



**Labourers' International Union of North America
(LiUNA)
Local 183**

Submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy regarding
Bill 171, *Building Transit Faster Act, 2020*

June 10, 2020

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Introduction:

The Labourer's International Union of North America (LiUNA) has over half a million members in North America and tens of thousands of them are in Canada. In collaboration with government and employers, LiUNA fights for worker safety, innovative skills training, and better pay and benefits. In the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Local 183 has a long and storied history striving to improve conditions for our members and ensure they have meaningful, safe, and well-paid employment. Our approach is always positive, proactive, and progressive. We believe in working collaboratively with government and employers for our mutual benefit.

From hospitals to highways, our members play a large role in major government infrastructure projects. Notably, LiUNA members have anchored construction of transit projects such as subways, streetcars, and LRTs; the very systems that move Ontarians from point A to point B. We are proud of the work our members do, and the value we provide to our province.

Transit in Toronto:

In the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), building transit infrastructure has historically faced many challenges as competing voices and levels of government often lead to gridlock, or watered-down proposals. Changes in governments following elections have resulted in shifting policy and priorities, further muddying the waters. Additionally, while Toronto has often been responsible for the Toronto Transit Commission's (TTC) infrastructure, the city usually relies on federal or provincial funds – rarely awarded without strings attached or done so with conflicting timelines. These overarching challenges often result in little to no meaningful movement on transit expansion plans despite a rapidly growing population density.

In April 2019, the Ontario Government unveiled an ambitious plan which would bring much needed relief to the millions of people who rely on public transit every day in the GTA. While there was a healthy debate over the proposal, LiUNA Local 183 feels it is a promising way to offer affordable accessibility to our families and neighbours in the GTA. It is about time that our subway system accommodated our growing city, and we support it.

Of course, like most everything in today's world, the COVID-19 pandemic has complicated transit planning in Toronto. Ridership numbers are down. The TTC, Metrolinx, and transit systems throughout the province have experienced massive losses as the fare-box revenue declines and costly new safety measures become the everyday normal on busses, trains, streetcars, and subways.

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Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that this should not change our long-term transit planning. Now is not the time to pull back investment on future transit lines. A survey by researchers from the University of Toronto notes that while roughly a quarter of regular transit users will not take public transit again until a vaccine is found, caution is suggested when interpreting those results “as they may reflect respondents’ attitudes towards the severity of the crisis in Ontario at the time they completed the survey, rather than what respondents may actually do”.¹

The TTC and Metrolinx have already taken measures to make transit safer. These will certainly only improve as more is known about the COVID-19 virus and how it spreads. We are confident that many of these new measures, such as improved cleaning and disinfecting, better air flow and use of HEPA filtration, and increased implementation of contactless payment methods will be incorporated into the existing system and planned future rolling stock.

We will beat this current crisis. Ontario will persevere, and users will return to transit. When they do, the system must be ready to accommodate them and the growing number of Ontarians that will follow.

Building Transit Faster Act, 2020

The Ontario Government’s April 2019 announcement was a historic commitment to transit. It cut to the heart of what the GTA’s broken system needs most: a large, but necessary, investment of capital in building new lines throughout the GTA, reducing motorist traffic, diffusing crowds, and offering more affordable and accessible transit options to more people. Perhaps, however, the most important feature is that it will reach many communities that lack convenient access to higher-order transit. It will allow families spend more time together, and less time commuting.

Now is the time to push these projects forward. Transit users do not want more delays – they want shovels in the ground. There will always be naysayers who don’t like the plan, the route, or the investment, but the vast majority in the GTA just want it built. This is also overwhelmingly the opinion of our membership.

The *Building Transit Faster Act, 2020* helps ensure that the four new transit projects will proceed responsibly, yet without unnecessary delay. The Act would ensure that in the transit corridor, the transit project has priority. This is a common-sense measure in a region that is serious about transit expansion – and a region that desperately needs it.

¹Dr. Palm, M., Allen, J., Prof. Widener, M., Zhang, Y., Prof. Farber, S., and Howell, N. (May 11, 2020). *Preliminary Results from the Public Transit and COVID-19 Survey*, page 13. Retrieved from <https://uttri.utoronto.ca/files/2020/05/Preliminary-Report-on-the-Public-Transit-and.pdf>

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While some individuals may object, the greater good of millions of transit users must be taken into account.

The Act would also put measures in place whereby utility companies may be required to relocate their infrastructure if necessitated by the transit project. Lastly, the bill would streamline the process for compensating homeowners whose properties lie within the transit corridor, an unfortunate but very real factor in major transit infrastructure projects. What is important is that fair and due compensation is awarded in these instances. In this case, the bill would allow either party to apply to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal if satisfactory conditions cannot be reached. This appeal to a third-party independent body ensures that the process is free of bias, and conducted in an accelerated manner, so that work can begin as soon as possible.

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Our members at Local 183 helped build the transit lines they depend on every day to get to work and back home to their families. Naturally, then, they would like to see construction of the four new transit projects proceed without delay. We look forward to less congestion at Union Station, faster commutes for many communities throughout the GTA, and relief for our over-burdened existing subway lines.

Like most in Ontario and around the world, LiUNA members have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Families have struggled as their jobsites have closed, planned builds have been delayed, and labourers laid off. Everyday Ontarians who rely on their paycheques to get by, and look forward to their pensions in retirement, have had their daily livelihoods threatened and their long-term plans upended. We know this experience is not unique to LiUNA, but we also know that the solution would serve more than just us.

Experts have already shown the need for economic stimulus to help the province and country come out of the recession caused by the pandemic. Elected officials and academics have spoken at length about “shovel-ready” projects. When considering which projects are important and which will help return Ontario to its status as an economic powerhouse, one must also consider the future. While there will be plenty of immediate injections of capital providing short-term relief, the planned medium- and long-term projects must not be left by the wayside. Necessary transit investments that were already moving ahead with support from all levels of government and multiple parties should be prioritized and accelerated as much as can be done responsibly. These projects were needed before from a ridership perspective. They are needed now from an economic relief perspective.

The four planned transit projects – the Ontario Line, the Yonge North Subway Extension, the Scarborough Subway Extension, and the Eglinton Crosstown West

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Extension – will bring much needed jobs for workers across the GTA. For our members, it will be a return to meaningful, well-paid work, and allow them to support their families and once again plan for their future.

The passage of the *Building Transit Faster Act* will help accelerate the four new transit projects in Toronto and it will certainly speed up the economic recovery for LiUNA members, and the many other workers who will help construct the lines. The primary and secondary jobs created through these projects will have a meaningful and measurable impact on Ontarians' lives. The *Building Transit Faster Act* will enable the government to finish what they started, and to do so in a responsible and fair manner. That's what the region needs and that's what people want.

Let's build our future now.