger cities, all without needing to travel by road or highway, or to deal with congestion and traffic delays. Because of the investment into transit-oriented communities that this proposed bill will bring, this couple will be able to enjoy a high quality of life in a quieter part of this province, but they will still have easy and secure transit access to the dynamic job market of the greater Toronto area.

Speaker, this vision of the future will not just help smaller communities across the province; it will also help relieve tensions on the housing market in the greater Toronto area, allowing for more development in the eco-

nomie heart of our province. More space could be dedicated for retail or commercial lands downtown, allowing for better jobs to be available for all Ontarians. And all this potential will not just be borne by the taxpayers of Ontario. Through the station contribution fee, developers and landowners would contribute to the cost of new GO stations. Developers and landowners would be attracted to these new stations by the promise of growth, as housing and mixed-use communities spring up around these new stations.

These new stations—usually it's mixed-use and transit-oriented; it will be popular. But not only this; we are bringing the vision to the transit-oriented development in Ontario. Also, it's very popular in other parts of the province and the country. This basically brings a live-and-work concept. I visited Taiwan, so I could see some of the transit-oriented communities—it's beautifully designed and done. Also, it's busy—you could see some of the examples in our country as well.

They would also pay back into these communities by helping to contribute to the cost of building out our infrastructure. And this fee will help speed up the construction of these stations, by spreading the cost amongst multiple developments and over multiple years.

The station contribution fee makes it easier for developers to invest into the future of a community, helping to unlock the most potential out of our economy and setting ourselves up for long-term success in a changing world.

1550

Speaker, my riding of Markham–Thornhill is the most ethnically diverse in the province and the country. It has seen unprecedented population growth over the past 10 years, and our existing infrastructure is nearing its capacity to support our population. My riding sits at the very edge of the Toronto transit system's area of coverage. Thousands of residents of my riding make the trip to Don Mills or Finch stations in order to ride the subway to their jobs.

This bill, if passed, will make modifications to the City of Toronto Act, 2006, which will give the city of Toronto access to more tools in order to integrate its transit networks further into the greater Golden Horseshoe. This means my constituents will be able to transition from York regional transit to the TTC with less hassle, and more seamlessly travel to where they wish to go.

My riding is also eagerly anticipating the Yonge North subway extension of the TTC that will allow my constituents better access to the entirety of the greater Toronto area's transit infrastructure. That was a big game-changer. People not only in Markham, my riding, but into York region have been waiting for the Yonge North subway extension for decades. I will bring my personal experience during my time as a councillor. We were advocating for 10 years through the previous government, and it never happened.

Now, under the leadership of Premier Doug Ford and our ministers and this cabinet and this caucus, it's shovels in the ground for this Yonge North subway extension, from Yonge and Finch, all the way to Yonge and Highway 7. We're also backing up the transit-oriented community

in Langstaff. It's the largest megaproject in Ontario, from 10,000 units to close to 30,000 units of condominiums. It's still building—actually, we're bringing another community into this area because of this project and this government's vision.

This bill, if passed, will make modifications to the City of Toronto Act, 2006, which will give the city of Toronto access to more tools in order to integrate its transit networks further into the greater Golden Horseshoe. This means my constituents will be able to transition from York regional transit to the TTC with less hassle, and more seamlessly travel to wherever they wish to go.

My riding is also eagerly anticipating the Yonge North subway extension of the TTC that will allow my constituents better access to connecting to the greater Toronto area. This is connectivity. We're talking about the connectivity from north and south and east and west.

This expansion, in the spirit of "get it done," will change my constituents' lives for the better. That is an additional 94,000 daily users of the Toronto subway system. This will bring an additional 26,000 people within a 10-minute walk to transit infrastructure. It will save an average of 22 minutes of commuting time for many residents, getting them to their jobs and back to their homes faster.

Another aspect of this development in my riding is the planned GO expansion from Kennedy and Steeles to Stouffville. This northward expansion takes the GO Transit system right into the heart of Markham–Thornhill and further connects my constituents to the greater Golden Horseshoe, all without the need for more roads, highways and traffic congestion. This expanded service will mean that my constituents will have all-day service to and from their homes in Markham, with a train every 15 minutes.

Our government's action to build Ontario by introducing the Transportation for the Future Act, 2023, if passed, would build more GO transportation, support housing around transit and make it convenient to travel not only in my riding in York region but across the greater Golden Horseshoe area. This proposed legislation would create a new voluntary funding tool for municipalities that will help for the construction of new GO transit stations, accelerating transit while building vibrant mixed-use communities and much-needed housing.

The station contribution fee also facilitated earlier GO station construction through spreading the cost of delivering the station across multiple developments and over multiple years. New stations will also spur new development and new housing, Madam Speaker.

The proposed legislation will also provide the city of Toronto with the tools to better integrate its transit services with the other regional transit networks. This is very, very critical for our other cities north of Steeles to do connectivity. Even during my councillor time, Madam Speaker, bringing the TTC north of Steeles—one block, two blocks—it is impossible because of the jurisdiction, the regulations.

Now, I could tell one of my stories. There was a TTC loop around in the McCowan and Steeles area—it's one

block north of Steeles—for 15 years; then it was stopped. Then hundreds of hundreds of residents called me and asked me, "Why did they stop?" I said that now that they have a new station they don't have to loop around. They don't have to drive the bus north of Steeles. They were able to stop at Steeles and McCowan or Markham and Steeles or Kennedy and Steeles. They are not looping around anymore. You know how many thousands of people were impacted by discontinuing that TTC service, just bringing it one block north of Steeles? Seniors, students, new Canadians, newcomers, low-income people—because they want to avoid the extra fare. Through this bill, it's going to cut off the extra fare for bringing the TTC north of Steeles. This is a jurisdictional issue, and I think this is a game-changer—not only a game-changer. I was talking to my colleague. He said, "revolutionizing" the integrated fare system in our province and the cities.

Madam Speaker, by taking this critical step, our government is strengthening communities, supporting economic growth, creating more jobs, delivering better services and improving the lives of Ontarians today and for generations to come. I personally am so excited about this bill, Speaker. I could wear my municipal hat. I've talked many, many years about transit-oriented communities or transit-oriented development. That is the way to go, because you don't have to look for the land. We could do so many things in an in-filled area, and we could bring, for example, the Stouffville GO line, 48 kilometres—the House leader and great Minister for Housing and Municipal Affairs, from his riding connecting all the way to Union Station. We could put hundreds of thousands of units, if you start doing the right planning. You could put hundreds of thousands of affordable units and housing along that—transit-oriented stations, transit-oriented development.

So I wholeheartedly support this bill, Madam Speaker, and I ask the members opposite: This is a good opportunity to support not only this bill but the great vision that we are bringing in trying to address transit and transportation issues, along with bringing more affordable, attainable housing supply into our communities and cities in the province.

1600

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thanks to the member from Markham–Thornhill for his presentation. Clearly, Bill 131 doesn't recognize the power imbalance between the provincial government and municipalities. To my mind, it's almost as though this is like the government inviting someone to dinner at a really nice, fancy restaurant and then saying, "Guess, what? You're paying for the bill." Or inviting someone on a shopping trip, getting them to choose all sorts of great things that they want, and then saying, "Bring out your credit card."

My question to the member: Is this just another example of the province downloading its responsibilities onto smaller municipalities and forcing them to pay for things that the province ought to be doing?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the member for that question and actually applauding so many of things

through this wonderful project. Fare integration is another example of how we can integrate the fare system. That is another way of addressing the transit and transportation issues and alleviating gridlock, and also reducing the greenhouse gas emissions—so many wonderful things you could do through this bill.

We are not downloading anything to the lower-tier municipalities. We're trying to bring effectiveness and efficiency to transit and transportation systems in Ontario.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you to the member from Markham for his great remarks. And actually, it's in that context that I ask my question, which is that you come from York region, so how would York region respond to the legislative changes to the City of Toronto Act that are being presented here today?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. He's a great representative for those constituents. Thank you.

It's long-standing and overdue. That was a great question. It's decades and decades. I made a joke at Markham council. I said dealing with the city of Toronto, York region and city of Toronto, is like dealing with two different countries. They're disputing the boundaries.

For four years, the TTC and neighbouring municipal transit agencies have been seeking opportunities to integrate fare and services across the GTA and the greater Toronto area as well. This amendment would allow the TTC to initiate and enter into a cross-boundary partnership with their neighbours, just as all the other municipalities have the ability to do so. Thank you for that great question.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate the opportunity to ask a question. The folks in my neck of the woods are pretty excited about a train headed to Bowmanville that's been promised for basically a generation. So we were glad to see there's funding in the budget for the rail part, but no stations. Here we have a bill that says, "Unfortunately, the province will not be paying for stations," and this is kind of a creative solution for municipalities to figure it out themselves.

While I think the municipalities are grateful to even have a path forward to get a station, it is really disappointing that the province has gotten out of the game of paying for provincial public infrastructure. So my question is, why won't the government directly fund and invest in provincial infrastructure for stations?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: This is interesting. Thank you for the question from the member from Oshawa.

When we build a community, when we build a subdivision—so that's what happened, we put the horse before the cart, the cart before the horse. So usually we make a joke about, we bring the park and build in the community subdivision after a few people, a few residents, moved in. They started building the park after six, seven years. The people moving into the community, they've never seen the park. So, I'll say to the member, keep building the transit corridor, the stations, before the community is moved in, before the housing starts building into that area. That's a great vision. A great idea is building the station before we're building the transit-oriented community in that site—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mrs. Robin Martin: It's a great pleasure to rise today to ask a question of my friend, the member for Markham–Thornhill. I was listening a bit to the debate, and I heard you say you're very excited about this. I'm very excited about this as well.

I understand that this bill consists of a lot of amendments that are necessary, that have been requested by the city of Toronto, have been requested by the TTC, to try to make this happen so that we can have fare integration and so that we can put riders at the centre of what the travelling is in the region. And for the person who is riding on the bus or subway, etc., they don't want to have to get off and get on to something else if it's cold or just for the inconvenience of it. Can you just talk about what a difference this could make for constituents in your area?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for that important question. This is a seamless transportation transit system. It's connected so when the people are coming from Markham or York region, they don't have to pay for another fare. Also they don't need to wait for another specific TTC to connect their ridership into Toronto. And also, especially in the wintertime, ridership stops at the border. I think through this fare integration system we could be able to bring seamless transit, and also the riders don't have to wait in the cold or in the hot times to connect to another specific transit bus or transit ridership.

Thank you for the question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: To the government member across the way: This legislation allows GO service expansions if a municipality agrees to help fund the GO station where the trains would be running from.

I wanted to share some of the experience of London with GO service. On October 13, just over a month ago, we saw the final GO train leave of our station to provide the GO service between London and Toronto. It was a pilot that was announced by this government just over two years ago. It was a four-hour ride between London and Toronto and, to no one's surprise, the pilot was considered a failure. So there is no future in sight for GO service in London. I wondered if the government member could tell us what the plans for GO service to London are.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: This station contribution fee will be a voluntary new renewal tool which municipalities could use to fund the design and construction of new GO stations. The province must determine that the new GO station is warranted and the new municipality must have a sufficient financial capacity before the province allows the tool to be used, Madam Speaker.

Now, this is another way to encourage the municipality to participate, like a large city like London. This is a great way to encourage and bring partnership, and keep involved other levels of government, to the integrated community in our province.

1610

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to join the debate here this afternoon on Bill 131. I did expect, actually, to be in committee, but of course, the government gave so little time on Bill 146, the fall economic statement—they gave less than, I think, 18 hours to actually have public consultations on that piece of legislation, so this afternoon got freed up. I'm so pleased to be here to be able to weigh in on this bill, Bill 131, Transportation for the Future Act—very timely, I would say, as far as the debate goes. But just to complete that circle on Bill 146—there were no Toronto dates offered for budget consultations. Toronto, Etobicoke and Scarborough were left out of the consultation process—really, a missed opportunity. I would think that people would want to hear from the people of Scarborough.

Also, I did move a motion to give some more time for people to come and talk about the mini budget—especially this new Ontario Infrastructure Bank—and I also wanted clause-by-clause to be even next week so that we can actually get some more stakeholder feedback. The government said, “No, no, no”—in fact, no to a briefing, as well, which actually is quite something. I've been here for over a decade, and it's definitely showing. There was a time and a place where these briefings were offered by the ministry.

My friend here, the former finance critic, Mr. Fedeli, and I used to spend a lot of time—in fact, once, we got stuck down in a bunker. I don't know if you remember that. They take away your phones. It was a very serious affair. They actually kept us out of the limelight for as long as they could—of course, I'm referring to the former Liberal government. I just reference this as context to this piece of legislation.

When you do your due diligence, when you do the proper outreach to stakeholders, when you respect the people who sent us here by respecting us as legislators, you often get a better piece of legislation. Isn't that what we all want?

That seems like a very good segue, actually, to this particular piece of legislation. I will say that the concept of municipalities now being gifted with the opportunity to pay for their own GO stations is something that I have never seen before in this House.

Just for those people who are watching, which now includes my mom and my dad, Allan and Sheila Wood from Peterborough—hello, folks.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes. So we all know at least two people are watching. That's where we are right now.

It's interesting that the government has moved forward with this particular tool of enabling municipalities to fund new GO stations as part of a development proposal—but could also allow Metrolinx to download financial responsibility for provincial infrastructure onto municipalities. And I'm starting at this point in the debate, at this particular moment, because municipalities in Ontario, under the Ford government, have literally been put through the wringer, not even beginning with Bill 23.

Some of us were here in this House until midnight—I guess we're going to be here until midnight again tonight, so I just want to do a shout-out to the staff, to the security guards, to our own staff who are putting in the overtime; I'm sure you deserve every dollar of it. But I do think that—

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, you should applaud.

I was just talking to my friend, a particular security guard—he is missing a very special moment in his family. I think when you enter public service, you come to this place and you honour the commitment to public service. That said, he is hoping we don't go till midnight, and he may not be the only one, I have to say.

I will say that the relationship between municipalities and this government is very fractured, and there's a lot of tension there. I recently retweeted—I often don't retweet mayors, but Cam Guthrie put out a tweet. This was after the Premier had some sort of complaint, I would say, that the federal accelerator fund, which was being directly flowed to certain municipalities, was actually generating housing and was actually fast-tracking and streamlining some of that housing. The Premier, Premier Ford, said, “You know, that's not cool. Don't do that.”

For us, on this side of the House, regardless of partisanship, regardless of party affiliation, anything that gets housing built in this province of Ontario deserves our attention, would you not say?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Hear, hear.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes. So regardless of the fact that the Premier is being excluded or not invited specifically to the ribbon cuttings and the announcements, it's a good thing.

We do want to see this province, this provincial government under Premier Ford, really get back into the business of honouring that partnership with municipalities, and in order for that to happen, some funding has to be put on the table and it can't be the stick part; it should be the carrot part.

