

Greater Toronto & Hamilton Area Transit Choices: Report finds much higher transportation emissions from road vs. rail

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January 19, 2011 (OTTAWA, ON)- Two of Canada's leading think tanks released a new report today that compares air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from road and rail transportation. The report confirms that smog in the GTHA could be reduced significantly by moving car commuters to rail, such as LRT and subway, and freight trucks to freight trains.

The Sustainable Prosperity, Pembina Institute report **"Putting Transportation on Track in the GTHA"** provides the most up-to-date data comparing transportation emissions from rail with those of cars and trucks in urban centres similar to the GTHA, concluding that rail is by far the cleaner, greener and more sustainable option.

Key findings of the report include:

- Road transportation is responsible for a majority of smog-producing criteria air contaminants (CACs), causing illness and resulting in 440 deaths in Toronto alone and costing \$2.2 billion per year. The death toll in Ontario is 9,500 per year.
- Transportation is the largest and fastest growing source of GHG emissions in Ontario.
- Road-based passenger travel contributes significantly more GHG emissions than rail and is two to four times as emission-intensive as rail, yet currently 70-90% of transportation in the GTHA takes place on roads.
- Freight trucks contribute 12 times as much GHG emissions and are five times as emission-intensive compared to rail.

"Current discussions between decision-makers and the public about the Regional Transportation Plan for the GTHA, must be grounded in fact," said Sustainable Prosperity's David Thompson, the report's author. "While for the most part it is common sense that rail is better than road, this report provides decision makers and the public with hard facts and figures and clearly shows that building a comprehensive public transit system and encouraging people and freight shippers to use rail is good for our health, our air, and our planet."

Sustainable Prosperity and Pembina intend the report to contribute to the public's understanding of why the Ontario government's comprehensive plan to build new rapid transit infrastructure and shift car trips into transit is so important.

"We know that the pollutants that cause smog in the GTHA are 90% lower per person using rail-based transit than a person using single-occupancy road-based transportation. There is an opportunity here for decision-makers to do the right thing and clean up transportation in Greater Toronto," said Cherise Burda, Ontario policy director with the Pembina Institute. "The health impacts for the region are some of the worst in urban Canada and the solution is straight forward – provide rail options that result in cleaner transit and a cleaner region."

The report “**Putting Transportation on Track in the GTHA**” highlights the environmental implications for the future of transportation in the GTHA and adds to the economic and social analysis provided in the earlier report co-authored by Sustainable Prosperity “*Time to Get Serious: Reliable Funding for GTHA Transit/ Transportation Infrastructure*” that clearly identified the urgent need for a better transportation system, predicting a population increase in the GTHA of three million by 2031 and an additional 1.5 million cars on the road.

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The report, “*Putting Transportation on Track*”, is [available online](#).

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Learn more about the work of Sustainable Prosperity, including the report co-authored by Neal Irwin, IBI Group, for the Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance “*Time to Get Serious: Reliable Funding for GTHA Transit/ Transportation Infrastructure*” www.sustainableprosperity.ca

Learn more about the work of the Pembina Institute <http://www.pembina.org>

Media Backgrounder

The Sustainable Prosperity/Pembina report “**Putting Transportation on Track in the GTHA**” provides the most up-to-date, independently researched data directly comparing road and rail emissions (for both passenger and freight transportation). The report’s findings, which clearly show lower greenhouse gas emissions, and an improvement in air quality and associated health impacts by shifting from road to rail, provide critical data for the current discussion about the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

Main Findings of the Report “**Putting Transportation on Track in the GTHA**” include:

Road-based greenhouse gas (GHGs) emissions are at least two to four times those of rail-based, yet 70 to 90% of transportation in the GTHA is road-based.

Criteria air contaminants (CACs) cause an enormous burden of illness and have been estimated to **kill 9,500 people per year in Ontario**, far more than the number killed by all infectious diseases combined. In the City of Toronto alone, air pollution just from traffic has been estimated to kill 440 people and **cost \$2.2 billion per year**.

Transportation is not only the largest but also the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas (GHGs) emissions in Ontario.

Automobile and truck traffic account for the large majority of overall emissions in the GTHA.

According to the results of the report, the opportunity for the GTHA is clear: shifting people from cars and trucks to transit will lower greenhouse gas emissions, smog-producing criteria air contaminants, improve the air quality resulting in health improvements and lower smog-related deaths, and will enable the GTHA and the region to meet its environmental commitments. While other studies have focused on socio-economic factors, this report clearly sets out the environmental implications.

“Putting Transportation on Track in the GTHA: A survey of road and rail emissions comparisons” follows the Sustainable Prosperity / Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance report *“Time to Get Serious: Reliable Funding for GTHA Transit/ Transportation Infrastructure”* that examined the urgent need to improve regional transportation and provided a menu of funding options to enable the GTHA to implement the RTP.

For high resolution versions of images or graphs, including Ontario Emissions Reports, please contact Jennifer Wesanko at jwesanko@sustainableprosperity.ca.