

A New Transit Service for Innisfil residents

I am an Innisfil resident who has been pushing the Town of Innisfil to do a valid assessment of potential ridership for a new Innisfil Transit System, and what tax cost would be acceptable to residents. In the hope that a new Innisfil Transit Master Plan (TMP) can better serve the people of Innisfil, **I offer the following opinions:**

A new transit system for Innisfil should meet the needs of its residents. The current system, which subsidizes trips by Uber, has achieved a ridership of just 0.4% of all daily trips taken by residents. Overall, that cannot be considered a success. The current system requires that reservations be made for service, the fares are high, and the public subsidy is high (more than \$10 per trip).

From the apparent emphasis on On-Demand transit by the consulting team (Left Turn Right Turn) contracted to develop a new transit system for Innisfil, it seems to me that there is an assumption from the start of the TMP process that Innisfil residents are not ready for a better/larger system – that the demand does not exist for it, and that almost everyone prefers to drive an automobile. Yet the reality is that 19% of people aged 16-84 in Ontario do not have a driver's license (perhaps it's 10% in Innisfil), and those people either have to be chauffeured by others, travel less or not at all, or borrow a car, and have fewer social and employment opportunities than people who drive. Teenagers and many adults cannot afford to buy an automobile; this is a growing affordability problem as the prices for automobiles and other costs of living have surged.

It is my sense that while tax costs are the focus of transit development for Town Council, the public would be open to a system that serves their family, their neighbours, and other people in the community much better than the system does now. I have estimated that a new fixed-route transit service of good quality (that is, 15-minutes between buses arriving, shelters at all stops, seamless service into Barrie), and is supported by a rural On-Demand service, would be affordable for taxpayers: If ridership reaches a 2.0% modal share of all daily trips, the property tax cost would be about the same as for Library Services, the least expensive service in Innisfil.

The City of Barrie, which has a higher population density than Innisfil, has a transit service that struggles to achieve a 3% modal share of all trips taken by Barrie residents. The struggle for transit ridership is due significantly (if not primarily) to Barrie Transit's dismal bus frequencies (30 minutes between bus arrivals) and the lack of shelters for people waiting for a bus.

Innisfil's lower population density is, or will be by 2034, offset by its clustering of residential and non-residential development along a few major routes, the new GO station, and anticipated higher-density development on the Orbit site and along Innisfil Beach Road. I believe that with a good transit service that includes transit shelters at every bus stop, attractive bus frequencies at 15 minutes apart, route configurations that minimize transfers, and service to the most popular

destinations in Barrie (Mapleview, Georgian College, RVH), Innisfil Transit should, after perhaps five years of service, be able to match or exceed Barrie's 3%.

Importantly, the TMP consultants did not present a fair comparison of ridership and cost implications that they presented with their four Options (figure at right).

Service Option →	Option 1 - On-Demand + LINX Route	Option 2 - On-Demand + FixedRte.	Option 3 - Fixed + On- Demand	Option 4 - Mostly Fixed route.
Passenger Cost/Trip	\$6.15	\$8.80	\$6.00	\$2.55
Municipal Cost/Trip	\$10.60	\$7.60	\$8.40	\$14.50
Provincial Cost/Trip	\$2.25	\$1.55	\$1.85	\$2.15
Total Cost/Trip	\$19.00	\$17.95	\$16.25	\$19.20
Est. Annual Ridership	170,000	255,000	280,000	190,000

The TMP team presented the Options based on “the same level of annual investment”, which means poor service levels for the Fixed-Route options. In fact, they aren't “the same level of annual investment” – Innisfil's costs of the Options would range from roughly \$1.8 million per year to \$2.7 million. In 2024, Innisfil spent \$1.8 million on its transit service. Option 4 indicates that ridership would be only 10% higher than current volumes; that is unrealistically low (about 0.36% of all daily trips by Innisfil residents in 2034), and thereby inflates the projected municipal cost per trip. As a result, it suggests that the per-trip tax cost to Innisfil for Option 4 is the highest of all four Options. **This is misleading, and is an inappropriate comparison of potential costs and ridership.**

Comparisons of Options should be based on better estimations of ridership. In reality, Option 4 should be able to generate much more ridership for fixed route services. At just 1% modal share of all trips by residents, transit would be *the least municipal cost per trip* of the four Options.

Also of note is that Option costs are based on 20-30 minutes between bus arrivals at stops. 30 minutes is a huge deterrent for people in Canada's climate for anyone having to wait for a bus they just missed (for example, mothers with kids, people having to go to work or to appointments, anyone else). 15-minute headways are best if ridership is to be maximized, although the total costs of providing service could be roughly twice as high as for 30-minute service.

