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# **Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Wednesday, October 26, 2011**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Merv Tweed**



## Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

Wednesday, October 26, 2011

• (1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)):** Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to meeting number 9 of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Our orders of the day, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), are a study of the national public transit strategy.

Joining us today as an individual is Mr. Harry Redstone, a retired professional engineer, who comes here highly recommended.

I know you've been advised regarding your opening comments. We'll listen to them and then move to committee questions. Please proceed.

**Mr. Harry Redstone (Retired professional engineer, As an Individual):** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It's a pleasure to be here, there's no question about that.

I want to assure you that what I'm going to talk about relates to me; I'm not associated with any consultant, any transit agency, any contractor, or any vehicle supplier. So the ideas and issues I will be discussing are issues that I have learned about and been helped to think about based on the experience I've had in various countries.

I think what we have to really look at is basically a saying and a little bit of philosophy, that the past is history, the present doesn't exist because it's gone in a nanosecond, and the future depends on educated projections and awareness of possible innovations.

When I say that, what I'm suggesting to you is that this strategy has to be a living document. In other words, things change and will change. Just take, for example, cell phones and the impact they've had as they've morphed into smart phones. Look at what these smart phones, which have been in use for only three years or so, have done with regard to revolutions in different countries and changes and peaceful demonstrations in different cities in the U.S., Canada, and elsewhere. So things are changing, and we have to look at that and the related innovations that crop up. Therefore, the document, to my mind, must be a living document.

Now, there's another philosophical situation, not an idea but a reality, which is that people in this country basically live in a flat environment and are used to a two-dimensional society, a two-dimensional situation. We forget that there is a third dimension, and this third dimension is something that one should always consider with regard to living and with regard to transit. Vancouver is a classic case in point. It has gone to an elevated transit system. I'll get into that a little bit later.

Another issue that we in Toronto have noticed—and I don't really want to complain, but will—has to do with the fact that, in 1994, there was a change in provincial government. Prior to that there was a very good “Let's Move” program between TTC and different consultants. When the new government came in, it cancelled the project. There was actually some work done on this extension. Similarly, when the mayor of Toronto took office a year ago, he cancelled what is known as the “Transit City” project that the previous mayor had brought in. Millions of dollars had been spent on consulting fees and on orders for the procurement of vehicles, which had to be cancelled. These are things that really discourage the people who are involved in the industry.

I'd like to talk now about the various subjects related to public transit. I noticed, too, that in the committee's mandate public transit does not really exist. We talk about highways and railways and these kinds of thing, but the people use mass transit. So I think it's something that we should really look at. Mass transit is for people, not for cars, which are meant for roads, basically.

I'm not going to address air travel too much. It's something that we can discuss ad infinitum.

As for train travel, commuter service in the city of Toronto is becoming very popular. The system is growing, and extensions are taking place, but commuter services at this point in time are working only to bring people into the central business district in the morning and to leave it at night. This means there are a lot of people who would like to travel in the daytime—and Metrolinx, which is GO Transit's operator, is considering that.

• (1540)

The other issue is a favourite one, I think, of all of us and that is the issue with regard to trains. The bullet train was instigated in Japan in the 1960s. In the early 1980s, the TGV ran its first train in France, which is the high-speed rail. The difference is that the bullet train goes up to and around 200 kilometres per hour whereas high-speed rail goes up to 300 kilometres per hour, and sometimes in excess of that. Since that first inaugural trip in France, 14 countries have installed high-speed rail; 18,000 kilometres have been installed, with another 10,000 under construction.

In Canada, high-speed rail has been studied for at least 20 years. There have been several meetings on this, and I attended one in the early 1990s. Alignments were identified and a decision has still to be given. So this is an issue that we have to think about.

Now we get into mass transit. Mass transit carries people; highways carry cars. There's obviously a difference. If you consider a mass-transit train, which can carry approximately 20,000 people per hour per direction, the train can go at an average speed of 30 kilometres per hour. The road necessary to compete with this, at the same speed and with same carrying capacity, would require approximately eight lanes in each direction. That's a lot of space.

I have also gone through and made a table—which you don't have, but you will get it in the future—that basically outlines the top nine cities in Canada with populations in excess of 600,000 people. Toronto has, according to the latest statistics, over five million people, and that includes Mississauga and Brampton. It is the fifth largest city in North America and something that Canada should be proud of, but its size creates major problems.

