

Protect Toronto's Public Transit from A Ridership Death Spiral

An Open Letter to Federal, Provincial, and Municipal Governments

We the undersigned — a collection of researchers and experts from around the Greater Toronto Area — are calling on municipal, provincial, and federal governments to protect the city's incredibly vital public transit system from harmful and unproductive cuts to service.

In response to a budget shortfall, the Toronto Transit Commission [has proposed](#) a 9% service reduction compared to pre-pandemic levels. This includes moving to 10-minute wait times on the subway network at some times of day and compromises the city's "10 minute network" of frequent bus service. These cuts to service are likely to initiate a ridership [death spiral](#) in which long wait time and poorer service leads to ridership drops, which in turn lead to further revenue losses and cuts.

Instead of forcing our nation's largest transit system to rely so heavily on fares and ridership to operate, **we call for the implementation of alternative revenue sources across all three levels of government to prevent this downward slide.** A transit death spiral now will have the grave consequences for the city, province, and country:

- **More congestion:** The TTC's Line 1 regularly carries the equivalent of 26 highway lanes of people directly into the downtown core of Canada's largest city. Longer waits and fewer trains will push more people towards driving, increasing congestion in a city already ranked [3rd most congested](#) in North America.
- **A weaker economy:** Studies place the cost of congestion in the GTA between [\\$3.3](#) and [\\$6](#) billion per year. This cost will increase as more riders switch to driving.
- **Dirtier air, poorer health, and more traffic deaths:** Transit produces significantly [less air pollution](#) per rider than private cars in the region, including pollutants that [reduce life expectancy](#). Cities with higher transit ridership also have [fewer traffic deaths](#) per capita.
- **Undermined equity goals:** Transit riders will struggle more to complete daily life activities. Many Torontonians, especially those belonging to equity seeking groups, rely on transit to access [healthcare and prescriptions](#), [groceries](#), work, and other essential services. For example, newcomers are [more likely to rely on transit](#) for [daily activities](#), and the federal government [plans](#) to admit more than 500,000 permanent residents annually by 2025.
- **Undermined housing goals:** Toronto is [planning for](#) more affordable and market rate housing. Planning to build more housing while cutting local transit service will lead to crowding on transit and give existing residents more motivation to oppose new housing.
- **Undermined climate goals:** Canada [plans](#) to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. Transit in the region produces dramatically [lower emissions](#) per rider compared to private cars. Riders switching to driving will undermine our efforts to achieve net zero.
- **Less return on infrastructure investments:** All three levels of governments have poured billions of dollars into expanding the city's network. Some examples include the Ontario Line, Eglinton Crosstown, Scarborough Subway Extension, Yonge North Subway Extension, and more. If the bus system [supporting these rail lines](#) is diminished, then the benefits promised by these investments will not materialize.

We recognize that transit demand is at a crossroads, and so our ask means fully funding a system that looks under-utilized compared to the recent past. **But how policymakers respond to the lingering effect of the pandemic is what will actually determine whether the pandemic was a brief shock to our transit system or the beginning of its demise.**

Leaders in other cities across the world have recognized this choice and have decided to double down on a transit-oriented future. Washington D.C. is [winning back riders](#) by pairing enhanced service with the elimination of fares. Closer to home, Brampton Transit is [exceeding pre-pandemic ridership levels](#) by maintaining and expanding frequent and connected service.

Meanwhile, Canada's largest city is on track to rob current and future Torontonians of a sustainable, equitable, and liveable future.

We strongly urge governments to adopt progressive policies that can shore up transit service in the nation's largest city (and elsewhere) until ridership recovers. Below we provide a list of options that, in some combination, could easily offset planned cuts, while providing co-benefits across social, environmental, and economic goals for a sustainable and vibrant future:

City

- A [commercial parking levy](#). World-class cities from New York to Sydney apply commercial parking levies to fund transit and other green infrastructure.
- Expedite implementation of [RapidTO](#) transit right-of-way projects, especially along major surface corridors that were carrying 15,000 passengers or more in 2019.
- Scale down planned expenditures on [Gardiner Expressway rehabilitation work](#) and move funding to transit operations instead.

