



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Mike Morrice

Member of Parliament
Kitchener Centre

The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc
Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities

RE: Accountability for Federal Investment in GO Transit Rail Expansion in Waterloo Region

Dear Minister LeBlanc,

I hope this letter finds you well. While I applaud the federal government's significant investment in GO Transit Rail Expansion in Ontario, particularly the Kitchener Line serving Waterloo Region, I strongly encourage you to ensure that there is robust accountability on the part of Ontario's provincial transit agency and ministries receiving this federal funding to deliver on their commitments and completion timeline. I also echo the concerns raised at the provincial level in Ontario by both regional and provincial elected representatives and constituents across Waterloo Region, including demands for improved intercity regional public transit from Metrolinx's GO Transit. There has been longstanding frustration among residents of Waterloo Region, including in my riding of Kitchener Centre, with respect to the unavailability and unreliability of GO Transit for intercity travel throughout the region and for commuting to and from Toronto.

As you know, Ontario's provincial transit agency, Metrolinx, operates GO Transit as a regional public transit service across the Greater Golden Horseshoe in Southern Ontario through a network of intercity train and bus lines, including in Waterloo Region, and is overseen by the provincial Ministry of Transportation. This includes GO Transit's Kitchener Line that serves stops between downtown Toronto and Kitchener, and which currently only operates with trains running in one direction, twice per day, with no weekend service. However, as part of GO Transit's system-wide GO Rail Expansion project first announced in 2018 and currently underway, Metrolinx committed to establishing two-way, all-day train service on the Kitchener Line, including service on weekends.

Metrolinx has reported that the Kitchener Line expansion will cost more than \$1.9 billion and could be in place as early as 2025 but has not committed to a specific completion timeline. Elected leaders, business owners, and residents of Waterloo Region, including myself, have cheered Metrolinx's GO Transit expansion in the region. However, persistent unavailability and unreliability of GO Transit in Waterloo Region, combined with uncertainty over Metrolinx's progress and completion timeline for bringing expanded service to the region, make it challenging for elected leaders and businesses to accurately plan for growth projections and cause residents to lose confidence in their regional public transit service. Recent reports of riders being left behind at GO Transit stations and stops in Waterloo Region due to overcrowding and a lack of reliable service are unacceptable.

Through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP), overseen and administered by your ministry, the federal government has provided Metrolinx, through the provincial Ministry of Infrastructure, with significant funding for its GO Transit Rail Expansion – totaling \$4 billion as of June 2022. This includes ICIP funding from Infrastructure Canada and the Canada Infrastructure Bank for Metrolinx's GO Rail Expansion capital infrastructure and for procurement of additional

bi-level train cars to facilitate expanding rail service. Notably, among all GO Transit rail line expansions, the Kitchener Line expansion specifically received the largest amount of direct federal funding – totalling more than \$752 million. As a result, the federal government has assumed nearly 40% of Metrolinx's total estimated cost for the Kitchener Line expansion.

With such a significant federal investment, both to GO Transit Rail Expansion generally and to the Kitchener Line expansion specifically, it is imperative that there is robust accountability for the expenditures of federal funds and for meeting commitments and delivery timelines related to these projects. I strongly encourage you, your ministry, and the federal infrastructure funding agencies you oversee to assess the use of federal funding (including the amount of funding received versus spent), the current extent of progress, and the projected completion timelines specifically related to Metrolinx's Kitchener Line expansion, and to report the results of this assessment to municipal and regional leaders in Waterloo and to the public.

There is a critical need for the federal government to be an active partner in ensuring that expenditures of federal public transit funding are prudent and that expanded GO Transit in Waterloo Region is delivered by Metrolinx as quickly and efficiently as possible, given that:

- the region experienced 10.1% population growth between 2016 and 2021 and, as of 2022, is the third fastest growing municipal region in Canada;
- growth projections for the region estimate that the population could continue to swell to nearly 800,000 by 2035 and to over 920,000 by 2051; and
- Metrolinx's own projections estimate that GO Transit ridership demand for the Kitchener Line in 2031 could increase by nearly 400% over 2017 levels.

Moreover, I am troubled by the persistent lack of reliable service and apparent slow progress to expand GO Transit service in the Waterloo Region, particularly considering the substantial levels of funding provided by the federal government to Metrolinx to deliver this. In a recent letter addressed to Ontario's Minister and Associate Minister of Transportation, Regional Chair Karen Redman highlighted serious issues with continuing overcapacity and lack of service options with GO Transit and the negative impacts this has across the region for things such as access to labour, employment, healthcare, post-secondary education, and tourism. I agree with Chair Redman, and, in addition, I would stress that continuing unavailability and unreliability of regional public transit has significant detrimental environmental impacts.

Broken down by sector, transportation is Ontario's largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, comprising 32% of total emissions. We know that reliable public transit options reduce fuel dependency and overall emissions by providing commuters with an alternative to driving. We also know that vehicle emissions are a principal cause of air pollution and air pollution remains a serious health concern in Canada. Thus, you and your ministry taking an active role in ensuring timely or accelerated delivery of expanded regional public transit in Waterloo Region will help drive less vehicle traffic, reduced emissions, and improved air quality – results from which we all stand to benefit.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this further. I look forward to working with you to bring forward greater availability and reliability of regional transit for all Waterloo Region residents.

Sincerely,



Cc:

Jennifer O'Connell, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs,
Infrastructure and Communities

Phil Vester, President and Chief Executive Officer, Metrolinx

The Honourable Caroline Mulroney, Ministry of Transportation (Ontario)

Catherine Fife, Member of Provincial Parliament – Waterloo

Karen Redman, Chair – Region of Waterloo