I say that because in Kitchener or Waterloo—as you know; I've raised this issue many times in this House—the so-called GO station in Kitchener is really a Via Rail station. It's not accessible to everybody all the time. The door is often locked. I think I'm one of the rare MPPs who actually does commute on occasion, because the 401 is getting more and more dangerous—I think we can all agree on that—and that time is money, and that time is also productivity. And so public transit investments are so needed in Ontario right now. In fact, that should be, I would say, one of the number one priorities from an economic perspective and from an environmental perspective.

So the concept—and this is really interesting, because it's primarily in schedule 2—is that this piece of legislation would allow a municipality, with the consent of the minister, to impose a transit station charge, which the government is calling a station contribution fee. This would be applied to new developments within a designated area around a proposed new GO Transit station.

Well, listen: If you came to Kitchener and you got off the GO train—and it's chaos. I just want to say it is com-

plete and utter chaos. People have left their cars there. People are getting picked up. Students are madly trying to find a bus. For the first 20 to 30 minutes, trying to get on the train and getting off the train is not a pleasant experience.

If we want people to be truly engaged in public transit and using public transit as an option, it should be convenient; it shouldn't be stressful. It should be affordable; it should not be expensive. It should be there when you need it, not when the schedule dictates or when Metrolinx determines Kitchener deserves a GO train. If that were to happen, then you would have more people taking public transit. The research is there. The evidence is there. This is not a complex issue exactly.

But when you look at the transit stations, it actually is a deterrent from taking the GO train. I've heard this. There's a whole Reddit dialogue on this: people who are professionals, IT, who commute from Toronto to Kitchener—of course, there's no train in the morning that gets them to work on time yet in 2023. We were promised the bullet train, the high-speed train every 15 minutes. I mean, we've heard it all, so you can excuse us, please, for just being a little bit cynical that this proposal, Bill 131, is actually going to result in a GO station that works for people, especially when the municipality has to pay for it.

When you get off the Via train or the GO train, and right across the street there's an encampment of tents—it's actually right across the street: in Canada, people living in tents, some of them seniors, some of them women fleeing domestic violence. Until recently, some children were there as well. As you can imagine, Madam Speaker, an encampment filled with tents—all of that living experience, all of that stress, all of that weather in Canada impacts the quality of life for those people. So it is so ironic that the province of Ontario, the Ford government, expects Kitchener-Waterloo, or the region of Waterloo, to somehow possibly dig into their housing budget, which is so stretched right now. We're actually planning for a second encampment in Waterloo. Now, remember, this is the Silicon Valley of the north. This is a well-resourced community, for the most part. The incomes are there, but the poverty hides incredibly well, primarily because of our church community that has really held together that social fabric.

1620

When you get off that train and you think, "Oh, well why doesn't the municipality just make this agreement, this pact, with the provincial government and build us a new GO station"—I mean, it's so far from the reality and lived experience of the people in Kitchener right now that it defies, actually, any logic that the government would bring forward this legislation.

Obviously, we fully support fare integration, but boy, you're going to have a big problem with fare integration when you have constitutional challenges to who's going to be operating that side of the equation. For us, the new provision that clarifies such service in integration agreements does not constitute contracting out of the purposes of a collective agreement. You've built in a loophole to get

out of those respectful relationships that you have or that you should have with the people who are driving the buses, driving the trains, meeting the public face-to-face each and every day. Those jobs are becoming more and more complex, I just want to say. So the fact that schedule 2 allows the municipality with the consent of the ministers to impose this transit station charge is really a huge stretch, and it leads us to a conversation about downloading, because that's essentially how we see this issue.

So I was reading, as I'm wont to do, academic studies on this issue. This is entitled, "How Downloaded Costs are Steamrolling Local Governments". It's actually from Charley Beresford, Robert Duffy and Gaetan Royer. They're from an "NGO focused on inclusive, sustainable communities," which is what we should all want. The three co-authored this particular study called, "Who's Picking Up the Tab?" We often hear in this place that there's only one taxpayer, but at the end of the day, the municipalities are really being forced to pick up the slack, I would say. Also, it references this new narrative that really is embraced by this Ford government. There are "claims that local government spending is 'out of control' or 'unsustainable.'" The core thrust of their argument is that local government costs are increasing at a faster rate than inflation and population growth, and that this is primarily a result of reckless spending by local governments." This is exactly the playbook that this government has fully embraced. You've talked down to municipalities. Bill 23 is removing \$5 billion in development charges for needed infrastructure.

Just yesterday, my colleagues and I heard from the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association. They said, "Listen, you have to get back into the business of supporting municipalities for this infrastructure. You will not be able to meet any housing targets in Ontario unless you have sewage and water main infrastructure." It's more than nice to have. People like to flush their toilets. They like to drink clean water. These are things that we should actually expect in Ontario.

This paper goes on to say, "Contrary to this argument, however, local governments have long said 'downloading' by the federal and provincial governments, along with growth and urbanization, are the main drivers of increased local government expenditure." I would have to say that this is very spot-on. I can say that for sure for Kitchener, which has seen an influx of international students, immigration, government-assisted refugees and also refugees seeking asylum. These are vulnerable people who have come into our communities. They should not be sleeping on the street, Madam Speaker. We should respond to that call at every single level, and the province certainly should be playing a stronger role in that regard.

These concerns around the downloading were actually supported by several business associations, particularly on the taxation front. It goes on to say that "municipal costs have been growing faster than the combined rate of inflation and population increase." This is true. "In many cases, these costs are driven by decisions that are outside the direct control of a municipality and require some form

of collaborative action with other governments.” We absolutely agree.

The municipalities—the 444 municipalities in this province—are waiting for this government to come to the table in a true partnership and an honest relationship, and with funding, Madam Speaker. We are in a housing emergency crisis. This crisis requires an emergency response. This crisis requires emergency funding, 100%.

And so on the downloading, which is how we see these so-called voluntary payments for GO stations, they go on to say—they define downloading, so let’s just truly explore this concept:

“There are a range of ways this happens...:

“—Direct off-loading of federal or provincial programs and/or responsibilities without adequate funding or revenue tools”—check.

“—Regulatory changes that require spending by municipalities”—check.

“—Enforcement of federal and provincial regulations”—check.

“—Cancellation of programs and services that are needed or expected by the public”—check.

“—Reduction or cancellation of senior government transfers or program funding”—check.

“—Programs that are paid for municipally, but where municipalities have little control over costs”—check.

“—Grant-based or ‘one time only’ funding of down-loaded or new programs encouraged by senior governments”—absolutely, check.

“—Underinvestment by senior governments in infrastructure maintenance, renewal and replacement”—check.

“—Failure to adequately address issues or problems that should fall under provincial or federal jurisdiction”—absolutely.

And today, we also have the Financial Accountability Officer’s report, which points to the high cost that climate change will have on the budgets of municipalities and provincial governments and federal governments.

Why not build some resiliency into this budget? This would have been one of the issues that we would have raised with the fall economic statement had the government allowed more time for public consultation, had they allowed for more time for amendments. We’re going to clause-by-clause tomorrow. Those amendments are due by 8 o’clock tonight. We’re still waiting for legal rights organizations, for student-run organizations to give some feedback. Does this government want the feedback? Clearly not, Madam, Speaker.

At the end of the day, this paper sums it up by saying, “[there’s] always money to build something to provide short-term ‘feel good’ projects, but never any money to maintain them once they’re completed.”

What I will say about this government as it relates to this particular piece of legislation, Bill 131, is that you definitely have not crafted this legislation with an eye to actually having a respectful relationship with the people that are on the front line: the transit workers. This is a huge issue for us. I think, at the end of the day, this whole description of “voluntary” needs to be further explored.

Theoretically, it’s voluntary. It is likely that Metrolinx will delay planned service expansions if the local municipalities do not fund the GO stations.

So I want to say very clearly: Kitchener-Waterloo deserves a new GO station. They may not have the money to put on the table to get it. It cannot be funded off the local property base when we have such—we are embroiled right now in a housing humanitarian crisis, when right across from the Via Rail station you have people living in tents. This is not the Ontario that we should be fighting for.

If the government is serious about getting people off the 401, embracing public transit, you’re going to need something more than fare integration. You’re going to actually have to have stations that work for the people that we are elected to work for. And so where Bill 131 completely fails is that the downloading of financial responsibility for provincial infrastructure onto municipalities is problematic across the province, and this bill just doubles down on a flawed policy.

1630

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I will follow up on the same theme that I was asking previously about: the difference in powers between municipalities. I was saying that I could certainly contemplate situations where some municipalities might need powers that are different than what other municipalities had, and I certainly can contemplate situations where the city of Toronto might need municipal powers that other, smaller municipalities simply don’t have. Part of that is set out in this act. I was just wondering if the member from Waterloo might think the same way.

Does she think that some municipalities—in particular, the city of Toronto—might require greater powers than what some other municipalities have?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I would just go back to this basic principle that municipalities are the most, obviously, local level of government; they are the most accessible level of government; one would say that they are the most public-facing level of government, and therefore they deserve to be respected, and that respect should also include funding for provincial directives. This is what I would say to the member from Essex.

I would also say that local governments can and do efficiently deliver services and are happy to take on expanded roles when given the right resources. This is the missing piece with Bill 131. The province of Ontario needs to recognize that an investment in a GO station in a place like Kitchener is a good investment for the health, the economy and the well-being of the people we’re elected to serve. Bill 131 fails in that regard.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: The member from Waterloo and I have in common that our communities are hopeful for a GO station—in our case, a few GO stations—in the area. The Ministry of Transportation used to be really good at building infrastructure, and through the years, our capacity has been basically pulled out and thrown to the private sector.

I worry, with this plan for municipalities to have to pay for their own provincial infrastructure for the stations and work out that deal, effectively, with Metrolinx—what is that going to look like down the road? The municipalities will have a plan for recouping the cost and paying that back, and they'll budget for that. But the thing that we've learned with Metrolinx is, they ain't no guarantees on time or cost. So how can municipalities plan when it comes to this investment?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Oshawa. I think that this is one of the pivotal questions in this debate. If municipalities are being asked to fund their own GO stations, that money is going to come from someplace else.

This morning, in question period, we raised the issue of femicide and of gender-based violence and the fact that this government has not addressed it as an epidemic. In Waterloo region, we have seen the wait-list for shelters, for instance, rise. The region of Waterloo is trying to fill that gap, but you can't necessarily fill that gap on the local property tax base.

At the end of the day, what people want is a government to help with the transit recovery post-pandemic and to improve the lives of all Ontarians.

We would argue, on this side of the House, that the more people you get off the 401, the more you improve productivity and health and safety and the economy of the province of Ontario. So investing in GO stations is actually the job of the government, and they should do their job.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you to the member for her remarks. I heard the member talk about convenient and affordable access to public transit. These amendments are improving the rider experience.

In my area in the 905, we have fare integration between Burlington city transit and Metrolinx. This government removed double fares between GO Transit and the 905, and the opposition voted no. Now that we're pledging to extend this to the TTC, will the opposition say yes?

Ms. Catherine Fife: This is an interesting angle that the government likes to take. Whenever you introduce a piece of legislation, you always have a poison pill in it; it usually involves violating collective bargaining rights or underfunding one ministry at the expense of another.

We have said very clearly that we support fare integration. This makes a lot of sense on the front, but not when you're going to get taken to court for a constitutional challenge around collective bargaining rights. So I wish this government would just do their basic due diligence—respect the Constitution, respect collective bargaining rights, sit down with the people who are doing the work in our communities and our municipalities—and not keep sending that train one step forward, three steps back.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member for their comments today. This bill is yet another bill where this

provincial government is downloading onto municipalities costs that are actually provincial responsibilities. And we saw it under—you know, one of the main sources of the housing crisis that we have in this province is that the last Conservative government downloaded housing costs, supportive housing costs, onto municipalities which do not have the tax space to do it.

Now, this government has also downloaded a billion-dollar gift a year that they are giving to developers—a taxpayer-funded gift to developers—and they're not funding that. And in this bill, they're downloading the cost of GO Transit stations onto municipalities.

The question that I have is, why does this government—and I don't know, maybe you can give us some insight. Why would this government think, after all the downloads they've already made to municipalities, that municipalities have the money to pay for provincial GO stations?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you so much for the question. It just bears repeating that if the government is so on this one track, that municipalities are going to have to find the money, make the case, get ministerial approval, and then sort of figure out how much it's going to cost at the local level—these are barriers, each and every single one of them, to actually having a workable, amenable GO station in our areas.

What we would say to the government on this front is, why don't you reprioritize your efforts back on municipalities in a respectful way, in a true partnership way? Instead of you saying, "You can pay for this if we give you approval," why not say, "If you can do this, we will help you pay for it"? What a concept.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Newmarket–Aurora.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Speaker, through you to the member from Waterloo: Our government has been doing many things to make taking the transportation system much more convenient for transit people. And we are pushing more transit because—and I think we all agree. We want people using the transit system. Some of the ways we've facilitated this was in more ways to pay, and I know a lot of my constituents really appreciate that because it is much more convenient to them.

My question to the member is: With all of these improvements, I know the rider experience is better, because I've heard it from my constituents. When this government removed the double fares between GO and the 905, I know you voted no at that time. But now, is the opposition prepared to explain to riders why they are going to vote no to this bill?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you so much to the member from Newmarket–Aurora for actually raising this question. It does lead to another question about who you are listening to. Because in Kitchener-Waterloo, our students are being left at the station, even though the minister was able to get a double-decker bus. We still don't have a weekend train in Kitchener, Madam Speaker. We still don't have a train that gets people from Toronto to Kitchener-Waterloo, where there are thousands of high-

paying IT jobs available, in the morning. See, the whole thing about “two way” is that it actually has to work two ways. Right now, it only works one way.

I will say that Gideon Forman has said—and this should be of interest to some of you. This is an EKOS poll that found that 72% of Ontarians agree that the provincial government should help transit agencies cover operating expenses, because that keeps the cost of transit down. So, let’s work together.

I mean, this bill should have been amended. I don’t understand why it’s still before us in such a flawed state.

1640

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

MPP Andrea Hazell: I will be sharing my time with the member from Beaches–East York.

Madam Speaker, I hope everyone in this chamber agrees that we need to build more transit. We need more subways, more busways, more regional rail—we need it all. When it comes to GO, we need faster transit, more frequent transit. GO should not just be for commuters who work downtown, but as a web that connects Ontarians from all over.

When the Liberals were in power, we invested a lot in the GO system, particularly with massive investments—and this current government has reaped the fruits of our labour. Yet this government has very much slowed down on building new stations. Our government had begun work on new stations all over: in Bowmanville, in Innisfil, in Grimsby, in Kitchener, just to name a few. But, of course, in 2018, the Conservatives came in. Five years later, I am wondering where the stations are. Have any of the members opposite seen them? Oh, it seems the Conservatives forgot to actually build them—strange enough.

Having realized they completely forgot to build these stations, the government has realized it is more expensive to do so than it was a couple of years back. So they came up with a brilliant solution, which is development charges, taxes on new housing near the stations. Of course, the government spent a year talking about how we need to cut taxes on development because it makes building houses more expensive. A year later, we have municipalities in budget crises, the provincial government not covering the lost municipal tax revenue and the government adding new taxes on housing because they are too cheap to build GO stations themselves.

