OPINION & EDITORIALS

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Ontario's private health care gamble is failing

By Andrew Longhurst

Wait times rise as Ontario pours billions into private care Health care spending is "unsustainable," said Ontario's finance minister earlier this year. Public hospitals are told they must learn to do more with less. But not so for private, for-profit health care facilities. Over eight years, the provincial government poured more than $4 billion into for-profit surgical and medical imaging facilities. The provincial direction favouring investor-owned facilities over public hospitals didn't happen overnight. In 2023, the Ontario government passed Bill 60, which has been used to expand the role of for-profit health care facilities. Since the passage of Bill 60, the provincial government has made three big moves to privatize core hospital services by awarding funding to private facilities for MRI and CT scans, endoscopies and orthopedic surgeries.

Over the last three years, $280 million in public subsidy has been committed to for-profit health care delivery — the largest injection of public funding into for-profit health care outside of Quebec. The growth of this for-profit industry is significant — especially at a time when public hospitals are unable to maintain current service levels, according to a recent report from the Financial Accountability Office. While Ontario's public hospitals are being told that the cupboard is bare, the provincial government is able to find significant year-over-year increases for the private health care industry.

In 2024-25 alone, provincial payments to the for-profit medical imaging and surgical industry totalled $674 million — jumping by 48 per cent from $457 million in 2017-18.

What remains particularly concerning is that public payments to for-profit facilities performing surgeries and medical imaging increased at faster rates than public hospital funding. In the three years following Bill 60, the average annual growth rate of public payments to for-profit medical imaging and surgical facilities increased two to four times that of public hospital funding. What's worse is that we would have no idea of the true extent to which the provincial government favours corporate health care providers over public hospitals because this information is not publicly disclosed by the government. The Ontario government has failed to transparently report how much public funding is flowing to private health care facilities. It was only through freedom-of-information requests that these troubling findings have come to light. The Ontario Public Accounts report $84.7 million transferred to these private facilities, while expenditure reporting obtained by FOI puts payments at $659 million.

This means that the Public Accounts underreported payments to for-profit facilities by 778 per cent in 2024-25. It would be one thing if the public dollars flowing into private profits were delivering clear results for Ontarians. But they're not. Evidence shows that for-profit surgeries can be two to three times more expensive than performing the same procedures in public hospitals, performing surgeries privately poses risks to patient safety and care quality, and contributes to longer — not shorter — public wait times. The Ontario government began ramping up the outsourcing of surgeries and diagnostics in 2018, with a big push following Bill 60. Any significant policy direction should be evaluated to see if it's achieving its stated goals. Between 2017 and 2025, median wait times for eight of 12 publicly funded priority procedures increased in Ontario, including MRI scans, cataract surgeries and all cancer surgeries. Despite the 185 per cent increase in public funding for privately delivered ophthalmologic procedures between 2017 and 2025, cataract surgery wait times increased. Rather than doubling down on privatization, the Ontario government would be wise to focus on policy strategies grounded in proven evidence and experience, both in Canada and internationally. An obvious place to start would be proper public hospital funding — increasing by at least six per cent annually — so that hospital operating rooms and MRI machines are idle no more.

Why gamble $50 billion on the Pacific Link pipeline?

The proposed U.S. Bridger pipeline could cost only $3 billion, carry over a million barrels of Alberta oil a day and start operating years before Pacific Link The much-vaunted Pacific Link pipeline could leave Canadian taxpayers on the hook for tens of billions of dollars, even though a much cheaper alternative for exporting Alberta's oil already exists. That alternative is a proposal from America's Bridger Pipeline, partnered with Canada's South Bow. President Donald Trump has already granted a permit for its Canada-U.S. border crossing, although other approvals remain outstanding. Bridger would initially transport 550,000 barrels of oil daily from Alberta to Wyoming, with capacity eventually exceeding a million barrels. Alberta estimates Pacific Link could cost as much as $43.7 billion, with completion targeted for 2032. I wouldn't count on that timetable. Construction delays, inflation and financing costs could push the bill towards $50 billion and completion into 2034 or later. Bridger could be carrying oil years earlier. Pacific Link would provide access to overseas buyers, while Bridger would expand access to the U.S. But how much is that difference worth? I've seen nothing to convince me it's worth spending tens of billions more.

