

# Ghost stations: Councillors baffled by lack of trains

They pepper Metrolinx official with questions on all-day GO service to city and beyond

---

The Hamilton Spectator · 16 Nov 2017 · MATTHEW VAN DONGEN

---

**BEWILDERED CITY COUNCILLORS** want to know why all-day GO train service is not headed for the \$80-million worth of new GO stations that will soon be open along Hamilton's lakeshore rail line.



The province's arm's-length transit agency, Metrolinx, opened a \$45-million GO station on James Street North in 2015. But more than two years later, only two Torontobound commuter trains leave the station each morning.

Construction is also about to begin on a \$35-million Confederation station further east on the same line, at Centennial Parkway, that should be ready to roll in 2019. New stations are also promised along the lakehugging rail line in Grimsby, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls.

Despite all of the new infrastructure, Metrolinx regional planning director Antoine Beliaeff told councillors Wednesday there is no public "service plan" yet for the expanded GO line.

And long-promised hourly GO train service — whenever it finally arrives in Hamilton — is first destined for the Hunter Street GO Centre, which is on a Canadian Pacific-owned line not connected to the newly built stations.

That plan "confuses the heck out of me," said Mayor Fred Eisenberger, who asked why more frequent train service isn't a priority for the new stations and expanding commuter line into Niagara.

Beliaeff said Metrolinx had already chosen to first extend true "all-day" service to the Hunter Street station when the agency's 10-year Regional Express Rail plan was announced in 2015. Hamilton is supposed to be on track for hourly service by 2025, but Beliaeff said he had no more specific timeline to offer.

Metrolinx communication staff later clarified the 10-year RER plan calls for "expanded service" to both the West Harbour station and Hunter Street GO Centre.

But they also confirmed that plan only envisions hourly trains — and eventual 15-minute rush hour service — at Hunter Street, not along the lakeshore line. By the end of the RER expansion plan, the hope is to have 30 minute rush-hour service at West Harbour GO.

Belaieff added “complicated” negotiations continue between Metrolinx and the owner of the lakeshore rail corridor, CN, over access to existing tracks. New service to West Harbour cannot be added without an agreement with CN.

Those negotiations have been cited by provincial officials at least as far back as 2010 as a reason why extending more frequent GO train service to Hamilton is difficult. (Metrolinx owns the lakeshore rail corridor through Toronto, but both GO lines in Hamilton are owned by private railroad companies.)

That oft-repeated explanation didn't fly with many councillors.

“It's frustrating,” said Coun. Donna Skelly, who pressed unsuccessfully for any update on when train frequency would improve to the new West Harbour station.

“I don't understand why we would continue to build stations if we don't know whether we can get trains to them.”

Belaieff said trains will be able serve the new east-end station in 2019, but Metrolinx isn't able to say how many. “It would be illogical to have stations with no trains,” he said. “There will be service, but we don't have a service plan yet.”

Eisenberger later said he expects all-day GO service to Hunter Street is the “interim” solution until Metrolinx solves the rail corridor ownership issues and the rail traffic bottleneck that occurs between Aldershot and the Desjardins canal.

Former Metrolinx head Bruce McCuaig has called that junction of railroads “the most complex corner of railway infrastructure in Canada.”

“The important thing is to get that all-day service to Hamilton sooner rather than later, at one location or another,” said the mayor.

Neither Belaieff nor Metrolinx staff could say when service might improve to the West Harbour station at James Street North. As of spring 2016, an average of 50 riders per weekday morning were using the two outgoing trains from the \$45-million station.

The agency, in partnership with corridor owner CN, has been building a third track across the Desjardins canal that is expected to help ease train traffic congestion between West Harbour and the Aldershot GO station.

Metrolinx later said a new track to allow a second platform at West Harbour is now complete, but further track “surfacing” work will continue into December and additional, unspecified “infrastructure” is still needed closer to the Bayview Junction.