The bus routes presented by the consultants for each Options do not serve popular destinations in Barrie directly – there is no seamless service. Bus transfer points between municipalities should (and can) be eliminated. Routes 1 and 3 do not serve the Yonge-IBR civic area or future hospital, and all routes assume the Simcoe LINX route is unnecessarily fixed/unchangeable, with bus frequencies very likely to be a very poor 30 minutes apart.

None of the proposed routes serve RVH, Georgian College, or the regional retail centre on Mapleview Drive. Only two Options (2 & 4) have a fixed route that serves the Town Hall civic area and its future hospital (I've felt for a long time that the area should become a higher-density mixed-use node). It is unfortunate that intermunicipal transit service is left to the Simcoe LINX service, which usually operates at one bus per hour. Within Innisfil, an autonomous EV shuttle service for Sandy Cove (and perhaps the new development east of it) and for areas away from main roads should be explored.

Importantly, the consultants did not do the necessary research to determine potential transit ridership or the tax cost that residents would support – it failed to undertake a valid random survey of residents, or collect an adequate survey sample size. It could be that the consultants based their Options on levels of service that would keep tax costs at pre-determined amounts(?), or on old/historical information of other municipalities(?). Times have changed; a greater portion of the population is struggling with car costs, and demographics are changing. It could also be that the budget for transit development research was inadequately limited by Council.

Innisfil Town Council should NOT be making decisions on transit based on the cost presentation of the four Options.

Perhaps the most important cost component of an expanded transit system is the initial infrastructure cost (buying buses, building other infrastructure). I have suggested to the Town of Innisfil that if Town Council pushes the Government of Ontario aggressively for special transit start-up capital (at 100%), and operating funding on a declining scale for a high-quality high-frequency transit service, it could succeed. Council should not disregard that opportunity – it should be built into the range of transit levels of service.

Innisfil should NOT implement a new transit service that is primarily based on an on-demand subsidy system. It should create a system that maximizes transit ridership for people. A transit system that is designed to generate no more than a fraction of 1% of all daily trips by residents is an embarrassing failure.

I note that achieving a modal split of 3% or more, which should be a target, cannot be done with a service focused on On-Demand ridesharing services, because it would fail – it's too expensive to use except occasionally, and would become a congestion issue and a subsidy cost issue as Innisfil's population increases.

I believe it is not right to decide from the start, or to infer from the start, that transit should not cost much more than the current system, or that Options should be presented that are based on "the same level of annual investment" when each generates different ridership volumes with different costs.

The public should decide what's affordable, and the TMP presentation does not show that appropriately. The public should be choosing the degree to which they would accept a tax cost, based on more useful information. The public should be told of the economic, environmental, social and community benefits of a much better, and perhaps more costly, transit system, and what the benefits are, compared to holding public costs to the barest minimum. Some of the benefits include:

- The chauffeuring of many non-drivers ends or is reduced.
- More independence for people who are physically unable to drive; their isolation from the community is reduced.

- Providing public transportation for people who cannot afford the cost of an automobile increases their independence, and reduces hardship and their isolation (i.e., helps people with low income jobs, young mothers with children, unemployed people, seniors whose incomes have dropped, teenagers and young adults who cannot afford to buy a car, households with more than one adult but can afford only one car).
- Road traffic congestion is reduced as Innisfil's population grows: If two or more people are on a bus, the bus takes up less road space than if those people were driving a car.
- Transit is far less expensive for people to use than an automobile.
- Households that can reduce the number of cars in the household would be able to redirect money saved to other family priorities. (Household affordability of transportation is a huge issue.)
- Increased transit use helps the local economy: almost 100% of money spent on automobile ownership and operation leaves the local economy; more money held locally helps local businesses.
- Fewer cars needing to be built, transported, sold, maintained, and disposed of, reduces damage to the natural environment.

The Transit Master Plan has not given the public an adequate and balanced chance to evaluate the impacts of various levels of transit service on community wellbeing and affordability both private and public. For example, is an average of 35 cents per day per household tax cost for a better transit service worthwhile (compared to \approx 10 cents in 2024 with the Uber-subsidized system), knowing that they themselves may benefit from it, and that it may benefit their neighbours, is good for the environment, is good for the local economy, enables people to access destinations, and so on? Or, alternatively, let residents decide if that is not a matter for public support, and that taxes shouldn't go up.

I say, start big, get provincial start-up funding, and scale back after five years if low ridership makes it necessary.

Please let your Councillor know you feel about the Transit Master Plan.

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