Supporters argue that overseas sales could narrow the price gap between Western Canadian Select (WCS) and West Texas Intermediate (WTI). The discount reached US$21.35 per barrel in September, partly because of refinery maintenance and pipeline constraints. But WCS is heavier and higher in sulphur than WTI. Another pipeline might ease transportation constraints, but it wouldn't change the oil. How much of that discount could Pacific Link realistically eliminate? Another argument is that Canada must reduce dependence on the U.S., evidently regardless of cost and geography. Diversification makes sense, particularly given President Trump's tariffs. But Canadian taxpayers shouldn't have to spend tens of billions simply to reduce dependence on a market that already buys our oil. That's an expensive way to make a political point. We've already seen what can happen with an expensive pipeline. Trans Mountain cost taxpayers some $35 billion and reported net income of $556 million in 2025. But Thomas Gunton, a professor at Simon Fraser University, argues that its reported profits are misleading because much of its debt sits with TMP Finance. The interest still has to be paid. Gunton estimated that, accounting for those costs, the pipeline lost about $166 million in the first six months of 2025. Trans Mountain's tolls are also substantially higher than those on competing Enbridge pipelines to the U.S. Why would producers pay more if cheaper transportation is available?

The Parliamentary Budget Officer valued Trans Mountain at between $29.6 billion and $33.4 billion. I doubt it would fetch anything close to that. A more realistic estimate may be $20 billion. A sale at that price could leave taxpayers with a loss of about $15 billion, depending on how the outstanding debt was handled. Given that experience, I doubt arm's-length investors would pay anything close to Pacific Link's construction cost.

Ottawa claims Pacific Link could generate more than $20 billion annually in GDP and $100 billion in government revenue by 2060. But those aren't profits from operating the pipeline. They don't establish that taxpayers would recover their investment.

There's another wild card: what happens to oil prices when Pacific Link comes on stream? Producing oil from new oil sands mines can cost about US$55 per barrel, compared with around US$35 for oil extracted underground using wells. A sustained price below US$40 could threaten the economics of much of the production Pacific Link would depend on.

What happens if production recovers in Venezuela, Iran, Iraq, Russia or elsewhere? Oil prices have collapsed before. If falling prices make additional oil sands production uneconomic, who will fill Pacific Link? And who will pay for the unused capacity?

Then there's the Pathways Alliance carbon-capture project. Ottawa and Alberta have explicitly recognized that Pathways and Pacific Link are mutually dependent. Its planned annual CO^2 capture target has already been reduced from 22 million tonnes to six million tonnes.

Cenovus CEO Jon McKenzie once put Pathways' cost as high as $30 billion, before the project was scaled back.

Letters To The Editor:

WHAT IS ON YOUR MIND? Send letters to newspaper@ocentral.com

Dear Editor:

The recent municipal election across Durham Region should prompt reflection about public confidence in local democracy. My concern extends beyond who won or lost. Residents deserve campaigns centred on practical solutions, respectful debate and clear commitments. Property taxes, housing, roads, community safety and reliable services affect every household.

These issues should remain at the forefront after the campaign signs disappear.

Every newly elected representative has a responsibility to serve the entire community, including residents who supported another candidate. Winning an election provides an opportunity to lead; it does not place anyone above scrutiny.

Councils should make decisions openly, explain spending clearly and provide meaningful opportunities for residents to ask questions. Any concerns about election procedures should receive fair, timely responses supported by evidence.

Voters also have responsibilities. We must remain involved, attend meetings, examine council decisions and challenge misinformation without turning political disagreements into personal attacks.Durham needs leadership that listens between elections, not simply during campaigns. Promises must become measurable actions, and accountability must become an everyday practice.The election may be over, but the public's role is not.

Our communities deserve transparent government, responsible leadership and a political culture built on respect rather than division.

Stewart Coine, Oshawa

Dear Editor:

The holiday season is approaching, and I am trying to find the words to tell my two children that we cannot afford Christmas this year.

No parent should have to rehearse that conversation. After paying for rent, groceries, utilities and transportation, there is nothing left. No cushion. No breathing room. Certainly no money for presents or a special Christmas dinner.

I am disgusted that keeping my children fed and housed now means wondering which bill can wait. I am tired of stretching every dollar and still coming up short.

