

## John Stillich

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September 4, 2025

To: Innisfil Town Council

Re: **Transit Master Plan Survey, and Work Done**

Hello. This letter expresses some concerns regarding the focus of the Transit Master Plan and the work done to arrive at an appropriate transit system option. Based on the work I see having been done and not done by the TMP team, Town Council will not be able to make decisions that are in the best interest of Innisfil residents.

### **The Recent Survey of Transit Options**

The TMP team recently presented results of its Options survey, which asked numerous questions of the public regarding transit system preferences. Unfortunately, the sample size of the survey was too small and was not random, based on voluntary online participation that elicited views of a few people who are interested in the issue of public transit for their communities.

**Importantly, asking which transit system option a few people prefer does not determine what the transit ridership potential may be. That is a critical error.** Innisfil Town Council should not rely on the preferences of a few people who participated in the Options survey.

The TMP team has not presented to the public what the benefits and drawbacks of various transit system options may be, and a range of cost profiles identified based on them. The “same level of investment” summary is not enough, and can be misleading. Basic operational data is not enough. The needs of the community should have been identified.

The public should have been presented with a clear picture of what the variable levels of potential transit ridership may exist, after the TMP team did that research, and then should recommend appropriate transit system options.

Only a few things are helpful from the options survey; most questions were unnecessary, and some questions were missed. Option 1 (Status Quo) had lowest favorability (18.4%), which makes sense. Over the past 7-8 years, the current system has generated only a 0.4% modal share of all trips by residents. Overall, that is a failure. The Left Turn Right Turn consultants for the TMP found numerous ways to improve the On-Demand service, but even if ridership rates increase by 50%, that would still be a modal split of just 0.6% of all trips by residents. The only reason for selecting Options 1 or 2 is if there is a Town Council aversion to increases in public costs, regardless of system merits for the community. That would be an unfortunate mistake.

Transit routes for a fixed route network presented for each option are poor. Almost all routes are too short. The large volume of day-to-day intermunicipal trips has been forgotten (e.g., RVH, Georgian College, shopping along Mapleview). Several proposed transit routes are disconnected rather than networked. Moreover, the options should ***not*** assume that the LINX route shown (or its service frequency) is fixed and non-negotiable – the best route for Innisfil should have been determined.

### **A focus on On-Demand Transit**

The Options presented in the recent survey are based on the “same level of annual investment”, indicating that service costs rather than service quality may be the focus or direction by Council, even though residents have said repeatedly they would consider using or would prefer a transit system with fixed routes.

A great deal of work was done on the current Innisfil transit service. Comparatively, there seems to have been little research on how a fixed route system can work to attract ridership, and what its potential for growth beyond simple population increases could be, and what the associated cost profiles may be.

There should be transit choices presented to the public that show a range of fixed route service levels that are not limited to the “same level of annual investment”. Fixed route services will cost more to operate, but it is not known what the revenue offsets might be, or what the ridership may be.

### **Transit That Responds to Needs**

Comparisons to other municipalities are not useful except to show what poor services can mean for ridership. For example, Barrie’s modal share of all trips by residents has dropped from 3% before the pandemic to about 1% in 2022 (per the TTS Survey). To a significant degree, Barrie Transit ridership was lost because of the pandemic, but I suggest that the principal reasons for overall low ridership include

- The very poor service frequencies -- 30 minute intervals or worse.
- Few shelters at transit stops (only ≈20%? in Barrie); Canada’s weather requires shelters at all stops;
- Too many trips that require multiple transfers from one bus to another.

Public transit is usually scaled reactively to reflect the cost effects of ridership volumes. It’s not scaled to attract future increases in ridership growth, and the effect of that is to minimize and deter ridership. People will continue to buy personal automobiles at current rates because they don’t see transit services as good enough. The reactive approach means more traffic congestion, economic losses to the community, environmental costs/damage, and lost opportunities and struggles of many people left unmet.

***The approach to transit development should be aggressive***, to reduce the modal share of trips by automobile.

Some things are already known. One is that close to 20% of residents aged 16 to 84 do not have an Ontario driver's license or do not drive. Another is that, among car drivers, the costs of owning and operating an automobile are becoming significant financial burdens to many more households than in the past. Typically, a car will cost more than \$10,000 a year, and diverts money from other household priorities. This is important, and presents an opportunity for much higher transit ridership, provided that service quality is good enough.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is unlike the 20<sup>th</sup>; needs are not the same. Assumptions of past performances of various transit systems in other municipalities may not, or may likely not, apply.

### **False Economy**

Was there a direction to the TMP team to find a transit solution that minimizes public costs, as a reflection of concerns by members of the public regarding taxes, regardless of what the comparative benefits might be for alternative transit systems? That is likely to be false economy. However, what increase in taxes for transit is too high is not known. How much do taxpayers/residents know about the community effects of a transit system for Innisfil?

Millions of dollars will be spent annually to operate Innisfil Transit, and that warrants doing adequate research. It does not appear that the TMP consultants have done enough to identify costs, transit ridership potentials and effects of different transit alternatives. Their surveys of the public were not well designed and not helpful.

Perhaps a cost example is helpful: A fixed route service with 15-minute frequencies, supported by on-demand services in rural areas, may cost taxpayers \$150 per year (41 cents/day) to operate. The figure excludes start-up capital and operating funding from Ontario (something not being considered by the TMP,) and would be less costly than Library Services.

I've suggested in the past that a random survey of residents, which needs to be person-to-person to capture all viewpoints is necessary, and would be a drop in the bucket (\$25,000?) when measured against transit costs. A two-week door-to-door survey should get Innisfil 500+ valid and unbiased data that reflects how people really feel, including potential transit use, based on what it would be like.

**Innisfil Town Council should not decide to proceed with a specific transit system until better information is available.**

I would be happy to meet with you to answer your questions and to receive your comments.



c.c. Michael Bohdanowicz