



Metrolinx—GO Station Selection 2018 Value-for-Money Audit

Why We Did This Audit

- In September 2017, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts passed a motion requesting our Office conduct a value-for-money audit on the proposed Metrolinx GO stations at Kirby and Lawrence East.
- The motion was presented in light of the controversy surrounding whether the Minister of Transportation and the City of Toronto influenced Metrolinx's June 2016 recommendation to its Board that these two stations be built.

Why It Matters

- The public has a right to know who is accountable for planning decisions affecting the selection of GO stations.
- Decisions to build new transit infrastructure projects should be supported by sound, evidence-based planning because costs to Ontarians can be significant and long-lasting.

What We Found

- The Minister of Transportation did not use the legislated channels available to him to direct Metrolinx's regional transportation planning work; instead, he and the City of Toronto influenced Metrolinx to override its own GO station planning process. The Ministry of Transportation went so far as to issue news releases announcing the Kirby and Lawrence East stations before the Metrolinx Board had met to make its final recommendation to build the two stations.
- Metrolinx's initial analysis of the two stations concluded that the stations should not be recommended for construction for the next 10 years because of an expected net loss of GO ridership, a net increase in vehicle use (driving) in the GTHA and an overall decrease in fare revenue.
- In response to the Minister of Transportation and the City of Toronto's influence, Metrolinx removed Kirby and Lawrence East from the original list of "not recommended" stations and put them into a new category it created of "low"-performing stations. In Metrolinx's June 28, 2016, report to the Board, Metrolinx recommended that its Board approve the construction of these two "low"-performing stations.
- In Metrolinx's updated February 2018 analysis, the expected benefits of the stations to the GTHA increased. However, in its analysis, Metrolinx used outdated information and assumed a best-case scenario about future changes to the GO rail system that, to varying degrees, are not certain to be fully implemented as planned when the stations are completed.
- Metrolinx affected the clarity and transparency of the results of its analysis of the two stations when providing information to the public and its Board.

Conclusions

- The ultimate selection by Metrolinx of the proposed GO stations at Kirby and Lawrence East was clearly influenced by the Minister of Transportation and the City of Toronto.
- Metrolinx's lack of a rigorous transit-planning process that weighs all costs and benefits against established criteria facilitated Metrolinx making the Kirby and Lawrence East stations' evaluation results look better.