Province

- [Increase](#) the amount of existing gasoline tax revenue dedicated to public transit from 2 cents to 4 cents under the *Dedicated Funding for Public Transit Act*.
- Fully fund an integrated fare system for the GTA.
- Allow the City of Toronto to raise revenues from tolling the DVP and Gardiner Expressway or implementing other congestion charges.
- Develop and implement a rational 400 series tolling system.

Federal government

- Establish a dedicated funding program for public transit operations similar to Ontario's *Dedicated Funding for Public Transit Act*.
- Federal funding for transit and affordable housing should be provided within an integrated funding framework.

Failure to act now will throw the future of public transit in Toronto into jeopardy as the region grows by almost [3 million people](#) over the coming decades. We call on all levels of government to protect Toronto's transportation backbone and stop these cuts.

Signed,

Dr. Willem Klumpenhauer
Postdoctoral Fellow, Civil and Mineral Engineering, University of Toronto

Dr. Matthew Palm
Postdoctoral Fellow, Human Geography, University of Toronto Scarborough

Dr. Steven Farber
Associate Professor, Human Geography, University of Toronto Scarborough

Professor Eric Miller, PhD
Director, Mobility Network, University of Toronto

Dr. Patricia Wood
Professor, Geography, York University

Ahmed El-Geneidy
Professor, McGill University

Dr. Antonio Paez
Professor, School of Earth, Environment and Society, McMaster University

Dr. Luna Khirfan
Associate Professor, School of Planning, University of Waterloo

Dr. Brian Doucet
Canada Research Chair, School of Planning, University of Waterloo

Dr. Shoshanna Saxe
Associate Professor, Canada Research Chair in Sustainable Infrastructure, Civil and Mineral Engineering, University of Toronto

Dr. Raktim Mitra
Associate Professor and Director, School of Urban and Regional Planning, Toronto Metropolitan University

Dr. Andre Sorensen
Professor, Human Geography, University of Toronto Scarborough

Dr. Michael Widener
Associate Professor & Canada Research Chair, Geography and Planning & Health Studies, University of Toronto

Dr. Richard J. DiFrancesco
Associate Professor and Chair, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Prof. Greg Evans FCAE, FAAAS, FCEEA
Professor and Director, Southern Ontario Centre for Atmospheric Aerosol Research, University of Toronto

Karen Chapple
Director, School of Cities, University of Toronto

Dr. Daniel Silver
Professor, Sociology, University of Toronto

Dr. David Wolfe
Professor, Political Science and IMI, University of Toronto Mississauga

Prof. Jeffrey Siegel
Professor, Department of Civil and Mineral Engineering, University of Toronto

Dr. Alan Walks
Full Professor, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Dr. Paul Hess
Professor, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Prof. Shauna Brail
Associate Professor, Institute for Management & Innovation, University of Toronto Mississauga

Dr. Anna Kramer
Assistant Professor, School of Urban Planning, McGill university

Dr. Mahtot Gebresselassie
Assistant Professor, Environmental and Urban Change, York University

Professor Ron Buliung
Professor and Graduate Chair, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Dr. Clarence Woudsma, MCIP, RPP
Associate Professor, School of Planning, University of Waterloo

Mischa Young
Assistant Professor, Department of Urban Environment, Université de l'Ontario Français

Dr. Tim Ross

Assistant Professor (Status), Geography & Planning, University of Toronto

Dr. Matthew Roorda

Professor, Civil & Mineral Engineering, University of Toronto

Dr. Jeffrey Brook

Associate Professor and Scientific Director of the Canadian Urban Environmental Health Research Consortium, Dalla Lana School of Public Health and Department of Chemical Engineering and Applied Chemistry, University of Toronto

Dr. Marianne Touchie

Associate Professor, Civil & Mineral Engineering, University of Toronto

Dr. Jonathan Hall

Associate Professor, Economics and the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, University of Toronto

Dr. Luisa Sotomayor

Associate Professor, Faculty of Environmental & Urban Change, York University

Dr. Patricia E. Perkins

Professor, Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change, York University