Now, the government is saying that this is to facilitate transit-oriented communities. I totally agree that we need more transit-oriented communities. I want to state that fact. But by shifting the costs of building the GO stations to developers, it will cause the housing in the transit-oriented communities to be more expensive to build, and then either more expensive for residents or it will just cause developers to get turned off from wanting to build at all.

In some places, this model might work. Kitchener was supposed to get a new central station to replace the old one, and there should be a transit-oriented community there, where it will intersect with the ION LRT line. Developers

very well may want to build there. Is it worth delaying construction for them when the government could have and should have started on it already?

The legislation suggests that municipalities would pay for the rest of the station that cannot be recouped from the new taxes on development. Interesting—but Speaker, most municipalities cannot afford to do so at this time. This is expensive infrastructure that is out of the traditional municipal wheelhouse in the best of times, let alone in the era of municipal budget crises.

I yield my time to the member for Beaches–East York.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Beaches–East York.

Interjection.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: It’s great to hear such support for Liberals speaking on this topic from the member across, who is quite vocal today. I appreciate that, always.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Okay, good.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Keep it going, actually. It will add to my speech.

So with Bill 131, An Act to enact the GO Transit Station Funding Act, 2023 and to amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006—it came to my committee, actually. Everything comes to my committee, at a rapid, fast and furious pace. All the destruction-of-Ontario bills come to my committee. But this one actually doesn’t seem—

Interjection.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Well, actually, they come to every committee.

Now, this one doesn’t seem too bad, actually, but let’s just talk about—you know, we’re working together. I mean, Ontarians want to see us work together, right? And they want us to build a better Ontario and create a safer, healthier space for them. So in doing that, I would expect, especially as a new MPP, that we would work together. So you can imagine, when I come to committee and I worked super-hard on amendments with the legislative lawyers—who are probably super-depressed, because none of the opposition amendments never get passed. So I want to take you through some of my amendments, just because they’re so scintillating. Pop your popcorn.

The initial one I wanted actually was requiring that developments built near transit stations have an affordable housing component requirement built in. You would remember this story I’ve told so many times, because I will continue to tell it until we get it right: 8 Dawes Road, a Metrolinx site near Main Street, if you’re familiar with Toronto, at Main and Danforth, a huge mobility hub, putting in a new egress there. Metrolinx sold the property without having any component requirement for affordable housing. That is provincial land, so how can we expect developers to build affordable housing if we don’t even model the behaviour? Anyway, amendment 1, rejected—surprise, surprise.

The next one I was suggesting, as I’ve suggested here: If you want to build housing, if you’re serious about getting shovels in the ground and attacking that housing crisis, well, build up along transit corridors. Allow as-of-

right development within an area around transit—you figured that out—but go up. Go up, and do it so that the developer doesn't have to be back at the city, back at the municipality all the time getting approvals. Do it as-of-right. Danforth Avenue in my area should not be two storeys. That's ridiculous along a subway corridor. You guys have the power to change it, but surprisingly, you voted that down, so there we are, 0 for 2.

We'll keep going. What do I have now? "Allow the municipalities to collect the charge for the purpose of funding future stations, as identified in the official plan and other community infrastructure necessary for a complete community, such as necessary services and affordable housing to accommodate future growth that is funded in an equitable manner." This actually came from the city of Toronto. Maybe you're not from Toronto, but Toronto is the economic engine of Ontario, whether you like it or not, so I might just heed the advice of the chief planner of the city of Toronto, who might have a little bit more experience, knowledge and education than any of us in here, because I'm not sure any of us have that planning expertise.

Also, "Provide for a municipality's in-effect official plan mapping and policies to identify potential future GO stations to which the charge would apply.

"Specify that the city of Toronto's share of the cost of SmartTrack stations that is not recovered through development charges be eligible for recovery through the proposed transit station charge."

And, "Make eligible for transit station charge recovery the municipal costs associated with creating complete communities, provided that they are not already recovered through the other growth-funding tools, such as development charges, community benefits ... and parkland dedication."

That was a great amendment, I thought, coming from the city of Toronto, and voted down, so a nice slap in the face there. We want to work with municipalities—we keep saying that—and there's not a lot of respect there.

Another one—okay, we already did that one—"Include a time frame for ministerial approval of no more than two months." It seemed reasonable; voted down, in a great effort of collaboration.

Then, you know, we want to talk about riders. I don't know how many of you have been on transit lately, or ever, but it can be challenging. We want to improve service, we want to improve safety, so I proposed a single flat fare, to only require one fare to be paid with a tap-on, tap-off system where using multiple transit agencies—so all over Ontario, right? Voted down. I guess we're not really—maybe transit riders aren't voters. I don't know. I don't know why you would vote that down.

1650

And the last one: "Provide for a municipality's in-effect official plan mapping and policies to identify potential future GO stations to which the charge would apply." I think this is part of the City of Toronto Act. Anyway, all those voted down—not sure why, because we're supposed to work together on bills, on policies, on legislation. It's

not about us infighting, just about respecting Ontarians and building a better Ontario.

People who came to the hearings were the region of Durham, Toronto Region Board of Trade—TTCriders had a lot to say, actually—Hatch, city of Oshawa, York University. Economists came. They gave all their input. We want them to share their voices, and that's what we asked for. From that, we created our amendments, because we listened to them intently because, quite frankly, I respect Ontarians. I think we all should, and we should do better to work together.

I just encourage you to work together with all parties and, when the member puts so much work into the amendments, to give them some consideration and not just blanket vote them down, because that's not collaboration. Those are my thoughts. That's my story on the bill. We will give it some consideration.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Madam Speaker, through you to the member from Scarborough—Guildwood, I think it's interesting to hear the conversation that's coming out right now. Because I know when I speak to Liberal friends, Liberal colleagues, Liberals in my own riding, they always talk to me about the need for intensification and that we have to build transit communities. I said, "Yes. Here, you understand." So when we're in the midst of a housing crisis, and we're seeing the number of people experiencing homelessness increasing, can the member opposite explain why we wouldn't do everything in our power to ensure that we're creating more accessible housing opportunities, such as the Transit-Oriented Communities Program?

MPP Andrea Hazell: To the opposite member, thank you for that question. You're speaking to someone who is representing Scarborough, who is representing Scarborough—Guildwood. All my life in Scarborough, since I left the Caribbean, we are the forgotten city when it comes on transportation.

Mrs. Robin Martin: That's because they keep voting for Liberals.

MPP Andrea Hazell: What I want to extend that on—*Interjections.*

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Keep going.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Yes. So what I want to talk to you about is, Scarborough needs a busway. I don't know who's speaking to you from the Liberal Party, because they spoke to me. They are very concerned that there is no shovel in the ground in getting what you're stating to get done. And I also know how important it is to make sure the commuters get to work, get to school, get to their jobs. I understand all of that, but we're not seeing it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's an interesting debate, because there's history in this place. You actually have to see it to believe it sometimes. I will say, though, that from our side of the House, we actually have been advocating since 2018 for fare integration because it does make sense. However,

the government puts in place a downloading to the municipalities to pay for GO stations that they don't have and that they're going to have to make really difficult choices about, especially when we are in a homelessness and housing crisis. So, at the end of the day, you can say, "Okay, give municipalities the right to apply to build their own GO stations." But also, at the end of the day, they don't have the funding for it.

I would just like one of the Liberal members to comment on that, because the downloading of infrastructure really did begin under the McGuinty-Wynne government.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much for the question.

What I would say is that I would agree on these municipalities—

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Everything?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Not everything.

We've heard it time and time again. I've heard it in person and out and about in Toronto, but also at committee on how strapped these governments are going to be with losing their development charges. I also heard at committee many times how people thought members in this chamber thought that, "Oh, well, that's just a big treasure trove. That's a treasure chest of money that these municipalities are just sitting on," like they're—I don't know, who was it? Rumpelstiltskin was sitting on the gold? Who was sitting on the gold? I don't know—the little leprechauns, which they are not.

The municipalities have said time and time again that this money, the DCs, have been specifically allocated for crucial infrastructure projects already. Those projects are yet—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you.

Further questions?

Mrs. Robin Martin: I listened intently. My question is for the member from Scarborough–Guildwood. I listened intently, because I remember the former member from Scarborough–Guildwood, Mitzie Hunter—I think I can say her name because she's not here anymore. When she was with CivicAction, before she ran to be MPP for Scarborough–Guildwood, she opposed subways. And then, suddenly, as she was running to be the member for Scarborough–Guildwood, she was in favour of subways.

But the member from Scarborough–Guildwood said, "We don't see the shovels." That's because it's a subway, member from Scarborough–Guildwood. Are you aware that there is a giant boring machine digging a tunnel that a subway will go through every day under the ground? Maybe people have felt the ground shaking a little bit, because that's what's going on over there.

We're really excited. We're going to get subways finally in Scarborough. They should elect more Conservatives in Scarborough because then they could get more things. Conservatives are very happy to make sure that we deliver—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the member. Response?

MPP Andrea Hazell: I am very happy with your comment, because I'll tell you what happened in Scarborough with that same subway that you're seeing built. I worked on a project in the Golden Mile area where business suffered. Businesses had to close because of the disruption. We're now looking at the subway finishing being built in, what is it, 2030? I hope we can see that happen.

Small business was disrupted, had to close, creating high unemployment.

You're talking about shovels in the ground and the predecessor before me supporting transit. You didn't hear me well. I am supporting transit. I know how important transit is to the commuters getting to work and getting to school on time. But we are suffering in Scarborough, I can tell you that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the members from Scarborough–Guildwood and Beaches–East York for their presentation.

In our discussion today, I was thinking back towards the 2022 election, and also the 2018 election. Many promises were made and many promises were not kept, thinking about the Ontario Liberal promise about buck-a-ride. It reminds one of buck-a-beer and how neither of those things ever showed up in the province.

My question to the member from—either member—is: Is it fair to raise taxes on local taxpayers to pay for these GO stations when that is a provincial responsibility?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much for that question. I am a big transit supporter, as I hope all of us are here, especially in a climate emergency, when we want to take vehicles off the road. But we need to give people a safe, affordable, accessible and clean alternative.

I ride the transit here. I also drive a car, believe it or not, but I ride the transit here. I also bike. So I see, day in and day out, about the transit.

In elections, yes, there are things—you know, gimmicks thrown out there, slogans and whatnot. Anything that I put out, personally, is usually related to my community and my community's needs, because I listen to their voices everyday.

1700

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mme Lucille Collard: I want to thank my colleague for being here this afternoon and talking on these very important issues. I know those are Toronto-oriented questions, and that's what the bill is about. I'm from Ottawa; we have our own issues with the public transit. I know that you are very strong on collaboration, and the collaboration between the province and municipalities is so important in advancing those policy changes—and collaboration, also, with members of Parliament to represent their residents.

I would like to ask you to talk a bit more about how this government could do better on collaboration with the key players in making those policy decisions.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'm glad you brought up Ottawa because I went to school there and took the transit and I chased OC Transpo in the snow. You could snap my ears off, they were so frostbitten.

Again, we want good transit for everyone and not just in Toronto, but everywhere. I don't think Ottawa has been treated too well from this government, actually. We know what happened with the horrible situation with the convoy, and we wonder about some people knowing that Ottawa is actually in Ontario. We might need to do a field trip, which I'm happy to do, and you could lead that, member from Vanier.

Yes, I think the government could do a lot better a job in collaborating and respecting their municipal leaders in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Ms. Doly Begum: It's a pleasure to always rise in this House, especially to speak to an issue that's so important to so many people: transit. Every single day, people in my community and across the city use public transit to get to work, to school, their doctor appointments, hospitals, to buy groceries, visit family—wherever they need to go. And then, obviously, get back home. Those are long, long days and long commutes for so many people, especially in Scarborough. I represent a wonderful community where a lot of people in our community have no choice but to drive because they don't have accessible transit available to them.

Speaker, today when we talk about this, I think of all my constituents who have shared their struggles with me. As the wintery days come and it's cold, it's snowing and there are horrible roads, think of someone with a stroller with a kid or carrying lots of groceries, or think of someone in a wheelchair. Recently, we voted down a bill that I, myself, with my colleagues brought forward to have accessible transit, and this government had the audacity to vote down an accessibility bill, claiming that they're already working on it. Yet, we have station after station that does not even have elevators in this city, in this province—in one of the best countries in the world. It's shameful.

Today, as we talk about transit, which is so critical and so important, we as legislators must do everything possible to make sure that we are doing everything that provides good public transit, available for our constituents and for the people of this wonderful province. And we must make sure that it's accessible transit, it's public transit and it's affordable transit for everyone.

This bill is called “transit for the future.” Well, folks, gather around for me to be able to actually tell a little bit about transit from the past or planning from the past—because when we think about transit for the future, we really have to do a little bit of digging or maybe looking into history about transit from the past and what took place, because that's very important. We should learn from history and learn from our mistakes.

Once upon a time, we dreamed a dream of something called the Eglinton LRT. I want to take a moment,

Speaker, to actually quote a little bit of a timeline that David Nickle, in the City Centre Mirror, from toronto.com, wrote in September 2021. In this timeline of the Toronto Eglinton Crosstown LRT, he highlighted, from 1985—to what took place:

“1985—Metro council and the Toronto Transit Commission proposed a busway along Eglinton West.

“1986—A coalition of city of York and Etobicoke Metro—at that time, that was the city of York and Etobicoke Metro—“councillors and the region of Peel persuade Metro council to include an Eglinton West subway in a new transit network plan.

“1994—NDP Premier Bob Rae announces funding for the Eglinton West subway. Work begins.”

With the New Democratic Party in power in the province, we actually had shovels in the ground.

Again, going back to the timeline from David Nickle:

“1995—Progressive Conservative Premier Mike Harris cancels the Eglinton West subway—work is cancelled and the already-begun tunnel is filled in.”

They literally put cement on already done work on tunnels that were already dug up, work that was done. Shovels were in the ground, and we were actually going to get a subway, and then guess what? The Conservative government took power. Premier Mike Harris, at that time, came on board and said, “No, we're going to put cement on this plan and literally fill the holes with cement.”

I'll go back to the article.

“2007—At the beginning of his second term as mayor, David Miller announces—a progressive mayor—“Transit City, a light-rail network that includes the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, which would go underground between Laird Drive and Keele Street.

“2009—Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty agrees to fund Transit City, including the Crosstown LRT.

“2010—On the day of his swearing in, Toronto mayor Rob Ford announces—and I'm sure the Premier would be happy to hear that—“Transit City is dead.” That's a quote from the late Mayor Rob Ford. “The Eglinton Crosstown LRT is cancelled. Ford proposes it be replaced with a subway.” We'll take a subway.

“2011—Ground breaks on the revised project at Black Creek Drive.

“2012—Toronto council overrides Mayor Ford's plans, and reinstates Transit City with a Crosstown LRT included. Project management is handed over from the Toronto Transit Commission to Infrastructure Ontario”—now, there's a name we've been talking about in this House for a while.

Sorry, I digress. Let me go back to the article, Speaker.

