

## **IXpress, not LRT, for Our Future Transit Needs**

The concept of using trains to transport commuters from one end of the Tri-Cities to the other utilizing the downtown cores of Kitchener, Waterloo, and possibly Cambridge, is an old one. Rails and trains as an inter-city mode of transportation are re-visited by our municipal politicians every few decades as a “holy grail” towards solving our commuting problems. Magically it becomes the solution. And additionally, it’s good for business since it supposedly attracts development along the rail line.

The *raison d’être* for rapid transit should be the transportation of commuters to destinations in a safe and efficient manner and not its appeal to industry. A step in the right direction would be to get the “politics” out of rapid transit.

Several questions quickly come into focus – How often do you run the service? How fast is it? How many commuters can you carry? Where does it really go? How much is it going to cost the taxpayer in subsequent years of operation?

These are some of the questions that our politicians must provide our citizens with satisfactory answers to, before embarking on a light rail transit (LRT) project. Our iXpress buses already operate every few minutes, often filled to capacity with commuters, providing a vital service from Conestoga Mall in Waterloo to Ainslie Terminal in Cambridge, via the Charles Street Terminal in Kitchener. It provides important links to other routes along the way in a timely way. Could LRT offer the same reliability and frequency of service that our commuting public would come to expect?

If the argument can be made that LRT would be the way to go, would the cost – about \$800 million – be justified? Although government subsidies would cover most of the initial start-up costs, would the high cost of maintaining LRT over the coming years by Regional taxpayers be justified? The answer to these questions is - No.

The best option for mass transit would be to increase the size of our existing fleet of rapid transit buses (iXpress), and to introduce different rapid transit routes that would reflect the needs of an increasingly mobile commuting public within the Tri-City area. Thought should be given to servicing rural destinations such as Elmira and New Dundee with iXpress.

Equally important, to assure a reliable service, iXpress routes must be chosen that would minimize interaction with existing high volumes of vehicular traffic. The Tri-Cities must introduce and encourage the use of dedicated bus express lanes. We need more efficiently coordinated traffic lights and intelligent application of advanced traffic signals at key intersections.

I believe the cost of an enhanced iXpress program would be considerably cheaper in the long run than using LRT as a form of rapid transit. It would be far more effective in moving the masses in a timely fashion because it offers the flexibility of multiple routes, unlike LRT, with its use of a monolithic, inflexible rail line.

The use of rail to efficiently cover commuting distances between cities such as Kitchener and Toronto makes sense. Indeed, the expansion of rail service between these centres is required. The provision of GO Transit would be a useful start. In the matter of inter-city commuting however, and in the commuting of shorter distances to communities such as Elmira and New Dundee, the expanded use of iXpress buses is the way to go. It would be more efficient from a travel time perspective, and would ultimately be more cost effective than LRT.

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