Dr. Gail Fraser

Professor, Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change, York University

Dr. Valerie Preston

Professor Emerita, Environmental and Urban Change, York University

Dr. Ute Lehrer

Full Professor, Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change, York University

Dr. L. Fawcett

Associate Professor, Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change, York University

Dr. Tara Vinodrai

Associate Professor, Institute for Management and Innovation, University of Toronto

Dr. Justin Podur

Associate Professor, Environmental and Urban Change, York University

Dr. Ted Spence

Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change, York University

Dr. Christopher D. Higgins
Assistant Professor, Human Geography, University of Toronto Scarborough

Dr. Martha Siegman
Associate Professor, Faculty of Environmental & Urban Change, York University

Dr. Ignacio Tiznado Aitken
Postdoctoral Fellow, Human Geography, University of Toronto Scarborough

Dr. Victoria MacPhail
Coordinator, Centre for Bee Ecology, Evolution, and Conservation, York University

Dr. Madeleine Bonsma-Fisher
Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Toronto Data Sciences Institute

Dr. Amer Shalaby
Professor, Civil and Mineral Engineering, University of Toronto

Dr. Catriona Sandilands
Full Professor, Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change, York University

Dr. Susannah Bunce
Associate Professor, Human Geography, University of Toronto Scarborough

Roger Keil
Professor, EUC, York University

Dr. Birsen Donmez
Professor and Canada Research Chair in Human Factors and Transportation, Mechanical and Industrial Engineering

Dr. Michelle Buckley
Associate Professor, Human Geography, University of Toronto Scarborough

Dr. Jed Long
Associate Professor, Geography & Environment, Western University

Dr. Diego Da Silva
Postdoctoral Fellow, Civil and Mineral Engineering, University of Toronto

Dr. Jinhyung Lee
Assistant Professor, Department of Geography and Environment, Western University

Dr. Mike Ekers
Associate Professor, Human Geography, University of Toronto

Dr. Marianne Hatzopoulou
Professor, Civil and Mineral Engineering, University of Toronto

Dr. Naomi Adiv
Assistant Professor, Political Science, University of Toronto Mississauga

Dr. Elnaz Yousefzadeh Barri
Postdoctoral Fellow, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Dr. Natalie Oswin
Associate Professor, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Elnaz Yousefzadeh Barri
Postdoctoral Fellow, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Dr. Natalie Oswin
Associate Professor. Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Dr. Nicholas A. Howell, MD, PhD
Internal Medicine Resident, Department of Medicine, University of Toronto

Michael Carter
Professor. Mechanical & Industrial Engineering, University of Toronto

Dr Zachary Hyde
Assistant Professor, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Cuilian Fang
Physical Scientist, Environment & Climate Change Canada

Ms Nancy A. Strader
Retired, Toronto Public Library

Christian Figueroa
Experiential Education, Faculty of Science, York University

Nicki Hemmings
People Partner, Faculty of Environmental & Urban Change, York University

Ameer Idreis
Graduate student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Mia Trana
MScPL candidate, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Amber DeJohn
PhD candidate, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Siobhan Teel
Graduate student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Allison Oki
Graduate student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Gillian Seitz
Graduate student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Dania Asahi Ogie
Graduate student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Kevin Roy
Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Kerstyn Lutz
PhD student, University of Toronto

Loren March
PhD candidate and Instructor, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Ryan Wilkinson
Graduate student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Michelle Zhang
MScPL student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Rober Nutifafa Arku
Graduate student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Brooke Sutherland
Graduate student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Chung-Yen Cheng
Graduate student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Dana McAuley
Graduate student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Christine Avery
Graduate student, Urban Planning, University of Toronto

Genevieve Drouin
Graduate student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Paromita Nakshi
PhD candidate, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Nickie Van Lier
PhD Candidate, Geography & Planning, University of Toronto

Jeremy Tessier
Planning at University of Toronto

Kosta Diochnos
Graduate student, Master of Science in Planning, University of Toronto