“Project management is handed over from the Toronto Transit Commission to Infrastructure Ontario, who retain a private contractor to oversee the project.

“2013—Tunnel boring machines (TBM) start digging the underground portion of the line from Keele Park, and traffic restrictions on Eglinton begin.”

And we know a lot of the history of what took place, how many businesses closed down, how many community members and how many neighbours suffered.

“2014—Tunnel boring machines arrive at Eglinton West station.

“2015—Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca”—there’s a name—“announces that the Crosstown will likely open in 2021. Infrastructure Ontario grants the construction contract for the Crosstown to Crosslinx, a private sector consortium. The second set of tunnel boring machines start heading west at Brentcliffe Road.

“2016—Tunnel boring machines reach Yonge Street from west and east. Work under way on all 16 underground stations.

“2017—First piece of track is installed at Mount Dennis.

“2018—Eglinton maintenance and storage facility complete.

“2019—Crosslinx informs Metrolinx that the line cannot be complete before 2022”—one-year delay.

1710

“2020—Crosslinx removes tunnel boring machines. First public artwork installed at science centre, Mount Dennis stations.” I don’t even know if we’re going to be able to call that “science centre” anymore if this government removes the science centre—but, again, I digress, Speaker. There are so many thoughts.

“2021—As of July, more than 90% of the rail has been installed.” Hopefully, we’re going to get something soon, right?

Then, “2022—Expected completion and opening.”

That was in an article written in 2021, so I know David Nickle from *toronto.com* was hoping that by 2022, we would have the opening. But then obviously we’re now in 2023, and we’ve heard recently from Metrolinx CEO Phil Verster—who could not give us a timeline, who could not tell us the specific status and what was happening, and there have already been tracks installed that were ripped apart and reinstalled. There’s a lot of problems, a lot of complications happening as well.

I know that a lot of the journalists, a lot of the reporters, along with a lot of community members felt like, from 1985 till today, their hearts have been broken when it comes to transit, especially for folks like me who really deeply care about public transit.

The Eglinton Crosstown project, when we think about how it began in 2011—no, it actually began decades ago. The previous Ontario Liberal government had their fair share of failures when it comes to transit, when it comes to underfunding, but we also have to remember what Premier Mike Harris did at that time and where we are today.

Originally this was scheduled to open—and currently we’re about three years behind schedule, not to mention the billions of dollars, by the way, we are over budget for as well. I should also mention that there have been numerous lawsuits that have arisen between the consortium responsible for construction and Metrolinx, with claims over \$500 million, and recently Phil Verster has stated that there is no deadline—while he was given a raise. A lot of people have called him the million-dollar man, and with his 59 vice-presidents—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, and 20 C-suite executives.

Ms. Doly Begum: And 20 C-suite executives—but, again, Speaker, I digress.

It just raises questions about the way the government is using public dollars. The responsibility this government has, how they’re using public dollars and the priorities it has set within Metrolinx, in the face of all the delays and the struggles that people face and the budget overruns, it really raises a lot of questions, because people that I’m talking to in my community, they’re still struggling to get accessible transit in their communities.

When we talk about the issues of Metrolinx, when we talk about the Eglinton Crosstown project and I look at this bill and I look at the two schedules: schedules 1 and 2. I’ll start with schedule 2, because schedule 2 really looks at municipalities, downloading costs to municipalities and how they would work with agencies like Metrolinx, for example. The issue surrounding the Eglinton Crosstown project raises a lot of concerns about the competency of Metrolinx and the competency of the CEO, who is being paid millions of dollars for a job that he’s not getting done, and really managing the public transit system, including GO stations, including the work that they will do in the future.

Let me just give you a little bit of an idea of what we deal with when it comes to Metrolinx. Just a few days ago—last weekend, actually—I received a message. And I want to thank Nancy and John who reached out to me on the morning of, I believe it was, Friday, when we heard that, basically, a Metrolinx line we have, a large oak tree which is, I think, over 100 years old was being chopped down by workers who were doing their jobs, I understand. But they were given the go-ahead by Metrolinx to cut down this tree to make way. And guess what? The public did not have any awareness about it. Let me tell you why—because the public has raised a lot of concerns in the past to have clear communication with Metrolinx. When Metrolinx informed us of this, with less than 24 hours’ notice, they decided to go cut down the largest and longest oak tree—in what is called the Oakridge community, by the way. That neighbourhood is called the Oakridge community, and they cut down the largest oak tree, the oldest oak tree that we had there. This is the type of thing that communities are frustrated with and that’s what they deal with. They just decided to chop it down.

If it was getting in the way and if there were real solutions to make sure that we’re going to take care of the community, take care of the environment, we’re going to be doing something that actually makes up for that loss—understandable. But tell the community about it. Be transparent and be accountable so that you are going to take action to make sure that you understand what the community needs are.

We have asked Metrolinx for a noise barrier for years now, so many community members who have advocated for it—nothing yet. We have yet to get any result from Metrolinx on that.

When I look at schedule 2, I see that, first of all, we have this government, instead of taking in the cost, instead

of funding responsibly, actually downloading the cost to municipalities. They're telling the municipalities "Do what you can." And then basically—you know what, one of the things that I'm more concerned about is what it means for transit fares, because it may actually increase fares for people as well, because the government has taken that responsibility away. And we know their history. We know the history of underfunding when it comes to transit.

They're doing this through something called a station contribution fee, which includes the recovery of construction costs of the new GO stations and the revenue must be used for intended purposes. Obviously they're talking about infrastructure building and they're talking about stations being built, but doesn't the government have any responsibility to do that? We know how much of a struggle it has been for a lot of municipalities already because of the actions of this government in dealing with the costs that municipalities have.

Now, basically, we're telling municipalities, the cities to take on the financial risk of constructing the GO Transit station, with approval from the ministry: "We'll give you the approval but you take care of the financial risk." This, typically, is the responsibility of Metrolinx. We just talked about Metrolinx—which is a provincial agency, by the way, so the responsibility is supposed to be with us here, but you're downloading that responsibility to the municipality while you have a provincial agency that will do the construction. There is so much of it that does not make any sense.

Schedule 1 of the legislation talks about fare integration. First, I want to applaud the Ontario New Democrats, who have been calling for a provincially funded transit fare integration policy for years. I thank the government for listening because we do need fare integration and we need to be doing it well, and it's the New Democrats who have been calling for that. But with that there comes a lot of responsibility.

We're glad to see that work is being done to make sure that there is fare integration, that there is service integration. Last time I spoke to this bill, Speaker, I talked about my own experience as a student and a volunteer who went from York region, using the TTC, and then had to get off the bus or give a second fare to get through to where I was going. I know so many people, even now—and I know the member from Markham–Thornhill talked about his experience as well. We know that because we both went to the same event and worked on the same project many, many years ago. So, we are glad to see that there will be service integration and that that's coming into a reality within the GTA here, specifically in York region, Mississauga, Brampton and Durham region.

New Democrats have been calling for this for years, so it's great to see that it's happening. But when we see how essential it is and when we see what has taken place, we have to make sure that it is done right. Let me explain, in my few minutes left.

1720

Fare and service integration is essential to make sure that we are greener, we're more affordable and we have an

accessible future. But we need to make sure that we are focusing on our workers as well. We need to make sure we do not infringe upon the collective bargaining rights of transit workers who work so hard, who work day and night to make sure that they provide the best service.

I want to just take a moment to actually say what they're going through because the difficulty of the job is unimaginable for a lot of us, for example, who sit in this House. They're the ones on the front lines when it comes to dealing with violence, when it comes to cuts to funding, when it comes to suicide on the subway. In 2019, I believe, the TTC actually came forward and revealed some of the stats and talked about this openly, because this is a controversial topic where you don't want to share too much detail of the suicides that take place, but you also want to be able to create public awareness of what's happening.

A lot of the transit workers who are out there on the front lines deal with these kinds of scenarios, deal with these situations because we are facing a lot of struggles across the province. We're facing an enormous amount of homelessness, mental health struggles, and a lot of people who are on the front lines deal with these kinds of issues, deal with the aftermath of it, and transit workers are one of those groups that deal with it. We have to make sure that they have a good job and they have the benefits they truly deserve, and we have to respect their collective bargaining rights. We have to make sure that we do that right.

In my 30 seconds left, Speaker, I just want to say, when we do all of this, the best way is to make sure that we're funding transit properly. We have been demanding, for the TTC, for Ontario to fund 50% of the operating funding, and it's about time that we do that so that we can make sure that transit gets done and we have to make sure that people across this province—and I know in my community, we truly appreciate having accessible, affordable transit that takes them to where they need to get to and to be able to get back home to their families.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to go to questions.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'll just continue along the same vein that I had done so previously. I was taking a look at the act; the act gives enhanced powers to the city of Toronto under the City of Toronto Act. I noted that the city of Toronto has greater municipal powers than other municipalities in the province of Ontario. I expressed the view that that's perfectly fine because the city of Toronto, being 2.7 million people approximately, has greater issues to deal with than other municipalities. I think it is perfectly acceptable that the city of Toronto would have greater powers than other municipalities might have.

Now, I put that question to this member: Does she think it is okay for the city of Toronto to have greater powers than other municipalities?

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member from Essex for that question because I think he needs to go back to the legislation and maybe read it one more time to understand what this bill actually does when it comes to

what he's referring to, which is greater power for the city versus downloading a lot more responsibility, dealing with the cost and the financial risk that comes with it. So is it about greater power? And what kind of power are we giving them? Because with great power comes great responsibility, and we know from this government that you can have great power but not have the great responsibility that you're really required to have.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Mr. Chris Glover: I really appreciate the member's history of transit and how Scarborough has just been shafted by Conservative and Liberal governments in the building of transit. As you pointed out, in 1995, the NDP government had started to build a subway, an Eglinton subway, and that would have been completed in 2004. So Scarborough would have had a subway for 20 years if the Conservatives had not filled in the NDP subway station.

And then, under David Miller, the NDP mayor of Toronto, there was Transit City, and Scarborough would have had a five-stop LRT starting in 2017. It would have been completed in 2017. But the Premier's brother, when he was the mayor of Toronto, cancelled that plan. So right now, they're building a subway, a three-stop subway, in Scarborough. How long will it be—and they've closed the Scarborough LRT. When will Scarborough actually be getting—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you.

The member for Scarborough Southwest to reply.

Ms. Doly Begum: Let me thank the member for his question, because he is absolutely right: Scarborough has been shafted for 20 years, 30 years. We pay our fair share, we pay our dues, but every single time, we get the short end of the stick, if anything, and every single time—it is so unfortunate, because Scarborough, every single time, gets left behind, especially when it comes to transit.

When I look at this bill, and even the title, that's not very hopeful to me, because when you say "transit for the future," I don't know how many more years we're looking at for the future to get those subway stations in Scarborough. I am not hopeful, Speaker. I'm very concerned about that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: In response to my question, the member said that with greater power comes greater responsibility, and I certainly thank her for the Spider-Man quote, but I was referring to the City of Toronto Act. I think that the City of Toronto Act, specifically as contemplated by schedule 1 of this bill, gives greater powers to the city of Toronto.

I'm not quite sure why members of the NDP caucus have difficulty answering the question; I have no difficulty answering it myself. It seems to me that the city of Toronto requires greater powers than other municipalities. The member wanted perhaps an example of a specific power, so I direct her to schedule 1. Does she think that the city of Toronto should have the powers set out in schedule 1 of this act?

Ms. Doly Begum: I answered the question already, Speaker. As I said, the city of Toronto is going to be dealing with a lot of financial risk, and they're going to be using an agency like Metrolinx that this government completely set free to do whatever it wants.

I just gave you a timeline—an entire timeline, if you were listening—and that is the most bogus question I've heard. Oh, my God. Read the bill again. I would really respectfully ask the member from Essex to read his own legislation and understand the actual impact that schedule 1 will have, that schedule 2 will have, because we are talking about the city being able to actually do the work that the province is completely downloading on the cities without taking any responsibility, and you're going to be using an agency. So maybe you should read the legislation again; I don't know.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: To the member from Scarborough Southwest: She actually has been on the subway. She actually has been on the bus. When I came out there for the by-election, I have to tell you that I actually had to get off the bus, it was that crowded, Madam Speaker. And it was families, it was front-line workers who were just trying to get from point A to point B with their families. I remember it was really hot and a family was trying to shelter their children at a station, and it was so obvious to me that Scarborough has really just been taken for granted, despite our efforts as a party. Our past leader, Andrea Horwath, actually went on the subway and did a three-and-a-half-hour commute from point A to point B.

So my question is, why do you think this downloading is actually going to improve anything for the people of Scarborough? Because clearly this government has a track record of leaving Scarborough—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Response?

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much for that question from the member from Waterloo. This morning, actually, I took the subway to get here, and let me tell you, sometimes I go to Victoria Park station; sometimes I go to—because depending on which bus is available and how long I'm walking, I can take the three stations that I have in my riding.

Let me tell you, Speaker: If you go to Warden station, it's still under construction. We still don't have an elevator there, so for those who are going to that station, they can't get off there. They have to go to a different station, get off using the elevator if they need that, if you're in a wheelchair, and then you come back to Warden station. Or you take a bus, for example, so you have to make sure that you go to a station that actually has accessibility to be able to get to the bus. That is the reality of Scarborough. Every single time, we get left behind. But guess what, Speaker? When the fares increase, when the hikes happen, we also have to suffer for that.

1730

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member from Scarborough Southwest for her comments.

I've been out in Scarborough quite a lot and spent quite a lot of time out in Scarborough too, so I know what goes on with Scarborough transit, and I've long supported a Scarborough subway out there. I think it's really important. Our government was requested—we received requests from the city of Toronto and the TTC to make the amendments in this piece of legislation. So I hope the member opposite can confirm to us that she is going to support that, because I'm sure she wants to see a subway built in Scarborough as well.

Ms. Doly Begum: To the member from Eglinton–Lawrence: I will always support transit for Scarborough. I will always stand up for the people of Scarborough, the people of my community, to have good, accessible, affordable transit. And if that means we get those subway stations, if that means we get the extension done, I will always support that. I will always support the city of Toronto to be able to do the work that they need to do, but they also need to have good funding, they also need to have the support of this government—and I hope you will support that, when it comes to the city of Toronto and when it comes to Scarborough.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I rise in the Legislature today in support of Bill 131, the Transportation for the Future Act, 2023. This piece of legislation brought to the House by the Minister of Infrastructure and the Associate Minister of Transportation is so important. And I would like to commend the ministers on their leadership and all of the marvellous work they are doing across the province. We have made a lot of progress since forming government in 2018.

Madam Speaker, I just want to say that our population has been growing fast, and since our government was first elected in 2018, we have demonstrated a commitment to building world-class public transit systems across the province. We're spending more than \$70 billion over the next 10 years to build new subways, expand GO Transit, improve service standards, and give municipalities the support they need to deal with increasing ridership.

We need to invest in public transit. This is so important, and we see the importance of it—this is greater than ever before. Our government has a bold vision to breathe new life into our transit infrastructure. This will help reduce gridlock and greenhouse gas emissions, get people to their destinations quickly and safely, and improve the lives of Ontarians across the province.