Cities with more than 600,000 people account for approximately 47% of the total population of Canada, based on the population projection of July 1. The population of the smaller cities will increase this percentage to well over 50%. The percentage of the population in Canadian cities with mass transit, compared to the total Canadian population, is approximately 42%.

Consider that the people with mass transit right now are mainly in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton—and, supposedly, Ottawa-Gatineau. Ottawa-Gatineau is the fourth largest city in the country. Basically what I'm saying is that as far as the statistics are concerned, Canada is becoming an urban country.

I have two minutes more? Oops, I'm going too slowly.

When you get the translation of this paper that I've written, you will see that I talk about design considerations. The main design consideration for mass transit is the passenger, not the materials.

•(1545)

The train systems should be procured using the latest technology. There's no point in purchasing outdated equipment. Automatic fare collection should be instituted throughout.

An issue that you probably want to talk about is joint development. The MTR of Hong Kong is a good example of how joint development can work. But it works by partnering with developers, and the amount of joint development profit is the same as that collected in the fare box. If you want some more information with regard to joint development, there's a Federal Transit Administration paper called "Transit-Oriented Development and Joint Development in the United States: A Literature Review", which goes through the different scenarios they use in the United States

The other issue with regard to joint development relates to partnering, as Hong Kong does, with developers. Developers who build close to mass transit stations benefit greatly from the transit stations. A tax should be levied against these developers, similar to what has been done on the Jubilee line in London.

Bus transit can complement the mass transit systems as a feeder system, and it does. Bus transit is a good means of transit for smaller communities. The main disadvantage that busses have in a large metropolitan area is that they occupy roads and are subject to an erratic schedule, depending on road traffic conditions.

I have some quick conclusions. Government funding is necessary to build and operate mass transit systems. There is no getting around it.

Canada has a good reputation for manufacturing and implementing technically advanced transit systems. Vancouver is a classic case in point. This system was installed in Vancouver and commissioned in 1986 and has been extended. Toronto has the RT system, which was commissioned a year before. But for some strange reason, drivers were put on these trains. They only operate a train for two hours a day. That is a waste of manpower.

Furthermore, it's essential that funding be made available to cover capital costs for the building of the infrastructure and the procurement of the systems. Ongoing funding will be required to supplement the operating and maintenance costs. Life-cycle costs must be carefully calculated in all of these functions. A partnership arrangement with developers can minimize the actual input costs. There are also other means of deferring costs, such as BLT contracts, which mainly involve dealing with the suppliers. That is one way of deferring costs, though.

•(1550)

**The Chair:** If I may, I will stop you there. Maybe we can flesh out the rest through questions. I know that committee members have lots of questions.

Mr. Nicholls.

**M. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NPD):** Thank you for sharing your knowledge with us.

I'd like to start by asking you about your experience with the Manila Metro Rail Transit. What was your experience with that project, and how do you believe it turned out?

**Mr. Harry Redstone:** That's a good question and one of the things I'm proud of, to be perfectly honest.

In 1984, Manila had an elevated LRT system that was built in Belgium, I think. In 1994, we had a team of people from Japan—which the Japanese funded—and from Britain, and the Philippines. I was the project manager. The existing system was old fashioned and without air conditioning. After some thought I went to see the Department of Transportation and Communications and discussed what I thought should be done. My recommendations included air conditioning of the system, as well as higher elevation—to achieve more light on the roads and sidewalks, and so that the concourses were underneath the stations instead of next to the actual platforms, which creates a major problem. Also, I recommended a driverless heavy-rail system, which was somewhat rare in Europe then, but they accepted it and the design went through.

There was a pause between the actual finish of the design and the awarding of the contracts for construction of the various phases. By that time I was in Bangkok doing a study.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** Were the consortium projections for ridership rates met upon completion of the contract?

**Mr. Harry Redstone:** No. This is the problem with projections: it's very difficult to get people to use the system, but once they do, they become more interested in it. I think the ridership is now increasing. I haven't been back to look at it, as far as the—

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** Is it true that there were problems, such as stairs being too long and a lack of elevators and escalators planned for the system, but that once they implemented those things, the ridership increased?

**Mr. Harry Redstone:** Yes.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** Is it your view that had those things had been planned ahead of time, perhaps the ridership would have been immediately receptive?

**Mr. Harry Redstone:** To a partial degree, yes I agree. The use of elevators is a very good idea. It means extra costs, mind you, and it's something you have to sell to the government, but it is a good idea. I agree with that 100%. I think it would also help with the ridership. It goes hand in hand with regard to people getting used to the system. So I agree with you.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** I have one last question about this. The fares for the new system were higher than the existing LRT because of the lack of ridership on this new system. Is that correct?