Ms. Dasha Gueletina
Junior Policy Analyst, Masters of Planning candidate, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Vivian Patel
Urban Planner, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Melissa Theodore
Senior Advisor, DEDI, Education and Communications, Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion, York University

Luisa Duarte Milani
PhD student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Christine Corso
PhD Candidate, Educational Leadership and Policy, OISE, University of Toronto

Kristin Iorio
PhD student, Southern Ontario Centre for Atmospheric Aerosol Research, Chemical Engineering and Applied Chemistry, University of Toronto

Majd Al-Shihabi
Doctoral student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Kaela Sanborn-Hum
Graduate Student, Geography & Planning, University of Toronto

William Overholt
Graduate Student (MES - Planning), Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change, York University

Ms. Elysia Fuller-Thomson
Graduate student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Mohammad Ghanbari
Graduate student, Transportation Engineering, York University

Maleeha Shams
MA Geography Candidate, Department of Geography & Planning, University of Toronto

Lauren Foote
Graduate student, University of Toronto

Alaa Itani
PhD Candidate, Civil and Mineral Engineering, University of Toronto

Emily Young
Graduate student, Physical Geography, University of Toronto

Jack Tattersall, BAsC
Graduate student (MASc), Civil and Mineral Engineering, University of Toronto

Travis Van Wyck
MSc Graduate student, Department of Geography & Planning, University of Toronto

Shelby Sturrock
PhD Candidate, Division of Epidemiology, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto

In Chan Hwang
MScPI Candidate, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Christa Yeung
MScPI Student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Haron Qudoos
Graduate student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Tricia Martinez
M.ASc Civil Engineering Candidate, EIT Civil Engineering, York University

Mani Singh
Planning Student, MES/Planning, York University

Kareem Othman
PhD Candidate, Civil and Mineral Engineering, University of Toronto

Alia Galal
PhD Candidate, Civil Engineering, University of Toronto

Michael David
Graduate student, Masters of Environmental Studies, York University

Mr. Roland Cheng
PhD student, Geography & Planning, University of Toronto

Aidan Grenville
President, University of Toronto Engineering Society

Emily Smit
PhD student, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Catherine Jimenea
PhD Candidate, Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

Nishitha Shashidhar
Graduate student, Southern Ontario Centre for Atmospheric Aerosol Research, Chemical Engineering and Applied Chemistry, University of Toronto

Miss Rebecca Hsiung
Graduate student, Master of Information Student, University of Toronto

Dr. Ramesh Pokharel
Postdoctoral Fellow, School of Cities, University of Toronto

CC

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
The Honourable Omar Alghabra, Minister of Transport Canada
The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance
The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario and Member of Provincial Parliament, Etobicoke North
The Honourable Caroline Mulroney, Minister of Transportation Ontario
The Honourable Stan Cho, Member of Provincial Parliament, Willowdale and Associate Minister of Transportation Ontario
His Worship John Tory, Mayor of Toronto

Gary Anandasangaree, Member of Parliament, Scarborough—Rouge Park
Yvan Baker, Member of Parliament, Etobicoke Centre
The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Member of Parliament, Toronto—St. Paul's and Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Canada
The Honourable Bill Blair, Member of Parliament, Scarborough Southwest and Minister of Emergency Preparedness Canada
Shaun Chen, Member of Parliament, Scarborough North
Michael Coteau, Member of Parliament, Don Valley East
Han Dong, Member of Parliament, Don Valley North
The Honourable Kristy Duncan, Member of Parliament, Etobicoke North
Julie Dabrusin, Member of Parliament, Toronto—Danforth
Julie Dzerowicz, Member of Parliament, Davenport
Ali Ehsassi, Member of Parliament, Willowdale
Nathaniel Erskine-Smith, Member of Parliament, Beaches—East York
The Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Member of Parliament, York South—Weston and Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion Canada
The Honourable Marci Ien, Member of Parliament, Toronto Centre and Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth Canada
James Maloney, Member of Parliament, Etobicoke—Lakeshore
The Honourable John McKay, Member of Parliament, Scarborough—Guildwood
The Honourable Marco Mendicino, Member of Parliament, Elginton—Lawrence and Minister of Public Safety Canada
The Honourable Robert Oliphant, Member of Parliament, Don Valley West
Ya'ara Saks, Member of Parliament, York Centre
The Honourable Judy Sgro, Member of Parliament, Humber River—Black Creek
Arif Virani, Member of Parliament, Parkdale—High Park
Kevin Vuong, Member of Parliament, Spadina—Fort York
Jean Yip, Member of Parliament, Scarborough—Agincourt
Salma Zahid, Member of Parliament, Scarborough Centre