As we have emerged from the pandemic, transit ridership has rebounded. We have to make sure that we work very closely with municipalities. We need to support them and work together with them, in partnership, to make sure that the riders are getting moving.

Through the provincial gas tax program, we are providing more than \$379.5 million to 107 municipalities. This funding has helped ensure municipalities across Ontario continue to deliver safe and reliable transit services. This funding can be used to extend service hours, buy transit vehicles, add routes, improve accessibility or upgrade infrastructure.

By working in collaboration and co-operation with our municipal partners, our government has helped make public transit more accessible, no matter which part of the province you call home.

I would also, at this time, like to highlight schedule 1 of this bill. We have been working very closely with different municipalities, especially with the city of Toronto. In the City of Toronto Act, we have barriers. Riders travelling across Toronto's municipal borders are faced with limited transit options. This makes it very difficult.

I still remember, when I was running my business, I had to travel from Richmond Hill down to the city of Toronto. Gradually, because of gridlock, I decided to not work with the clients that were in the city of Toronto. This really affects the economic development in Ontario.

However, when we work very closely together with municipalities, especially with local 905 agencies—MiWay, Brampton Transit, Durham Region Transit and York Region Transit—we are giving more options to the riders. They do not have to wait for the next bus and continue with their route; they just have to go onto the one bus or the one transit that will take them to their final destination. This has been something that the city and TTC board have been wanting us to work on together, and we are working together with them on this bill, especially in schedule 1. All we have to do is, when we work together, the riders only have to take the first bus available regardless of which transit agencies provide the service.

I am really happy, Madam Speaker, that in delivering the largest transit expansion of its kind in Canadian history, not only do we have the Yonge North subway extension, the Scarborough subway extension and the Eglinton West extension, we are moving as quickly as we can to get this done, which is why we have the Building Transit Faster Act.

The transit projects are held up by bureaucracy and red tape as well, but we have been working very hard to cut back all the red tape and streamline the projects. We are minimizing the delays transit projects may encounter by removing more barriers. The one that we mentioned earlier is one of them, but we have been working on different things to make sure that we enhance the coordination between the members as well as municipalities so that shovels can be in the ground as fast as we can.

Madam Speaker, our government is building the transit that the people of Ontario need and deserve, regardless of where they are located. For example, in Richmond Hill, where I call home, we are building the Yonge North subway extension. The Yonge North subway extension will extend the Toronto Line 1 subway approximately eight kilometres north of the city, running from Finch station up to Richmond Hill. This project spans the city of Toronto and York region and includes sections within the city of Markham, the city of Richmond Hill and the city of Vaughan.

The Yonge North subway extension will be a game-changer for commuters north of Toronto. The extension will put 26,000 more people within a 10-minute walk of a subway station. It will also accommodate more than

94,100 daily boardings. It will significantly reduce vehicle traffic during rush hours, slashing greenhouse gas emissions by 4,800 tonnes per year. It will reduce travel time to downtown Toronto by as much as 22 minutes, so that helps us a lot when we travel from Richmond Hill down to the city of Toronto.

By making transit more accessible to people north of Toronto, we will reduce traffic congestion and create thousands of jobs. During construction, the Yonge North subway extension will generate \$3.6 billion in economic benefits. Once the extension is complete, there will be 22,900 more jobs within a 10-minute walk to a subway station. Preliminary work on this vital piece of infrastructure began earlier this year at Finch station, which is currently being upgraded to accommodate additional subway service. In April, we issued a request for qualifications for the advance tunnel contract.

1740

The Yonge North subway extension will completely reinvent how people in Toronto and the surrounding area go about their daily lives. We will continue to collaborate with our municipal partners to ensure that we deliver world-class public transit. That is why we're investing in public transportation in every region of the province.

Speaker, I urge the House today to vote in support of Bill 131, because this is only good for all of us. It will make us work with our municipal partners and the transit agencies, and this spirit of collaboration will make it much easier to get the hard work done.

We urge everybody to support this bill, Bill 131.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member for her presentation. Here on this side of the House, we're very much in favour of transit investment. It is a social good. It is something that helps diminish our impact on the environment. It takes cars off the road. Yet, we see a pattern of behaviour from this government that really has impacted the relationship with municipal partners. It's been quite disturbing, in fact, to see the amount of downloading—you know, Bill 23 and the \$5 billion that has yet to be made up by this government.

To the member: Does the member think it's fair that this government is finding yet another avenue to download their responsibilities onto already beleaguered municipalities?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you, member, for that great question. I would not call it "download," but I would call it "partnership." That's why we're hearing from the municipalities the need that they see: what is required to have better transit for their municipalities. We're working together with them.

Not only did we make sure that we work with them, just now as I was mentioning, but we made sure that we integrated very closely with them so that we have the fare that we can go across the province in different transportation. We are also working to make sure that our government is also building more GO Transit stations together with them, and this is really just helping the municipalities in building their communities.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you to my colleague for her remarks. Many people in the greater Golden Horseshoe area rely on transit to commute into the city for work. More and more, we're seeing people from the city commute to the 905, and they are riding on multiple transit systems.

Can the member from Richmond Hill tell us about the anticipated outcomes of the proposed amendments in Bill 131?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you, member from Burlington. Yes, Bill 131 really helps the service integration. These amendments are being tabled with the understanding that this will improve cross-boundary travel and achieve more convenience and options for the riders. They only have to pay the one bill, get the first available transit, and are able to take it from one place to the next. Working together with the municipalities, this is the best service that we can provide to all our riders.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Richmond Hill for her comments on Bill 131. I just want to say that today is actually national Long-Term Care Awareness Day and I just want to say, I really still am very hopeful that the government will call Bill 21, the Till Death Do Us Part Act.

I will segue nicely into the fact that seniors also use public transit—more and more so, actually—and the need for it to be accessible is costly, because we have to refurbish a lot of the stock. At the same time, these are costs that are still being downloaded to municipalities. It's not partnership if you don't come to the table with the necessary resources to ensure that everybody has an inclusive and accessible way of getting around our respective cities.

So to the member for Richmond Hill: How do you expect municipalities to foot the bill for Bill 131?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you, member for Waterloo. I appreciate you thinking about the seniors. We have been thinking about the seniors all the time, especially with transportation. We understand the needs for the seniors, but in the Ministry for Seniors, we want to make sure we partner with not only the municipalities but with the all the agencies in the different municipalities to make sure that we care for the seniors in the way that they will not be just staying at home. We want to make sure that we get them to participate in a lot of other programs. So transportation is something that we do care about for seniors, and we are working on that, but in the meantime, it is much more important for us to get the people of Ontario getting from one place to another in a smooth way.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's my great pleasure to rise and to add the voices of the wonderful people of London North Centre to the debate that we have in front of us for Bill 131, the Transportation for the Future Act, 2023.

From our side of the House, the Ontario NDP are always great supporters of public transportation. It is a

social good. It is important for people who are just starting out. It is important for young people. It's important for students. It's also important for folks who might be differently abled as well as folks who might not be able to afford a vehicle of their own. It is also an environmental benefit, because the more cars we can get off the road and the more people we can get onto transit, the better carbon footprint we will have. It will be much less, and it will be something that we can all support and get behind.

However, with Bill 131, it is concerning to see much of the same pattern that we've seen for so many years of provincial governments abdicating their responsibility—not abiding by the principles that they should be upholding and instead trying to divorce themselves of responsibility by placing it down, by punching downwards, by forcing municipalities to pick up the tab for their responsibility.

Now, as I take a look at Bill 131, we've heard the minister and the parliamentary assistant talking a great deal about GO Transit. In my riding of London North Centre, we were quite pleased to have been tapped to have a pilot project for GO Transit before the most recent provincial election. It's something that is an economic benefit. It would connect London, properly, to Toronto. It would be something where people could commute—have a great service. However, it's been said that it was a system that was, really, doomed to fail right from the outset.

In fact, I'd like to quote Kelly Elliott, who had said, quite rightly—it was almost as though Kelly had a crystal ball, and Kelly tweets, “the province put together a” half-baked “plan”—I'm changing those words—“and is now throwing their hands in the air, saying, ‘Well, we tried—no one rides it’ and that is why we cannot have anything nice.” And Kelly, also quite rightly, says, “It's almost like I've said this from day 1 this would happen.”

You know, it's really quite concerning, because when we first had this announcement of GO rail from London to Toronto in October of 2021, Metrolinx said it would spend \$2.5 million dollars on the two-year trial. It was something that we welcomed. But unfortunately, it was placed upon tracks that were quite slow, not the best tracks, and it ended up being a four-hour commute from London to Toronto. Can you imagine, Speaker? When that commuter train was taking nearly twice the amount of time—to get from one to the other—twice the amount to drive, how does that take people off the road? How does that make any sense? How is that actually benefitting the great people of London North Centre? They committed to the study and, unfortunately, they didn't put the funding behind it that was necessary.

1750

But, Speaker, what is also deeply concerning is that this government made quite a number of flashy promises. This was put forward in campaign literature; this was put forward in many different ways, on social media, through traditional forms of media, and I'd like to quote that for you today. This was on May 12, 2022, just a few short weeks before the June 2, 2022, election. This is London, May 12, 2022: “A re-elected PC government will invest an additional \$160 million to improve the speed and

frequency of all new GO train service between London and Toronto.” This was something we absolutely welcomed. They committed. They promised, they put it—it's still available actually on the Internet for anyone who would like to see it. It's on the PCs' own website.

So they committed to that \$160 million. Now, when you make a promise, when you put that commitment out either verbally, in writing or on media, would it not make sense to honour that promise? Would it not make sense to follow through with that promise? Would it not make sense to make that funding flow? But you see, Speaker, promises that happen from this government in general, but especially before elections, rarely seem to make it onto the other side of the election.

I'd like to continue with their words. They said they “will invest an additional \$160 million to improve the speed and frequency of all new GO train service between London and Toronto.” They pat themselves on the back, saying that this is the first time in Ontario's history that it's going to connect London, St. Marys, Stratford, Kitchener-Waterloo, Guelph and downtown Toronto. When you look at that time, that four-hour time between London and Toronto, they even say that it's a lower-cost, convenient alternative and that it significantly reduces the current one-way travel time for commuters giving them more time to spend with their families. That sounds fantastic, doesn't it? It sounds like a great plan; it sounds like a great promise. It's such a shame that, once the election was decided, that promise went into thin air.

I'd like to quote some of the students from my riding. Post-secondary students, unfortunately, are saddled with some of the highest fees for post-secondary education in Canada and unfortunately rely on transit to get them back and forth to visit their families or perhaps to go to a job. They had said in the *Western Gazette*:

“As someone who has lived in the GTA my whole life and love the GO train commute, I was disappointed when I recently took a trip from London to Toronto on their new route.... The route has one direct trip from London to Toronto at the crack of dawn—5:14 a.m. to be exact—ending at 9:13 a.m., and one return trip leaving at 4:19 p.m. and reaching London at 8:19 p.m.”

Is that commuter service, Speaker? Does that make any sense for anyone who's showing up for a job in Toronto? You're getting there after 9 a.m. and then to have to wait until almost the end of the day to return, you're not even getting home for dinner, not even spending time with family, and yet the Conservatives promised they'd spend \$160 million, they would fix it, they would make it better, they would improve it, and then with Bill 131, we see the direct opposite of that. They're now expecting municipalities to pick up the tab. They're not going to spend the \$160 million they promised. They're, in fact, going to simply download.

I'd also like to quote another individual: “Limiting the train to weekday service means there are no trips on Saturday or Sunday when students travel most.” Kind of reminds me of the comments from the MPP from Waterloo. Were you not saying that there is no weekend trip to Kitchener on GO service?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know. It's true.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Does that make any sense? How is that good, robust provincial transit? It simply isn't.

Also, if we look at the times, the one way there, one way back, this quote says, "Students want to know if they miss one train, they're not stuck and that there's going to be another trip in a couple of hours"—absolutely. Things come up in our lives. Sometimes there are things that we can control and sometimes things that we can't control that might prohibit us from getting to a location on time. That happens quite a bit. For students to possibly miss one of these trains, it would impact their entire day and, in fact, cut them off from being able to make that trip.

As well, I speak with a lot of people who live in rural areas around London who are really desiring a more robust regional transit system. This GO service was supposed to be the beginning of an entire regional plan. There are wonderful jobs in neighbouring small municipalities. The farmers have great jobs, good-paying jobs, long-term jobs that they simply can't find people for. There are farmers who actually have to contract and hire their own van to go collect people and to bring them back at their own cost, and that is irresponsible. That is unfair. They should not have to do that.

We look at areas like St. Marys, areas like Stratford, that have been simply shut out, have been ignored from this province's overall transit plan. I kind of wonder whether they even have an overall transit plan. It seems—

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a moving target.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: —very slapdash, very haphazard. It is absolutely a moving target.

What is also really surprising when we consider this broken promise in light of the announcements made with Bill 131 is that that announcement that I had said, Speaker, was made on May 12, 2022, and by July 2—it was barely a month after the provincial election in 2022 that they cancelled it. They had already forgotten the words that came out of their mouth; \$160 million simply vanished, never to be seen again.

This article is from July 2, 2022: At the time, a Metrolinx spokesperson said, "We remain committed to serving commuters and will look to redeploy those assets where appropriate to meet demand." I don't think that any of those resources are being redeployed anywhere in the London area, Speaker.

Also, this project, the GO Transit pilot project—you can't look at the results in a real legitimate way because, unfortunately, six months after it was first launched, not only was it set up with a very long timeline, but also the pandemic hit. So, really, looking at the statistics and the numbers, we know that the pandemic completely upended ridership. The numbers—that they would say it was underused, underutilized, well, unfortunately, those numbers don't necessarily ring true.

Today we have before us Bill 131, and we see a government that has not invested properly in regional transit—quite the opposite, in fact. This downloading, this punching downwards, this abdication of responsibility and expecting municipalities to fund their own GO Transit

service makes absolutely no sense, Speaker. This is the time where government should step up. Government should look—it's a cost-of-living crisis that we are living in. We want to connect communities. We want to build that robust infrastructure that will last for generations so that people can have the access to the economic prosperity that is going to make this province even stronger and better. Part of making Ontario a robust engine and a robust economic place to invest is transit.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): My apologies to the member from London North Centre.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): It being 6 p.m., it is now time for private members' public business. There being no business designated, pursuant to standing order 100(e), I will now call for orders of the day.

1800

TRANSPORTATION
FOR THE FUTURE ACT, 2023
LOI DE 2023
POUR UN RÉSEAU DE TRANSPORT
ORIENTÉ VERS L'AVENIR

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 22, 2023, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 131, An Act to enact the GO Transit Station Funding Act, 2023 and to amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006 / Projet de loi 131, Loi édictant la Loi de 2023 sur le financement des stations du réseau GO et modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la cité de Toronto.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Resuming the debate, I call on the member from London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Wow, it's very interesting to see how time changes and how things stay the same. Taking a look at—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Time marches on.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Time marches on, absolutely.

