

Morning Media Scan: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan - June 12, 2017

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MEDIA SCAN HYDRO RATE REDUCTION PLAN

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Print Coverage

24 Hours Toronto: The Shuttle Shuffle; TTC detours show how badly we need new system; A5; 2017.06.12

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ILLUSTRATION: Joe Warmington, Postmedia / With all of the TTC service interruptions, Cameron and Ronald Heal are finding it hard to get around town.;

WORD COUNT: 591

The Shuttle Shuffle; TTC detours show how badly we need new system

Nothing is going to keep Ronald Heal from seeing his beloved son, Cameron, on Saturdays.

"We always meet at a downtown Tim Hortons for a coffee and then decide what we are going to do from there," Ronald says. "I live north and he lives south, so we meet in the middle."

"It's always fun," Cameron, 34, says.

Just not always easy. Born with Cerebral Palsy, Cameron never complains.

But that doesn't mean getting around this city is simple for him.

Certainly this weekend everything, everywhere was messed up.

If there isn't a ride for this, or a run for that, there are ramps shut down, roads closed and subway repairs underway.

A great city, but chaos! It's frustrating but difficult to assign blame because there is so much of it to spread around over so many generations of leaders.

This weekend is an example of the result.

For the Heals, the issue was the TTC's Bloor-Danforth Line.

To go east, the stations from St. George to Broadview were shut down while crews installed upgrades.

"We decided to go to the Scarborough Town Centre," Ronald says.

With professional and courteous instruction from TTC staff, it meant getting off one train, going up the elevator, jumping on a special shuttle bus and taking it over to Broadview station, going back down an elevator and back into the subway.

"It's just the way things are," Cameron says. "It's happened before. There's nothing you can do about it."

Of course he's probably right because when it comes to our roads and transit, you really can't rely on them being available - part of the price for leaning on work this city did in the 1950s that we still rely on today, despite being five times bigger.

But the question is, at what point will it be enough for Torontonians to say we need a proper subway system that does not strand people in an area just because there's maintenance and that is clean, fast, affordable, safe and modern? "I wish it was now," Ronald says. "They should just get it all done."

What is the magic number to do that? Is it \$10 billion, \$20 billion, \$30 billion? Mayor John Tory thinks the magic number that will really help is about \$12.5 billion.

"The federal government has already committed to about \$5 billion for future projects (ones we have identified: relief line, Scarborough East LRT, waterfront)," he says. "It's the province we are trying to get

onside for those same projects for \$5 billion (to match feds) and the city would then make up the remaining 20% (\$2.5 billion) and we would know for sure those projects were going to happen." Of course they should happen.

They need to happen. For those who say we don't have the money to modernize, consider that as my colleague Antonella Artuso reports that the "projected cost" of Premier Kathleen Wynne's Fair Hydro Plan to reduce bills now with borrowed money for the future is "\$45 billion over 29 years."

How many subway relief lines would \$45 billion build? How many new ramps or lanes? What about the Trudeau government having given \$10 billion in foreign aid, not including \$2.65 billion to developing countries to assist them with climate change.

How about using some of that \$57 billion of our money to help with the new transit or to help our environment? A lot of people are asking, including the guy in the wheelchair who relies on the subway to see his dad every Saturday.

London Free Press: Grits, NDP wage battle for left; Premier sticks to 'activist centre'; A6; 2017.06.12

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ILLUSTRATION: The Canadian Press / Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne is battling dismal approval ratings with an emphasis on "fairness.";

DATELINE: TORONTO

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Grits, NDP wage battle for left; Premier sticks to 'activist centre'

Kathleen Wynne is all about the F word.

Listen to ontario's premier speak these days and chances are she'll talk about fairness. it has become her mantra, an idea she ties to nearly every big announcement she has made lately, from a \$15 minimum wage to a basic income pilot to housing market cooling measures and rent control. expect that to continue through to next year's election on June 7, 2018.

"Everything we've done will be part of the re-election (bid), but i certainly hope there will be a discussion in the election campaign about how to have a fairer society," Wynne, 64, said in a recent interview.

Wynne said she is "being very intentional about fairness," whether it's by raising the minimum wage, giving low-and-middle-income students free post-secondary tuition, a youth pharmacare plan or cutting electricity bills.

Hydro is where the renewed focus on fairness and affordability seems to have started. With voter anger over rising hydro bills reaching a fever pitch, Wynne first admitted at a Liberal convention in november that she made a "mistake" by paying too much attention to the larger problems in the electricity system and not enough to how costs were accumulating on people's bills.

She has always fought for "social justice," Wynne said, but what's changed is how she communicates her plan.

Wynne used the word fair and variations of it about a dozen times while unveiling a basic income pilot project in april and about two dozen times while talking about a \$15 minimum wage last month. She has unveiled the Fair Hydro Plan, the Fair Housing Plan and the Fair Workplaces and Better Jobs plan.

"Making sure that we do everything that we can to make people's lives fairer, make the province a fairer place to live, yeah, that has been a focus," Wynne said in the interview.

Greg Sorbara, who was finance minister under Wynne's predecessor dalton McGuinty, called that platform

a game changer.

Sorbara made headlines earlier this year for saying on TVO's The Agenda it was "extremely unlikely" the Liberals could win the next election with Wynne at the helm. Her approval ratings have been dismal of late.

"The night I was on The Agenda the prospects looked very dim indeed," he said in an interview. "I think there's more light at the end of the tunnel.... There's a sense that the premier herself and the government is really getting its act together and that bodes well in the last year of a mandate."

There is a renewed focus on vulnerable populations, which is often a political strategy of the left, Sorbara said.

"Is (Wynne) occupying all of the space of Andrea Horwath's (NDP) party?" he said. "I think she's occupying a lot of it and I'm not sure that's a bad political strategy."

Wynne swears she is still "leading from the activist centre," her phrase of 2014, but many others have noted her shift to the left. A recent newspaper editorial called her a great NDP premier.

The next election will be the most difficult the Liberals have faced in a long time, Sorbara said. Anger over hydro bills has not gone away, and opposition politicians will be sure to remind voters that the Liberal plan to cut bills in the short term means ratepayers will end up paying more in the long term. Wynne's decision to partially sell Hydro One to raise infrastructure cash remains unpopular.

In September, not one but two trials begin involving Liberals. One in Sudbury on election act bribery charges and another in Toronto on mischief and breach of trust charges over the alleged deletion of emails about gas plant cancellations. And by that time, the Liberals will have been in power for 15 years. One of their biggest challenges will be fighting an appetite for change, said Genevieve Tellier, a political science professor at the University of Ottawa.

"It's to send a message that it's not the old Liberals that are in power, but they have new ideas and they're a dynamic and efficient and responsible government and they deserve to be re-elected," she said.

That messaging was on display recently as 600 Liberals did a mass canvass in 54 ridings, knocking on 60,000 doors to promote their plan.

Polls have suggested they have a long way to go, but Wynne's laser focus on pocketbook issues could still pay off. One of the latest polls put the Liberals ahead of the Progressive Conservatives, though within the margin of error, and Wynne's own dismal approval rating saw a slight uptick, though still below 20 per cent.

The Campaign Research poll is an outlier right now, but CEO Eli Yufest said announcements such as youth pharmacare, basic income and a balanced budget have helped the Liberals pull ahead in his polling for the first time in a long time.

"The provincial Liberals will not give up without a fight," he said. "There's no doubt that what they're doing, what they're unveiling in terms of policy is resonating among the electorate."

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