•(1555)

**Mr. Harry Redstone:** The fares on line 1 are extremely low and have been increasing slowly with time. The fares they were projecting or wanting for line 2 were much higher. I think they've had to reduce them to gain more ridership. The same is true for line 3.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** I don't know the Manila system. Is the whole system privatized, or was it all built in partnership with private partners? Or was part publicly built, and part privately built?

**Mr. Harry Redstone:** On line 2, we attempted to get together with different developers and stores to try to get them interested. Most of them were not, mainly because of the bad experience with line 1. So it became a major problem—well, not a problem, but something we were unable to do.

Line 3 is mostly privatized, as you may know.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** If there is any time left I'll allocate it to Mr. Sullivan.

**The Chair:** Mr. Sullivan, for a minute and a half.

**Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP):** One of the things we hope to accomplish with the strategy is to prevent the kinds of things you saw in Toronto, where we dug a hole and spent \$150 million to fill it again, and then dug another hole, which maybe we'll keep this time. It's bring some coordination to transit and some transparency to the amount of money that's being spent on it.

One of the issues that keeps coming up is who should be spending the money. Who should spend the money is not part of the public transit strategy, but it keeps coming up. There isn't enough money in the municipal infrastructure systems to be able to afford to put holes in the ground and put rails over them.

Do you think there is a place for the federal government not only in coordinating but also funding?

**Mr. Harry Redstone:** There are two issues right now with regard to Toronto. The first is that both Toronto and Metrolinx refuse to work with developers. If they worked with developers, in a partnership arrangement, maybe using the Hong Kong model as a possibility, then money could be made with regard to the operating costs.

The problem with municipalities and provincial governments is that it's sometimes very difficult to get them to agree on what's to be done. But it's also not necessarily uniform throughout the country. There is the suggestion of having federal overview to examine what's going on and to make some sort of design recommendations, but funding may also be required.

As I mentioned very briefly, there are some means by which funding can be deferred with regard to BOT types of contracts, and the period is normally about 25 to 30 years. This can be implemented to try to reduce the overall costs, but when you have a city the size of Toronto, with 5.1 million people when Mississauga and Brampton are included, it is a major problem for anybody to get enough money to develop transit systems for the city and surroundings. Who benefits? No one benefits. The people certainly do not benefit, so what do you do?

It's a situation where somebody has to say this has to be done. It's like a major decision with regard to high-speed rail. Something has to be done with regard to some of these issues, and the cities are broke in some cases. Toronto is a classic case in point, but the people need to have the transportation because they are the most important part of mass transit.

•(1600)

**The Chair:** I'll stop you there and go to Monsieur Coderre.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Redstone, I would ask you to wear your translation device, please. We don't have a non-bilingual Auditor General, but as I am bilingual, I'd like to talk in both official languages.

[*Translation*]

First I would like to thank you. I think it's important to hear witnesses who, in light of their expertise, can share their experience with us. This is why we can sometimes take prevention measures in order to prevent mistakes.

We are talking about the adoption of a national strategy for public transport and I think that governance is an important aspect of this question. You've talked about this earlier and indicated that municipal and provincial authorities didn't quite agree amongst themselves.

Could you talk a bit more about the Canadian government's role? This is not an easy question. There are questions regarding jurisdiction and the Constitution. There's also the question of rural versus urban communities. You can be inspired by models like Hong Kong or other cities in the world, but the fact remains that we must face a Canadian reality. I notice that you're an expert, amongst other things, in system integration. If it's true with respect to logistics, it can also be true with respect to governance.

Imagine you're the minister responsible.

[English]

You're the decision-maker now. You're calling the shots.

[Translation]

How could we make sure we can create a national public transport strategy that would be truly viable? The fact is this is a necessity for people.

[English]

I'm putting you on the spot now. You have the decision in your hands. How do you manage and make it possible?

**Mr. Harry Redstone:** Oh, talk about a loaded question.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Do you want a glass of water? You are okay?

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Harry Redstone:** There was not just one. There was a whole series of them.

Basically, as I mentioned, Canada is becoming more of an urban society. Whether we like it or not, this is a fact. Basically, we have a situation where the cities themselves have to gear themselves up to the reality that they're getting big enough that they're going to have to either initiate or expand some kind of mass transit system, because people really have to be transported around. When you think of the cost of cars, for example, and the people driving cars to work and parking and everything else, it doesn't make sense for a motorist to drive to the central business district if he or she can take a train of some sort. That's just a philosophical point.