Now, if we look at the bill itself, we see that they are talking about transit fare and service integration. This is something that NDP absolutely agrees with. This is something that makes sense. However, it is something that doesn't necessarily make sense when we are considering transit riders who regularly cross municipal boundaries.

What is concerning is some of the stipulations within this bill do not necessarily respect workers. This government—not only do they have a pretty terrible track record when it comes to environmental protections—right in their first few months, they were actually ripping out those electric charging stations from GO stations, weren't they? These were ready to go, they were ready to charge electric vehicles, and they were simply ripped out of the ground. This government also has a disturbing track record not just on the environment, but a disturbing track record when it comes to the way in which they treat workers. We've seen a lot of ironically titled bills where they're talking about

workers, but you see within their legislation that they simply aren't respecting collective agreements. They simply aren't respecting the people who make this province strong. They aren't respecting the front-line folks who go to work every single day and make Ontario better every single day, whether it's Bill 124, which was a direct attack on those front-line health care workers, on folks in education, and folks in so many different sectors in the public service.

Within Bill 131, they have a provision within it which is concerning to us on this side of the House. One wonders if this is the poison pill that they have placed in there. It's a provision that bypasses the ATU Local 113-TTC collective agreement. It's bad. It makes no sense. They can't, on the one hand, say that they support workers and then on the other hand do the direct opposite. It doesn't work like that. You have to have your actions match your words. You should have your legislation, the stipulations that you find within your legislation, match what you say or what you're trying to promote within this province.

You know, this government is one that I don't think people find much trust with anymore. We see that they are pretending to support workers, and yet they are allowing them to sidestep collective agreements. That's something that we can't do. That is against the charter. That is something that's going to cost money down the road. Not only is it wrong to workers, but it's yet another legal fight that this government—I would say that they can't afford to lose, but unfortunately, this government is having a party with the public purse. They can afford to lose it because they're not using their own money, really. They're using taxpayers' money. They're funding legal battles that they keep losing again and again—so many that they have lost. I, quite frankly, can't even keep track of all the legal losses that they have managed to accumulate. It's certainly lopsided. There is no legal battle that they are afraid of losing. Meanwhile, their track record should keep them from doing that.

That being said, when we look at schedule 1, it re-enacts an unproclaimed schedule 1 of Bill 2, the Plan to Build Act. It allows the Toronto Transit Commission to enter into service integration agreements with neighbouring transit agencies. Now, this is all in spite of the TTC's statutory monopoly on transit services within Toronto. This agreement is not a sale; it's not a transfer of the TTC under the Labour Relations Act. It adds a provision that clarifies that such service integration agreements do not constitute contracting out for the purposes of a collective agreement, and it's specifically the ATU Local 113-TTC collective agreement. Speaker, is this necessary? It's deeply disturbing to us.

Now, schedule 2 will allow a municipality, with the consent of the minister, to impose a transit station charge, which the government is calling a "station contribution fee" on new developments within a designated area around a proposed new GO Transit station. So what this government is suggesting is that local taxpayers will have to pay more, when people are in a cost-of-living crisis. A municipality can ask people to dig down deep into their

own pockets and pay for a service that the province ought to provide.

That seems wrong, Speaker. The province is responsible for transit, the province is responsible for creating those links, and yet what this government is doing through Bill 131 is reaching their hand into municipal taxpayers' pockets. It has often been said that there is one taxpayer, but they have punted down this responsibility, even though they have the money. There's \$5.4 billion in their contingency fund at this current time. They could certainly afford it. Typically, governments have a \$1-billion contingency fund, and they just recently were so flush with cash that they've put in \$2.5 billion more halfway through their budget cycle, because there's so much money.

That \$2.5 billion that they didn't know what to do with, that they've decided to put into that contingency slush fund, they could have spent on GO Transit stations. They could have spent it to make sure that rural municipalities and smaller places have a more robust transit system, so that peak goods were able to get to market, that people were able to get to good jobs and our province functions even more effectively. But yet, what we see within 131 is that they're not even passing the buck, because they're hanging on to the bucks. They're stuffing them into their contingency fund. What they're doing is they're abdicating their responsibility. They're forcing municipalities to ask their already strapped taxpayers to pay yet more money for something that the province ought to be responsible for.

Speaker, on this side of the House, we believe that transit is a public good. Transit is a social necessity. Transit is a key economic driver. This government has got it wrong if they think it's fair that they are downloading their responsibility onto municipalities. This is deeply unfair. This is deeply irresponsible. This harkens back to the past Liberal government, who for 15 years saw every way fit to not step up, to not do the right thing and to not look after people. The government must do better.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite from London North Centre for his comments today. It's interesting: This government has made enormous, historic investments into transit—I think it's \$75.5 billion—but it's never enough for the members opposite. It's always, "We want more. More, more, more."

But these are historic investments into transit, so what I'd ask the member opposite to think about is whether you should be supporting the initiatives in this bill, the initiatives which were requested by the city of Toronto, by the TTC, so that we can make sure that we can deliver fare integration in Toronto, the greater Golden Horseshoe and the GTA, because I know my constituents here in Toronto want that.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for the question. Within my remarks, just to remind the member, what I was talking about—she talks about a historic investment, and what I would like to remind the member is that we had the

historic breaking of a promise: \$160 million was promised to southwestern Ontario and London specifically, and that promise, that \$160 million, was broken.

So if you want to talk about historic investment, you should be investing in transit connections for southwestern Ontario, for rural municipalities that are within the region. Because of that disinvestment, because of that broken promise, we saw places like Stratford, St. Marys and Perth county who were all let down by this government. Don't say something unless you're going to do it. Don't make promises that you're not going to keep. That is simply wrong. You can't talk about a historic investment when you have a broken promise, and the evidence is clear. It is part of the historic record.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Ms. Doly Begum: I also want to thank the member from London North Centre for his remarks on this bill. I know he cares deeply about transit in London. When it comes to the actual implementation we're talking about, again, Metrolinx—and I want to ask, seeing what we're seeing across the province, the work that Metrolinx has done, and this government's failures, do you really have trust in Metrolinx or this government?

1810

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to the member from Scarborough Southwest for an excellent question.

This is all about trust. We are living in a time when people are in a cost-of-living crisis, and they should be looking to their political figures and their political leaders to be ones who are offering solutions, offering hope and offering a path out of this. And unfortunately, we see a government that is quite fond of cronyism and helping insider friends, with the greenbelt carve-out that was going to benefit a few well-connected people to the tune of \$8.3 billion.

In the situation of Metrolinx, we have the \$1-million man, Phil Verster, who, despite all of the failures of Metrolinx, the delays on the Eglinton Crosstown that have been going on and on and on, the promises that have been made year after year after year about all-day, two-way GO service to Kitchener, which there is no deadline for now—and there seems to be no hope in the future.

Faith in this government is really at an all-time low when it comes to so many different files, and it's unfortunate. They could do a lot better.

Simply, keep your promises.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you for your remarks.

One thing that I hear all the time and I speak with my constituents about is intensification—intensification around transit. So when we talk about transit-oriented community stations—the contribution fee—we know that this is going to help enable funding to provide much-needed transit and housing around that GO rail corridor.

So my question to the member is, are you supportive of this policy that will help all levels of government provide

more transit and unlock more housing in their communities?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Newmarket–Aurora for her comments.

To return to my comments—we saw disinvestment in southwestern Ontario. We saw \$160 million that was promised to provide better regional service within the area; that was taken off the table.

Here on this side of the House, we're also very much in favour of intensification, of municipalities building inwards and upwards. They have reported time and time again that they want to do that. They don't want urban sprawl. This is something that is supported by the federation of agriculture. And yet, instead, we saw policies from this government that contributed to urban sprawl. We saw Mr. X, who had a company “MZOs are us”—all of these ridiculously named characters, almost as if they were out of a Batman comic book.

Unfortunately, this government is saying some of the right things, but quite frequently the things that they are doing really have no relation to the things that they promise.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to thank my seatmate and colleague for really raising the inequity in service along that southwestern corridor, for train service. I feel like we are about 10 years ahead of where London is right now. We've been promised bullet trains, high-speed rail, every-15-minute service, and even weekends, and of course, none of that has come to fruition.

It's really interesting to listen to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence challenge you—that “you just want more, you just want more.” No, we just want the government to invest in needed infrastructure and not download those responsibilities and those costs to municipalities. This is your core business and the business case—and yes, we do want more. We want more transparency. We want more accountability. We want less brown paper envelopes. We want less destroyed government emails. We want less RCMP criminal investigations into the government. That's what we want. We just want the government to do the core investment that is needed. What do you say to that?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank my seatmate, the member from Waterloo, for an excellent question.

We see a government that is mired in scandal. You can see the fear in their eyes. I wonder if they're always listening behind them to hear whether the sirens are going to go off, because they're currently under a criminal investigation by the RCMP. It is really, truly unprecedented and that must weigh on a lot of their thoughts each day, and possibly on some members' consciences.

I speak with TIAO, the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, who have indicated that in the area of Collingwood, the cost of things have gone up so much under this government—the cost of housing—that they're actually having to provide housing for people to work in

resort areas. Tim Hortons actually has to hire their own van to go collect workers from neighbouring areas, just to come and work a shift.

This is a government that could invest in transit yet chooses not to by downloading to smaller municipalities.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I always enjoy hearing from the member for London North Centre, particularly because London and Windsor have a lot in common, and the ongoing rivalry between the cities.

What I think the commonality is that exists is on transit. With transit, I know it's tough to get the density required, and we know the climate change crisis is worsening. And so, I would love to hear from the member opposite about the advantages of getting people onto transit, having fewer people on the road, and whether that's a good thing, as what is being attempted to be addressed through this bill.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh for his question. Obviously we know there are benefits to getting people on transit, but my question back to that member is, what is the benefit to this government by cancelling their promise? What is the benefit to this government by breaking their word? What is the benefit to this government by not honouring the commitment that they made, by pulling that \$160 million, the pre-election promise, off the table once the election was done? What benefit is that? How has that benefited his residents in Windsor–Tecumseh, who would benefit from greater GO service? Obviously we need to intensify transit all the way through southwestern Ontario.

I'm surprised that that member is talking about investments when this is disinvestment. The examples that I've given you here today are money that has been pulled off the table. I'm very surprised that the member would ask that question when it is his government that took away \$160 million.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am glad to be able to stand and speak about transportation for the future, which is a big and exciting topic, although this bill leaves something to be desired. Many of the things we could talk about with such an illustrious and exciting title, I guess we'll leave for another day. This is third reading, Speaker, so it has been to committee, through and out the other side.

This is a bill that has two schedules, and the first schedule allows for transit service integration between the TTC and other local transit agencies. Unfortunately, though, it's going to undermine provisions in the ATU 113-TTC collective agreement, which is unnecessary and problematic, obviously.

The second schedule would allow municipalities to fund new GO stations as part of a development proposal, but could also allow Metrolinx to download financial responsibility for provincial infrastructure onto municipalities. Speaker, you and a handful of others in this chamber—we all hail from Durham region, and we're quite interested in extending GO train service all the way

to Bowmanville. And so I'm looking forward to talking a bit about that journey and some of my concerns, to ensure that the infrastructure that the folks in the Durham region—well, and frankly across the province—count on or are looking forward to happens, and that it happens well and that it doesn't saddle municipalities with the kind of debt that they could never get to the other side of. That's one of my big concerns with schedule 2.

I want to talk first about schedule 1. The NDP supports transit fare and service integration; of course we do. We have long fought for fair fare integration. The problem with this bill, Bill 131, is that it interferes with free collective bargaining. Schedule 1 of Bill 131 suspends the contracting out language that the collective agreement ATU 113 has with the TTC. It is unnecessary. That is problematic. The ATU 113 collective agreement allows for transit service integration between the TTC and other transit agencies, but the union has to be at the table for those discussions.

1820

So, while on the one hand I'm excited about fare integration, on the other hand, I feel a very definite need to uphold free collective bargaining. Right now, in downtown Toronto, the Ontario Federation of Labour is having their convention. Congratulations to Laura Walton, who is the new president, and more about her later because when we talk about this government's track record with disrespecting workers and collective bargaining, I think of Laura Walton, and I think of the CUPE folks who stuck their necks out there and really were up against it with this government.

We saw that story have a much better ending than we had feared, but it was a shame on this government at the time that those workers, who are not well paid and, I would say, not fairly compensated for the important education work that they do, had to stand up for themselves and stand up to their full height. And they had the support of their communities because their battle was a battle about fairness and respect for workers. Unfortunately, here we stand talking again about an unnecessary attack on workers' rights and again having to stand here and call on the government to respect free collective bargaining.

Speaker, as I said, as a New Democrat, we are very pleased about fare integration and we're going to take that win. That is a positive. We've always said it was a positive, but it is our work that we have accomplished with community allies. Certainly, New Democrats never claim the win without their communities because that's where our initiatives, that's where our fight and that's where our power comes from, is the folks who send us here.

This is a way that New Democrats save people money, but we propose to fund operational costs for transit 50-50 with municipalities. It's a way to ensure fare integration doesn't happen at the expense of transit service, and that is the work that we've been doing with community allies.

I've got lots of notes and articles here. Let's go back in time a little bit to talk about the history of fare integration in this place. This is from an article, March 2023: "Is It Finally Time for Transit-Fare Integration in the GTA?" A

bit of background—I'll read this quote: "Take transit-fare integration, the notion of allowing transit passengers to pay a single fare when they get on a bus in, say, York region, move onto a GO train, and then board a TTC subway. The Hansard at the Ontario Legislature says that the words 'fare integration' were first uttered by a MPP in 1986...." I don't know how old all of us were in 1986 or if some of us existed in 1986, but that's a long time ago.

It continues, "Though, even then, it was a member saying, 'This has been discussed on and off for the past 15 years or more,' so we can say with some confidence that it's an idea that MPPs have been talking about for" half a century. Here we are—and that's good. We're talking, and we've got a bill in front of us.

Also from this article: "Metrolinx wants to charge commuters by distance, but the largest transit operator in the region ... has substantial reasons to resist that. Sometimes solutions move forward by finding a workaround." This is an article looking at the board of trade's proposal. There has been a lot of back and forth and work has been done, and this is where we have gotten today—again, unnecessarily with a swipe at collective bargaining—to have fare integration. But we don't want that to be at the expense of good service.

Speaker, I'll move on to schedule 2 of this bill. Schedule 2 allows a municipality, with the consent of the minister, to impose a transit station charge—which the government is calling a "station contribution fee"—on new developments within a designated area around a proposed new GO Transit station. The objectives of the station contribution fee include the recovery of the construction costs of the new GO station. The revenues must be used for the intended purposes.

The municipality must first complete a background study meeting prescribed requirements and consult the public. The station contribution fee is payable upon receiving a building permit. A transit station charge bylaw is not appealable to the Ontario Land Tribunal, unlike development charge bylaws, and cabinet may make regulations governing transit station charges, including the rule for when the charge applies.