Most of all, I am heartbroken that my children will feel the consequences of circumstances they cannot understand or control. Please spare struggling families another speech about tightening our belts. Mine is already pulled as tight as it will go.

To those making economic decisions: do you understand the humiliation of putting groceries back? The dread of opening a bill?

The pain of hearing your children excitedly discuss Christmas while you quietly calculate what you cannot provide?My children deserve joy. Every child does. We will have love this Christmas. But love should never be the excuse society uses to accept families living without security, dignity or hope.

Janice Harper, Whitby.

Dear Editor:

With Tito-Dante Marimpietri elected Oshawa's next mayor, I hope the future of Oshawa Executive Airport becomes a priority for honest, open discussion. This issue deserves more than campaign language about growth and opportunity. It deserves answers that residents can understand, question and trust.An airport can support employment, investment and aviation services. However, the people living around it also deserve consideration. Their homes, their peace and their confidence in local government matter just as much as any economic development announcement.

Mayor-elect Marimpietri, please begin by telling residents what you believe this airport should become. What activities should it accommodate? What limits should apply? What investments would taxpayers be expected to support?

Most importantly, how will neighbouring communities have a meaningful voice before decisions are made?

I do not want Oshawa's future decided through competing slogans. Calling the airport an economic engine does not answer every concern. Calling for its closure does not explain every consequence. Residents deserve a complete picture, including financial realities, environmental considerations, noise impacts and the responsibilities of different levels of government.Any proposal for expansion, operational changes or redevelopment should come with publicly accessible evidence.

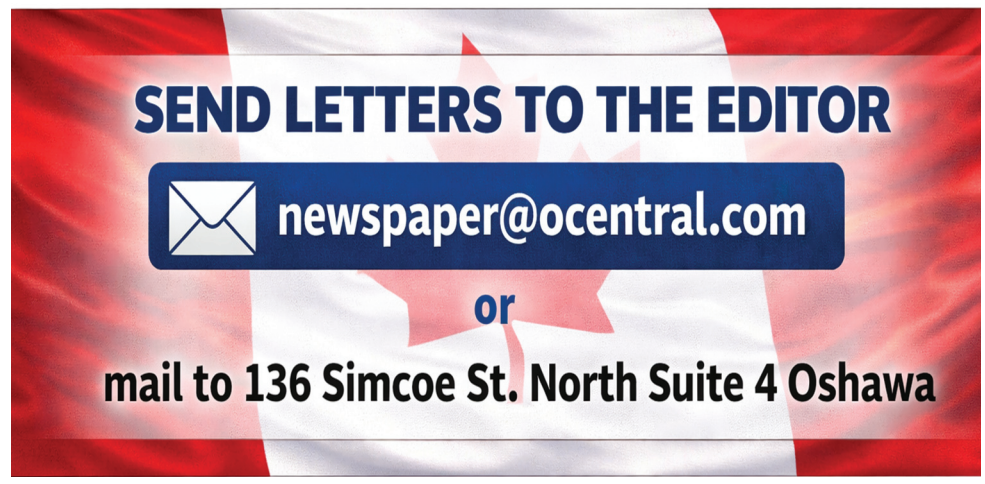
Publish the costs. Explain the benefits. Identify the risks. Give people enough time to respond.Consultation must mean more than inviting residents to speak after the direction has effectively been chosen.There must also be room for disagreement without dismissing airport supporters as uncaring or nearby residents as unreasonable. People can support jobs and still demand quieter neighbourhoods. They can value aviation while questioning how public assets are managed.

The new mayor has an opportunity to bring these voices together. That will require patience, transparency and the willingness to answer uncomfortable questions.

I want leadership that recognizes the airport's future belongs within a broader vision for Oshawa: a city where economic opportunity, responsible spending and quality of life advance together.

Please establish a clear public process, regular reporting and measurable commitments. Residents should know who is responsible for decisions and how to hold them accountable.Businesses considering their future need certainty, and families planning theirs deserve the same consideration.

Neither should be left guessing about the direction of a major public asset or whether their concerns will receive a serious response from the incoming council.

Congratulations on your election, Mr. Marimpietri. Now comes the harder work: earning trust through decisions that serve the whole city.Oshawa deserves nothing less.

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