In terms of governance with regard to the cities, they have to realize, first of all, what the problem is. The provinces then have to get involved and partner with the municipalities wherever possible, so there's a common desire to do this type of design and implementation. The FTA in the U.S., which I hate to use as an example—and so you have my apologies—has been in existence for quite a while. They have different ideas with regard to how things can work and the technology that might be the possible for a city in question, and they are also willing to help fund.

I can't go further on that, because we would have to go into great detail with regard to what can be done.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** One of the issues when creating that strategy is that we have to define a national need. In Quebec, where I'm from, they have their own jurisdiction regarding public transport. There is all the red tape, which we have to take a look at. We will also eventually need a smart regulation process. But at the same time, municipalities are provincial creatures.

We're talking about the funding. The FCM is telling us that they cannot use the actual gas tax. We need some other funding. Let's talk about that a little bit.

Do you believe that we should have a dedicated fund, a Canada one-two punch, combining infrastructure and public transport? I ask this because we cannot have public transport without having the proper infrastructure. Or do you believe that we should have a specific national strategy on public transport, and then we can address the infrastructure issue at the same time, but differently?

• (1605)

**Mr. Harry Redstone:** I think there's one point with regard to philosophy. The point is this: Can we afford it, and can we afford not to do it? In many cases, that “not” situation is something we have to consider. Can we allow these cities to grow without helping the people move around them? That's philosophy.

That's the first step with regard to understanding the problem. Then, as you were saying, we get into the situation of the municipalities. Invariably they have no money. So how do they get money? A gas tax may be one solution. It all depends on the kind of system we're talking about too, and how big the actual urban city is.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** You spoke a little bit about the P3, the public-private partnership. How do you perceive it? I don't have any problem having those kinds of things. We have some examples that have been working in my province in some other areas. I'm frankly concerned about the safety issue. Do you see a problem with that P3 and safety, so that the government would also be a regulator of sorts? How would it work in your book? I ask because they are there for profit, of course.

**Mr. Harry Redstone:** No, no. It depends on the partnership I'm talking about. The actual stations, for example, would be designed by the authority to incorporate the required safety for the passengers, including to allow people to move out of a station as quickly as possible, all designed so that you have access in case of a fire or some catastrophic event. These issues have to be addressed. This should be a federal regulation anyway. Regardless of that, these are the important things.

Now, the development that I'm talking about does not necessarily have anything to do with the station, as an example. It's what they do above the station, because the issue is that joint venture above the station. This is what they do in Hong Kong to quite a degree. They first get together and figure out what they can do with regard to building whatever they build on top, whether apartments, condos, offices, or shopping centres.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Poilievre.

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC):** Thank you for being with us today.

I'd like to ask you about the economics of public transit. I'd like you to give us, if you can, an idea of how a government determines the worthiness of a public transit project.

I gather the bells are ringing. I'm setting off alarm bells here with my question. It wouldn't be the first time.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** I have to interrupt here. I'm sorry about this, but there's been a vote called back in the chamber, and we have to be there. Tradition is that we suspend the meeting immediately upon the bells ringing. I'm advised that it will be a half-hour vote or maybe a little bit longer. I'm looking to the committee for some direction. We have another guest here, but I understand the timeframes are tight for everybody.

• (1610)

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** I would suggest that he can have his own little round, but are we going to be able to come back?

**The Chair:** Mr. Albas.

**Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In case we can't return, I really would think it would be good of us to at least accept written submissions by our guests, either now or another time, just out of courtesy.

**The Chair:** Yes, and I think that would be possible.

I have spoken to our second guest and suggested that the committee would entertain having him back here next Wednesday for an hour, if that would work for him, too.

I apologize, but I didn't call the vote.

With that, I'm going to end this meeting. I regret that I have to do this, but we do have written submissions and we do have your presentation, Mr. Redstone, so I appreciate your time.

To our other guest, Mr. Carter, I apologize, but the door is open to welcome you back, should you be able to find the time.

I'll ask Mr. Albas to table the report from the greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce. We have a written submission that will be circulated to all the members. Is that suitable?

Okay.

Mr. Redstone.

**Mr. Harry Redstone:** If there are some questions that you would like me to address, if they could be sent to me, I could then put something in writing.

**The Chair:** I will ask the committee to direct them through me to the clerk, and we will see that the questions get put out.

Thank you. I appreciate your time.

The meeting is adjourned.

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