Speaker, this is an interesting one. Schedule 2 might provide municipalities with the means to negotiate accelerated GO Transit expansion in areas planned for major growth. A transit station charge offers a more focused revenue tool in which developments most likely to benefit from a new station are responsible for more of the costs, as opposed to a development charge that applies to all developments across a municipality, including those that would not benefit much from the station.

While this tool is theoretically voluntary, it is likely that Metrolinx will delay planned service expansions if the local municipalities do not fund the GO stations. The MTO had told us that while the Bowmanville GO expansion will eventually occur, Durham municipalities are likely going to be waiting longer unless they pay up. That would be true across the province.

Municipalities are already struggling to pay for municipal infrastructure, especially after Bill 23. Now,

this government is signalling that municipalities may also need to pay for provincial infrastructure if they want transit any time soon. So obviously, we have some concerns.

Speaker, I want to tell you—and it's not a new story. I think any community in this province is needing better coordinated transit. Whether I hear from my colleagues in the north, in the Far North, whether it's folks in downtown Toronto or people in Oshawa or Waterloo, people want to get where they're going, or they want to be able to make plans to get where they need to go and have that transit, that transportation, be reliable. Whether that's commuting to downtown, whether that's commuting across the city, whether that is being able to get to medical services predictably—it's different specifics, but it is a shared need across the province.

The folks in my neck of the woods have been wanting this GO train expansion into the Durham region for a really long time. This is from an article in June of 2023. Clarington mayor Adrian Foster—he's my neighbour. He's the mayor who is quite interested in what's going to be happening in the Bowmanville area. He said, "I am thrilled to see the infrastructure planning contract go ahead, so that we can finally connect our community to the rest of the GTA through GO Transit'...."

"The Bowmanville expansion has been a talking point for years. Provincial transit agency Metrolinx first completed the environmental project report for the project in 2011, and is currently accepting"—well, back then, was accepting—"public commentary."

The thing about this Bowmanville train: When I first got elected in 2014, which isn't that long ago but feels that long ago—I guess, nine years—the Liberals at the time, I remember, they put up the signs and they took all the pictures and it was coming. And it is still not there. So, I'm a little wary when it comes to the train and when it comes to transit. I will believe it when I see it.

1830

I do have faith, though, that this is moving forward. I was pleased when I saw transit funding for the rail allocated in the budget, because that's new. What is concerning, though, is that there weren't going to be any stations. Like, there's no money for stations. That's not a thing.

Before this bill and before we had some clarity on what the plan was going to be, I asked the then Minister of Transportation at, I think it was estimates, about the station. It was a quick question—I was running out of time—but I wanted the assurance that the folks who were going to be on the train, which the government said was going ahead, would be able to get off the train, because without money for stations, was that train going to bounce all the way to Bowmanville and then bounce back and you could wave?

I remember the member from Kitchener-Conestoga and I quietly had a little tête-à-tête afterwards, trying to figure out how, without the stations, people were actually going to disembark. And the minister at the time, when I was like, "Can they get off safely? Are they going to

jump?” and I remember that she, basically, looked at me and said, “We’re going to make sure they can safely get off the train.” I see her here tonight and she’s still nodding. Yes, we’re not going to have folks just jump from the train.

But this is why I read this bill with such interest, because this bill lays out plan B. Plan A should have been that as a province responsible for provincial infrastructure, they would fund it, like they have since—I don’t know; way before my time, okay? The province builds infrastructure, pays for infrastructure and makes sure that people have what they need, but not anymore, okay? So now, if you want a station, you’re going to have to come up with a way to have that built and pay for it. What we’ve got here with this bill is a creative solution that allows those municipalities to recoup that money over time and basically fill in the holes that they’re making and paying for it up front.

It will be up to municipalities to figure out what that investment looks like and who they partner with. Not any of our municipalities have piggy banks shoved under the mattresses, like, “Oh, look, station money.” My concern is that when they’re working with an organization like Metrolinx, you know, with the illustrious Phil Verster at the helm, what assurances do they have that their plan for paying that back and recouping those costs, which will come from the tax base, right—when they are paying that back, will they be paying it forever? If they make a plan that’s 20 years—I’m making that up, 20 years or 30 years—of pulling that money back to pay for the station, I don’t see any Metrolinx projects that are on budget and on time anymore. So, if their plan, as responsible municipalities, is—I’m making this up—a 25-year repayment plan that’s based on, I think—I don’t know. I wouldn’t take that to the bank. I would encourage municipalities to be careful when they’re dealing with Metrolinx and make sure that they don’t hand it over to end up in a P3 situation where they can’t see it. They want to keep eyes on it. They want to keep accountability and they want to stay within reach so that they can continue to make responsible plans when it comes to budgeting.

Speaker, we all want transit. We want it to be safe. We want it to be efficient. We want it to be dependable and reliable, but we also do need it to be economical. We want it to not have a giant cost yet-to-be-determined, which is unfortunately what we’re seeing with Metrolinx projects. How can a municipality accept responsibility for funding a project when they do not control the planning, the procurement or the delivery of that project? Because that’s what we’re looking at here. To me, that seems like a very uncertain prospect.

And, listen, I have met with regional chair John Henry in the region of Durham and I will say—I don’t mean to mischaracterize how they are feeling about this. The region is excited to have the GO train, and they are looking forward to these stations and to being partners and getting that done. I think the first choice for everyone would be that the province paid for this and made sure it happened, but because that offer is not on the table and the province is no longer in the business of building provincial

infrastructure—in this case for stations—then I’m glad that there is an option B that’s better than nothing. The third option is, “Never mind, we’re just going to keep talking about a train and it’s never going to get there.”

I will read, though, from AMO. Specific to this legislation, AMO had said in a statement about the “station contribution fee, which would fund new GO Transit stations in the GTA by allowing municipalities to spread costs to new developments. The bill, the Transportation for the Future Act ... allows municipalities to build ... GO stations and recover the costs from the transit-oriented communities around them. Where market conditions are not conducive to a partnership with a single developer, municipalities would be able to spread costs over multiple developments for a longer time period.”

I think everybody, though, is wondering what happens with the smaller municipalities that don’t have as many tools to reach for. Will the government work with them if they cannot find that magic investor or be able to develop those relationships to pay for those stations? Will the government still show leadership or connect with them? Or will people have to jump from the train? I’m being a bit dramatic. I hope that doesn’t happen. I don’t think anyone thinks it will happen, but—

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: But it’s illustrative, “There’s money for the rail, but not for the stations. We’ve got to figure it out ourselves.” So for some of the municipal partners that will need help figuring that out, I hope that the government won’t leave them stranded.

Again, the NDP supports fare and service integration. We have a lot of disappointment about the attack on workers’ rights, which is not needed for the fare and service integration. The principle of asking developers, who benefit from transit station construction, we think that asking them to help fund such construction, that’s not a bad idea.

So we have been looking at this with interest. We still have questions. But, again, why can’t this government do something positive without the smackdown to workers? That’s disappointing.

Anyway, I’ll leave it there, Speaker, and be glad to take questions.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member from Oshawa for her comments. Certainly I appreciate hearing of your engagement with the municipal officials.

I’ve got a quote from Clarington mayor Adrian Foster. He says, “This is a huge step forward”—this is with respect to Bill 131—“to finally connect our community to the rest of the GTA through GO Transit. I am thrilled to hear about this innovative tool for building new GO train stations.

“The faster the two stations planned for Clarington can be built, the quicker the GO train can come here, bringing better transit options for our residents and a better quality of life.

“I want to thank our staff and the region of Durham for their partnership in the vision of vibrant transit-oriented

communities around the stations. I also want to thank the Ontario government for their determination to complete the GO Lakeshore East extension and strengthen the economic potential of Clarington and Durham region.

“We are finally making significant progress in bringing the GO train to Bowmanville.”

So I'm wondering if the member can explain. Is the mayor of Clarington wrong in supporting this bill?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Mayor Foster's quotes are great. I'd love to have that. I support everything that he just said there because the thing is, that mayor has waited a long time, along with his constituents, for this train.

The staff at the region of Durham has worked—I'm going to guess—overtime to come up with how to make this work and to come up with a solution, in partnership with this government, to figure out how to pay for stations to make sure that the people across Durham region have the train and the transit.

The big, giant, flashing neon light here is the province should be paying for provincial infrastructure. So the fact that they're not anymore, then, yes, this is the second—I guess this is the next best thing. But why on earth are you putting municipalities in that position in the first place and walking away from your responsibility as a provincial government?

1840

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to my colleague from Oshawa. Bill 131 introduces the Transit-Oriented Communities Program, which has raised questions about transparency and risk allocations. Why is it vital to have a clear idea of safeguards as it pertains to the past actions of this government and integrity? Should the bill ensure this program operates transparently and equitably, and why is that critical?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: We would love to have transparency. I know that municipalities and folks generally wish they knew what was going on. We cannot trust Metrolinx. Municipalities are going to spend years recouping costs. Hopefully, that recouping will be able to be predictable and they can budget for that.

That was a conversation I had with my region, which is, I basically said, “Don't let Metrolinx out of their sight.” You have to keep your eye on the ball. That's if they can get a station within a reasonable time and budget. If anything is predictable with Metrolinx, then they can budget for that, but as soon as it goes off the rails, pun intended, then they're left holding the bag financially, and I worry about that.

I think we need to have the transparency. Any time we're dealing with provincial infrastructure, it should be accountable. We don't see that in this province with Infrastructure Ontario and Metrolinx. It's just all hidden behind, right? That's going to be a problem for municipalities who are doing their best to provide infrastructure now that should be provincial.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Madam Speaker, through you to the member from Oshawa, I know a lot of comments have come out with concerns regarding the municipalities. It has been the municipalities who expressed their interest in partnering with the provincial government in delivering on our provincial priorities. In fact, we did work with the municipalities as a stakeholder all the way through in developing this bill.

This being the case, my question to the member is, why is the NDP continuing to stand in the way of the government working to provide the tools to help municipalities deliver new transit for their communities?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I would like to say, I am glad that you have been working with municipalities on this. I wish that you had been consulting with municipalities on other things like, oh, I don't know, Bill 23.

You're choosing to work with them now to find a solution because the government is no longer willing to pay for stations. So yes, of course, if you're like, “How do we get out of building stations? Let's work with our partners,” and you're coming up with thoughtful, creative solutions with municipalities—they've got wicked awesome staff there, but so does the Ministry of Transportation. The Ministry of Transportation has been building roads and building infrastructure for years, right? So I worry that the government has forgotten the strength of the civil service. Everything they do now is privatized and out there. Look at Metrolinx; what a mess.

I support transparency, I support partnership, but maybe on all things, not just the things that you're trying to clear off your plate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciated the comments from my colleague the member for Oshawa and, in particular, her reminder of the advocacy that the NDP has done to push for fare integration across the GTA. You know, when you look at house prices in Toronto, when you look at who works in downtown Toronto, it's many people from around the GTA who have to take multiple transit systems to get to their jobs downtown. So fare integration is an equity and affordability priority. However, can the member comment on some of the problems with the government's approach to achieving fare integration by overriding collective agreements?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Fare integration, as I said already, has been a long conversation and an even longer need, so we're glad to see that. We've been long advocates on that. The problem is that what this government is doing is they're failing to uphold free collective bargaining. Schedule 1 of this bill suspends the contracting out language of the collective agreement ATU 113 has with the TTC. And it's unnecessary because the ATU 113 collective agreement allows for transit service integration between the TTC and other transit agencies, but the union has to be at the table for those discussions.

So, this is unnecessary and it's disappointing. The government's contempt for free collective bargaining this time a year ago with CUPE education workers should have taught them how to do things better, and yet, here we are.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Well, the member knows what I'm going to ask. Schedule 1 of this bill sets out enhanced powers for the city of Toronto under the City of Toronto Act. The city of Toronto, as we know, is a municipality with approximately 2.7 million people. I happen to believe that giving the city of Toronto greater municipal powers than other municipalities might have is fair and appropriate. I think it's okay for the city of Toronto to have greater municipal powers than other municipalities have, probably because they have to deal with things that other municipalities might not have to deal with. So that being the case, I think that that's fair and reasonable to expect that.

I'd like to know whether the member thinks it's all right to give the city of Toronto greater power than other municipalities.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I think it's important to give, in this case Toronto, but all municipalities, what it is that they need to be able to provide the service that their constituents deserve and are asking for. It will be interesting to see whether the current mayor chooses or needs to use those powers. Working in partnership with municipalities is key, but my colleague earlier had mentioned that with great power comes great responsibility, which is fun to say, but it's a real thing.

I do think, though, that just more power without support—like, are they asking for more power or are they asking for more government support? I guess I'm not sure. What is the power specifically—have they asked for that? What is it that they're wanting from you?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate? Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a pleasure to rise tonight on behalf of the people that I represent in London West to contribute to this third reading debate on Bill 131, the government's Transportation for the Future Act.

I want to begin by taking members back to May 2022, when the Conservative government released a campaign platform that made some pretty specific promises to the people of London. They committed to bringing thousands of jobs to London. They committed to investing an additional \$160 million to improve the speed and frequency of GO train service between London and Toronto. That was a pretty attractive, appealing prospect because Londoners had never had that opportunity to use GO train services in our community, and London has a great need for that connectivity between southwestern Ontario and the GTA.

So, the prospect of being able to use GO trains to get back and forth between London and Toronto caught a lot of people's attention and, in particular, the government's commitment to invest \$160 million to provide that service made people think, "Wow, this is going to be a great service. This is going to enable us to get from London to downtown Toronto in time for a morning meeting. We can spend the day in the city in meetings, doing the work that we need to do, and then we can get back to London in time to spend an evening with our families."

1850

What happened instead, Speaker, was that that \$160-million commitment never materialized. Instead, we heard from Metrolinx that they were prepared to spend \$2.5 million on a pilot project that would provide GO train service between London and the city of Toronto. Because Metrolinx was only prepared to spend \$2.5 million, the service that was provided, the service that they were able to fund was not the kind of Cadillac service that London was expecting and had reason to anticipate because of the commitment that had been made prior to the election. The service that we got was a four-hour train ride that left London in the wee hours, the pre-dawn hours of the morning. It spent four hours to get to the city, to get to downtown Toronto, with some brief stops in St. Marys and Stratford, I believe.

And so you can imagine, Speaker, that a GO train service that took four hours to travel between London and Toronto, when you can drive from London to Toronto in two hours or you can take Via from London to Toronto in two hours—a four-hour GO train that left in the pre-dawn hours of the morning and returned late at night was not going to attract very many riders. This is supposed to be the pilot project that is going to generate data that will inform future decisions about GO service between London and Toronto.

So what happened after this pilot project started? In the first month of the route, 37 people a day travelled between London and Toronto, and 65 people a day travelled the following month, the second month of the pilot project. That was pretty much the pattern for the two years of that pilot. The last GO run between London and Toronto was on October 13, last month, and that concluded the two-year pilot. Guess what they decided when they evaluated the pilot, when they looked at the data? Guess what, Speaker? They decided that there's not reason to provide that GO service, that it's just not attracting the kind of ridership that is necessary.