Mary-Margaret McMahon, Member of Provincial Parliament,
Marit Stiles, Member of Provincial Parliament, Davenport
Jill Andrew, Member of Provincial Parliament, Toronto—St. Paul's
Aris Babikian, Member of Provincial Parliament, Scarborough—Agincourt

Doly Begum, Member of Provincial Parliament, Scarborough Southwest
Jessica Bell, Member of Provincial Parliament, University—Rosedale
Stephanie Bowman, Member of Provincial Parliament, Don Valley West
The Honourable Raymond Cho, Member of Provincial Parliament, Scarborough North
and Minister for Seniors and Accessibility Ontario
The Honourable Michael Ford, Member of Provincial Parliament, York South—Weston
and Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism Ontario
Chris Glover, Member of Provincial Parliament, Spadina—Fort York
Christine Hogarth, Member of Provincial Parliament, Etobicoke—Lakeshore
Mitzie Hunter, Member of Provincial Parliament, Scarborough—Guildwood
Bhutila Karpoche, Member of Provincial Parliament, Parkdale—High Park
Vincent Ke, Member of Provincial Parliament, Don Valley North
The Honourable Michael Kerzner, Member of Provincial Parliament, York Centre and
Solicitor General of Ontario
Robin Martin, Member of Provincial Parliament, Eglinton—Lawrence
Mary-Margaret McMahon, Member of Provincial Parliament, Beaches—East York
Tom Rakocovic, Member of Provincial Parliament, Humber River—Black Creek
Adil Shamji, Member of Provincial Parliament, Don Valley East
David Smith, Member of Provincial Parliament, Scarborough Centre
The Honourable Kinga Surma, Member of Provincial Parliament, Etobicoke Centre and
Minister of Infrastructure Ontario
Peter Tabuns, Member of Provincial Parliament, Toronto—Danforth and Leader of the
Official Opposition
Vijay Thanigasalam, Member of Provincial Parliament, Scarborough—Rouge Park
Kristyn Wong-Tam, Member of Provincial Parliament, Toronto Centre

Paul Ainslie, Councillor, Scarborough-Guildwood
Brad Bradford, Councillor, Beaches-East York
Alejandra Bravo, Councillor, Davenport
Jon Burnside, Councillor, Don Valley East
Shelley Carroll, Councillor, Don Valley North
Lily Cheng, Councillor, Willowdale
Mike Colle, Councillor, Eglinton—Lawrence
Gary Crawford, Councillor, Scarborough Southwest
Vincent Crisanti, Councillor, Etobicoke North
Paula Fletcher, Councillor, Toronto—Danforth
Stephen Holyday, Councillor, Etobicoke Centre
Ausma Malik, Councillor, Spadina—Fort York
Nick Mantas, Councillor, Scarborough—Agincourt
Josh Matlow, Councillor, Toronto—St. Paul's
Jennifer McKelvie, Councillor, Scarborough—Rouge Park
Chris Moise, Councillor, Toronto Centre
Amber Morley, Councillor, Etobicoke—Lakeshore
Jamaal Myers, Councillor, Scarborough North

Frances Nunziata, Councillor, York South—Weston
James Pasternak, Councillor, York Centre
Gord Perks, Councillor, Parkdale—High Park
Anthony Perruzza, Councillor, Humber River—Black Creek
Jaye Robinson, Councillor, Don Valley West
Dianne Saxe, Councillor, University—Rosedale
Michael Thompson, Councillor, Scarborough Centre