

## Public Transit Policy Resolution

### **Submitted by the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce - Hamilton Street Railway**

#### **Issue:**

The Hamilton Street Railway (HSR) is essential to the economic life of Hamilton. However in recent years the HSR has been undervalued by the City of Hamilton even while hailing its obvious benefits including poverty mitigation, reduced greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution and less gridlock. The City of Hamilton needs to value this essential public service through a thorough review of the HSR's independence, long-term planning and funding. Though this will require an investment of time and money, strong public transit provides excellent value for money and is capable of providing Hamilton with a competitive advantage over other communities.

#### **Background:**

Hamilton has recognized through Vision 2020, GRIDS and the Transportation Master Plan that public transit is a key priority. Ridership and the transit network must be aggressively expanded for Hamilton to gain a competitive edge in order to attract new jobs and build a sustainable city.

##### 1) Independence

Since amalgamation, the HSR has been increasingly subject to undue political influence. New routes are assigned, not based on need or maximized ridership or access to employment lands but on specific interests. The existing plans are vague and aspirational rather than well documented with data and annual ridership targets and reviews of the impact of initiatives. The HSR therefore cannot develop or implement unbiased long-range planning activities.

The HSR has a dedicated management team which oversees the day-to-day operations, sets budgets, and recommends enhancements or alterations to the service levels. However, the overall decision powers lie within City Council, thereby rendering progressive initiatives susceptible to biased support or lack thereof.

Other communities such as Toronto and London have independent public transit commissions that manage their systems and report to city councils. The function of the commission would be to set priorities and goals and be responsible to City Council for the running of the HSR. Naturally given this role the City would have to reassess the HSR's placement within Public Works. This commission must naturally include some councillors but should also draw from the business community and riders to ensure that city-wide goals are met.

##### 2) Long-Term Planning

A strong transit system works much like a strong business: it requires continued measurement, analysis, planning and implementation. Therefore public transit needs

to have the facts on hand gathered through the fare box and customer surveys. It needs to take the time to analyze trends and possible growth areas. It also needs to develop goals and plan how to reach them. Finally it needs to develop a schedule for implementation that works with its budget.

While the HSR runs a laudable, lean and efficient system, there seem to be no clear plans for expanding ridership, enhancing service levels or developing new routes. The HSR has not conducted a system review since amalgamation despite many changes to the city.

Furthermore the Transportation Master Plan calls for “aggressive transit expansion” and an increase from the current 47 transit rides per capita to between 80-100 rides per capita by 2030. To achieve this end, it relies exclusively on two new rapid transit corridors in addition to the current B-Line route in the lower city. Yet this is not a system wide plan and implementing these new routes will not necessarily achieve a doubling of the rides per capita as hoped.

It is also vital to develop transit expansion plans that work with the city’s business community and access the city’s employment areas. For instance, currently the HSR does not service the Ancaster Business Park. Developing a plan in line with business and economic development priorities is essential.

Measurement is also limited; regularly fare boxes do not record trips taken by passes for instance. The impacts of fare increases on ridership are therefore difficult to calculate beyond a best guess. This situation, combined with politics and fluctuating funding levels, limits the HSR’s ability to make factual and sound decisions and plans.

A review could be undertaken as a first order of business of a newly formed commission or happen immediately. This review should include consultations with riders, businesses and non-riders to learn what they need from the HSR and what barriers they face to using the system. Routing should be analyzed to gauge whether current routing makes sense for Hamilton. Ridership should be clearly tracked and plans made for its steady growth and progress (or regress) accurately measured and made public on an annual basis.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **1) Independence**

The Hamilton Chamber of Commerce urges the City of Hamilton to investigate the possibility of establishing an independent transit commission much like those of Toronto and London.

### **2) Long-Term Planning**

The Hamilton Chamber of Commerce urges the City of Hamilton to conduct a thorough review of the HSR.