So my disappointment with this bill—the bill talks about the opportunities for municipalities to expand the GO train service if they make a commitment to fund a GO station. Now, we're not talking about building a GO station in London. We have a Via station; the pilot that was in place was using the Via station to provide the GO service. But this bill before us today doesn't speak to the reality of people in southwestern Ontario. It doesn't address the transportation needs of people who live in London, people who live in those small communities, small rural communities surrounding the city of London.

We know that to provide that kind of service between London and Toronto in London you have to have a way to attract the riders who live outside the city but would be willing to come into the city if they knew they could get a two-hour train service, or faster, to London. That has been an ongoing priority issue that people in my community and in the southwestern Ontario area have raised with this government: the need to create a regional transit network that would allow people from outside the city to get to London so that they can access the transit services that,

hopefully, should be provided by the province to be able to travel into Toronto. So that's the first concern that I want to raise.

The second concern I want to speak to with regard to this legislation is that it also fails to address the challenges facing public transit systems, more generally, across the province. During the pandemic, we saw a dramatic loss of revenues for municipal transit systems, and I know there was some support provided for transit systems to get them through that period of significant loss of riders and revenues. But transit systems in London and, I'm sure, in other communities have not been able to rebound to the level that they were at prior to the pandemic and the level that they need to be at in order to serve the people of the community.

We heard today from the Financial Accountability Officer another report about the impact of climate change on provincial infrastructure. Climate change is real. Climate change is something that we have to address, and one of the most effective ways to address it is through public transit systems—making sure that we have robust, well-funded public transit systems that can attract riders and get cars off the road. But transit systems like London Transit Commission are struggling. This fall, the city of London is going through a budget process, and city agencies, like London Transit Commission, have made a request to the city, identifying the need for a 22% increase in the funding that they receive from the city of London just to maintain the status quo. I hear every day from people in London that the status quo is just not working, and in particular, it is not working for people with disabilities. We have a real problem with our paratransit system, which is run by London Transit Commission, which has really failed to support people with disabilities, to enable people who have mobility issues and have to use paratransit to get to doctors' appointments, to get to community activities.

I think it was just last month, London city council held a number of delegations to hear people's concerns about paratransit in the city, and one Londoner, Natalie Judges, told city council that one day—and she tracked this on her iPhone—she had pressed redial 834 times in order to book a paratransit ride.

I've heard from so many people who are beyond frustrated about the fact that when they want to book paratransit, they have to book three days ahead; they have to get up and be at their phone at 7 a.m. so that they can start that process of redial, redial, redial. And I've heard from people who talk about the fact that the service is late and therefore it makes them late for their appointments.

One senior told me that she felt traumatized by this incredibly frustrating process of trying to book paratransit. She lives independently. One of the activities that she's involved with is at the Kiwanis seniors' centre. She goes to the Third Age Program at the Kiwanis seniors' centre. It keeps her active. It keeps her feeling engaged in the community. It helps reduce her isolation. But she was so traumatized, so frustrated, by her experience with paratransit that she actually cancelled her participation in those classes because she could not handle it anymore.

1900

Municipalities need to be able to rely on provincial funding to enable the operation of reliable, affordable, accessible public transit services across the entire province. Unfortunately, the bill before us today does nothing to address those pressing priorities for the people of this province.

What this bill does, Speaker, is—there are two schedules. Schedule 1 allows the Toronto Transit Commission to enter into service integration agreements with neighbouring transit agencies. The idea of fare integration is something that the NDP has championed for a very long time. We see it very much as an equity consideration and we see it very much—the requirement to have to pay separate fares if you are travelling from different municipalities, it adds to the affordability crisis that all Ontarians are experiencing right now.

When you think about the TTC and the city of Toronto and the workers who rely on the TTC to get to their jobs downtown, these are people who are cleaners, they are hospitality workers, they work in retail, and many of these people are travelling from Brampton and other parts of the GTA downtown into the city of Toronto. These are low-wage jobs. These are low-wage workers. Transit fare integration is a very important equity tool that we can use to support those workers to get to their employment and not have to face that additional fee burden of having to pay two different transit systems for a single ride, so we are very much in favour of transit fare integration.

However, what we do not support is the government's view that the ATU, that the transit workers, don't have to be at the table when these discussions about fare integration take place. That, Speaker, is a path to yet another court challenge, potentially. It is yet another example of how this government disrespects workers, disrespects collective bargaining in this province. We have pretty significant concerns about that schedule of the bill.

Schedule 2 allows a municipality to impose a transit station charge on new developments within a designated area around a proposed new GO Transit station. Now, the purpose of this transit charge is to generate the funding for the building of GO stations. What this essentially does, Speaker, is it downloads the responsibility to construct GO stations from the province to municipalities. We know that municipalities, again—as I mentioned with the delivering of public transit systems—are struggling in general with some of the revenue shortfalls that this government has caused, in particular with Bill 23.

The city of London is looking at a \$100-million revenue hole that was caused by the changes that this government introduced to development charges in Bill 23. Municipalities are having a hard time finding the revenues to address public transit needs. They're finding challenges to pay for municipal infrastructure, the kind of municipal services that people in a community deserve to be able to access. Now, the province is proposing that municipalities start footing the bill for provincial infrastructure as well.

Speaker, my colleagues who have spoken to this bill have raised very legitimate concerns about the fairness of

going in that direction and the principle of going in that direction. Provincial infrastructure should be provincially funded, so that is a very serious concern.

The other issue I would flag, in the few minutes that I have left, is around the secrecy, the lack of transparency related to the new Transit-Oriented Communities Program. We know that the idea of this program is that Metrolinx is going to negotiate deals where developers will fund a new GO station in exchange for development rights. Now, municipalities will assume funding responsibilities.

But I have to say that where Metrolinx is concerned, the name that comes to mind, certainly on this side of the House, is Phil Verster, the CEO of Metrolinx, the \$100-million man who has failed abysmally in delivering transit projects on time and on budget. Yet, just astonishingly, this government continues to put their faith in this guy, continues to put him in charge of these very costly and important transit projects. People just don't have the confidence that Mr. Verster can deliver on these projects.

Questions arise around why the secrecy? Why the lack of transparency? Why do we not have the details about this new Transit-Oriented Communities Program?

With that, Speaker, I will conclude my remarks.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I just came back to the Legislature, so I apologize to the member from London West—I wasn't able to listen to all of her presentation.

But there's a feature within this legislation that speaks to the development of mixed-use communities, and one of them is in the region of Durham. A tool to affect that, as you know, Speaker, is the station contribution fee. That would allow the upper-tier of government in the region the ability to build upwards of 30,000 homes in the Durham region, along that corridor where the GO Transit station would expand from Ajax, Whitby and Oshawa, then ultimately to Bowmanville.

Given that the member from London West's colleague, the member from Oshawa, knows the significant impacts of what this feature of the bill does, my hope would be that, for once, the member from London West and her colleagues will say yes rather than no.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I do want to say to the member across the way that our big concern about the Transit-Oriented Communities Program is the lack of transparency. It is the secrecy about the program. It is the lack of details about the program. It's the lack of information about what exactly the program is going to involve. And related to that is the question of trust. When you look at who is going to be involved in the Transit-Oriented Communities Program, Metrolinx—there are very serious questions on the public's side as to whether Metrolinx and Phil Verster, the CEO who is earning the million-dollar salary, deserve the public's trust.

1910

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As the member had just highlighted, when it comes to Metrolinx and Phil Verster, people outside of the government are not impressed with his track record.

The municipalities are relieved, I would say, that they have been able to work in partnership with the government—I understand that—to come up with a plan B to ensure that the stations can be funded, that they can be paid for. My concern, though, is what assurances are in this bill for the municipalities that will be financially on the hook for quite some time as they're recouping the costs? What assurances are in this bill for those municipalities that Metrolinx is going to help them in recouping those costs with a predictable timeline?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to my colleague the member for Oshawa for pointing out that there are no assurances. There are no assurances in this bill that municipalities won't be on the hook for projects that they have no control over. That, again, relates to the lack of transparency and the lack of details about the Transit-Oriented Communities Program. It really is a program that is shrouded in secrecy, and so I would think it will raise concerns from municipalities about the level of risk that they are taking on when they engage in the program.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I thank the member from London West for her comments, but I just think the engineer in me is trying to put all things together, and really leaving our legislation in place the way it is, the status quo—it feels like such a lost opportunity. If the status quo is better, I'm certainly all ears, but the way I read this is that there's a chance to make our current transit network far less fragmented and more unified so that riders can get from point A to point B. So I guess my question opposite is, why is the status quo better than the implementation of this bill?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I think I highlighted where the status quo is not working at all for the people of London. We had a GO pilot, as I said, that ran for two years and was basically designed to fail. We have a municipal transit service that is struggling mightily in order to meet the needs of people in our community. We have to get serious about public transit, both within cities and between cities across this province, if we are to meet our climate change goals, but the measures that are included in this bill are not what is needed to take the bold steps forward.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further question?

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member from London West clearly articulated the issues with Bill 131. I just wanted to raise another issue around the necessary investment that the provincial government needs to follow through on. Promises have been made. London got left at the station. Kitchener still is left at the station. This particular piece of legislation asks municipalities to pay for the GO station, to fund the GO station, if the minister approves, but they have nothing to do with the planning, procurement or the delivery of the GO station.

We know in this province that people, especially in Kitchener, they're not going to go the Via Rail station. It's

chaos. There's no safety plan. There is no order. It doesn't work for them.

If the province of Ontario wants to get people on the damn trains, they should fund the damn project.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to my colleague, the member for Waterloo, for her question. Thank you also for the incredible work that she has done in so many years to push for that all-day, two-way GO service that the people in her community deserve, just as much as the people in London deserve to have that connectivity from London to Toronto.

But she raises a very legitimate concern that what this legislation is doing is asking municipalities to raise the funds to build GO train stations when they have absolutely no control over planning, procurement and delivery. So it is potentially exposing municipalities to a level of risk that they should not be exposed to. And it is downloading a provincial responsibility for infrastructure—provincial infrastructure—from the province to municipalities.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Quick question, quick response?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Back on the station contribution fee: It's an optional tool which allows municipalities to impose a fee on new residential and commercial development within specific geographic areas that I've referred to: the corridor for Oshawa right through to Bowmanville. It's an opportunity. It's an optional tool which would ultimately facilitate the development of mixed-use communities. In the region of Durham, that's 30,000, as supported by the chair of the region of Durham, supported by all the mayors along that particular corridor.

My hope would be, through the member from London West, that finally, the opposition will support this particular innovative approach that would allow mixed-use communities within the region of Durham.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to the member for the question. I understand from my colleague the member for Oshawa, who engages regularly and frequently with the region, that there is a lot of support for what the government has proposed.

But it has been made very clear, to my colleague, that this bill, Bill 131, is very much a second-best option. What they would have preferred and what should have happened is for the province to fund the construction of provincial infrastructure. The provincial infrastructure like GO train stations should not be downloaded onto municipalities.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: It's a pleasure to join the debate on Bill 131. As my colleague the Minister of Infrastructure said in the morning, now more than ever, we need to build better infrastructure faster and more efficiently while saving taxpayers money.

This comes during a backdrop of rapid population growth in our province. We know that many of our cities and towns are facing the fastest population growth in years. Although that is a good thing, with more jobs created, investments continuing to grow in our key industries and, it being a testament to the appeal of our

province, we will face tremendous challenges if we don't lay the necessary foundation to support this growth by building more infrastructure.

With increased population growth, our existing infrastructure will be strained. Simply put, Ontario needs to continue building. Working with our partners is how we are going to get infrastructure built. That is what this legislation will help us achieve.

The Transportation for the Future Act, 2023, if passed, would help create new transit-oriented communities without burdening taxpayers and by working with municipalities as they take a role in shaping transit for the future. The station contribution fee would create an innovative new tool that municipalities can voluntarily use to help spur the construction of new GO Transit stations, leading to accelerated transit expansion and vibrant mixed-use communities, along with more jobs and much-needed housing.

1920

If adopted, this tool would allow municipalities to recover costs from funding the design and construction of new GO Transit stations. The station contribution fee would apply to new developments within areas identified by municipalities surrounding these new GO stations, with revenue collected over time, as housing and transit-oriented communities are built around them. The municipality would only collect the fee until full station costs are recovered.

Municipalities proposing to use this tool would be expected to show a reduction in other development costs to help offset the fee and ensure it does not add to the cost of housing. Municipalities could, for example, reduce parking requirements, which is often a significant development-related expense. This would be made possible because the introduction of new transit would reduce reliance on single occupancy vehicles and the number of required parking spaces.

We want to stress that this would be a completely voluntary and optional tool that could only be used in places where the province has determined a new GO station is warranted. And it's just one of the tools that would be available to help spur GO Transit stations and more housing. Similar land value capture tools have been used to build transit infrastructure and vibrant communities in world-class cities, from London in the UK to Hong Kong.

We know that this proposed tool may not be suitable in every situation. We want to give municipalities the option to take an active role in transit expansion, and if they choose not to, we will continue to deliver transit-oriented communities through a market-driven approach, where partnerships with third parties are sought to fund the construction of new stations.

This tool, if passed, would help speed up transit and housing development throughout the region, especially in areas where there is some hesitancy among market participants, such as in rural municipalities, and it would help expedite the process in those places where a single development partner is difficult to find.

If passed, this tool would provide more certainty around the timing and delivery of stations, and it would allow municipalities to have more control of when the station will be delivered. By implementing these steps, the province is strengthening and connecting communities, expanding and integrating Ontario's transit network, supporting economic growth, creating more jobs and housing, and improving the lives of Ontarians for many years to come. Madam Speaker, we are building transportation for today and the future.

It is clear that many municipalities see value in this tool, and it is with our municipal and development partners that we will continue to work towards building more GO stations and vibrant, mixed-use transit-oriented communities. If this legislation passes, over the coming months, the Ministry of Infrastructure will be reaching out to municipalities to consult on the process for implementing this proposed legislation and station contribution fee. This consultation will inform the development of the enabling regulation and address some of the questions raised by municipalities, including when and where they will be allowed to use the tool, the scope of eligible costs and background study requirements, among other details.

We are committed to using this proposed tool transparently. If the province has determined a GO station is warranted, the municipality would need to undergo a background study, in consultation with the public and Metrolinx, to transparently demonstrate how the fee is calculated, directly relating it to station costs, and to demonstrate how the fee is intended to be offset. The

municipality would then pass a bylaw that includes the map of the applicable area and forward a package to the Minister of Infrastructure for approval.

In addition to the background study and supporting documents, an important factor for the approval of the use of this tool will be municipalities' financial position.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move that the question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Mr. Sandhu has moved that the question now be put. I am satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear a no.

All those in favour of the motion that the question be now put, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion that the question be now put, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred to the next instance of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Orders of the day? I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: It's been such a great evening. I'd like it to go on, but no further business.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): There being no further business, I declare the House adjourned until tomorrow, 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1926.

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Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Transportation / Ministre associé des Transports
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Vaugois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Vacant	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Vacant	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	