

RENAISSANCE CONFERENCE 2011



Strategies & Priorities for the Future

Saturday, February 26, 2011

*Scarborough Civic Centre
150 Borough Drive
Scarborough, Ontario*

25th Annual Renaissance Conference Report

Renaissance Conference 2011

Strategies & Priorities for the Future

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INTRODUCTION

We have reached a major milestone on February 26, 2011 with this the 25th annual Renaissance Conference. As in recent years, the conference was sponsored by the following Members of Provincial Parliament across Scarborough - Wayne Arthurs, Bas Balkissoon, Lorenzo Berardinetti, Margaret Best, Brad Duguid, and Gerry Phillips. It should be noted that the conference was organized and run by volunteers from across all the Scarborough riding associations.

The theme of this year's highly successful conference was *Strategies and Priorities for the Future*. This year we were rewarded by a really thoughtful, intriguing and entertaining speech by a marvellous columnist from the Toronto Star. As our Keynote Speaker, Jim Coyle gave a very interesting speech in which he drew from his Irish roots and experience in telling and writing stories.

Very useful discussions took place in the various workshops which included presentations by experts in three areas:

1. *Getting Around - Strategies to deal with congestion*
2. *Health Care delivery and access strategies*
3. *Job Strategy - Keep Ontario moving ahead*

As Chairperson, I would like to thank all the members of the organizing committee, the presenters, and panellists who so freely gave their time and expertise in making our conference a success. I would also like to give my personal thanks to our Editor, Ian Elder, for his editorial expertise. We would like to thank the Chairs of the morning workshops - MPP's Bas Balkissoon, Wayne Arthurs and Lorenzo Berardinetti. Also thanks are due to the Hon. Brad Duguid and the Hon. Margaret Best MPP for contributing their knowledge and experience to their respective workshops.

On behalf of the organizing committee, I would like to thank the Honourable Gerry Phillips for his vision and dedication in hosting the Renaissance Conference for a quarter century. We very pleased to have Norm Macleod join Gerry and talk to our conference participants about the history of these conferences. Over the years we have covered a wide range of subjects and listened to and learned from many learned people as panellists and keynote speakers. It is hoped that the Renaissance Conference will continue for many years to come to honour Gerry's legacy and build on the interest and involvement of all the Scarborough ridings.

Of course, the conference would not be possible without the participation of the concerned and dedicated citizens who come to share their views for the benefit of the community.

Respectfully Submitted

Murray Johnston,
Conference Chair

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Jim Coyle
Columnist, Toronto Star

Executive Summary of Jim Coyle's Remarks at the 2011 Renaissance Conference

"The Power Of Words...The Words Of Power"

Jim Coyle, former Queen's Park Columnist and columnist at the Toronto Star, began his address to the conference delegates by congratulating them on their activism, and by commending the Ontario Liberal Party for raising the right issues and for implementing a courageous agenda 'with an eye not on the next election but an eye on the next generation'.

Through a plethora of references and quotes, Jim went on to cover various topics with humour, honesty and originality which are a testimony to his down to earth personality.

Noting how political views tend to be established at an early age, Jim recounted stories from his childhood where he recalled growing up with Irish and Scottish immigrant parents who never made it to grade seven, but who worked hard for their family and who, above all, had a dream. This experience of life provided the basis for his belief in the importance of good communications through good story telling.

He recalled with nostalgia, his first days in the Ontario Legislature as a reporter and how this immigrants' son had a front-row seat. He said he became hooked on politics and its coverage -- from riots to royalty, and how the hardest part of his job is to figure out who the real politicians - both men and women -- are, what they're doing and why.

'Accountability' has remained Jim's code of ethics throughout his career at the Ontario Legislature's Press Gallery and the Star. In one of his statements, Jim cautioned us, with his usual blend of humour tinged with seriousness, about the huge influence the media have over the public. By devoting a large proportion of their stories to political issues, the media's power and influence in the political arena cannot be underestimated.

Most importantly, he concluded that, to address complex issues, reporters need to be succinct, provocative, powerful, passionate and emotional. He advised politicians to have a vision of mind and to pursue it. He advised them to "listen to what elected people have to say and try not to play the game".

WORKSHOPS

Getting Around - Strategies to deal with congestion

Chair: **Bas Balkissoon, MPP Scarborough-Rouge River**

Panellists: **Gerry Phillips, MPP Scarborough-Agincourt**
Chair of Cabinet

Michael Warren

CEO, The Warren Group and former Chief General Manager, TTC

Leslie Woo

VP Policy & Planning, Metrolinx

Opening Remarks

Gerry Phillips indicated that the Ontario Government and the City of Toronto share the same goal of reducing congestion throughout the city and surrounding region. He highlighted the province's efforts at reducing congestion. The Government established Metrolinx, the regional transit agency to coordinate transit throughout Toronto and the Greater Golden Horseshoe and Hamilton. The province is also pursuing highway expansion including key projects such as the Highway 407 extension and the Windsor Essex parkway, a key trade and economic corridor between Ontario and the United States.

It was clear that increasing these investments would be challenging in the near future due to the difficult financial situation. The province is currently in a deficit position but is still committed to invest over \$26 billion in capital projects in 2011 and 2012.

Drawing upon his previous experience, **Michael Warren** discussed the history of transit development in Toronto. In the 1970's, the TTC was the number one transit city in North America. This was mainly because the system had the support of not only the city, but of the province and the federal government as well. Today however, there is a need to catch up because the system has been benignly neglected since then. Moreover, both congestion and sprawl has been ongoing for the past 15 years and the need to invest is now. Investments in all forms of transportation are needed to keep us competitive economically and environmentally.

Leslie Woo then described in detail, the investments and projects that Metrolinx is undertaking on behalf of the Government of Ontario. The mandate of Metrolinx is to plan and implement a regional transportation network that will support the province's growth plan and green belt. As a result, the agency has started rollout of the regional fare card (Presto), expanded GO service and has begun work on the Airport Rail Link which will connect Pearson Airport to Downtown Toronto in time for the 2015 Pan-Am Games. The region is a complex entity that is under pressure due to growth and congestion resulting in real adverse costs to the economy. However, it is clear that a plan is in place and that work is in progress. Leslie stressed the need to keep momentum going so that these solutions could be put into place.

Key Challenges -

Sufficient Funding

Among workshop participants, there was concern that large projects require significant planning and ridership to make them viable, so incremental building is sometimes not possible. However, projects are carried out in a phased- in manner due to the large dollar commitments and timelines required to complete them. Michael pointed out that we now have the first long-term transit plan in a generation and that there is funding for it.

Choice of appropriate Technology

The choice of transit mode (subway, LRT, streetcar, bus, etc.) needs to be appropriate for each location. Leslie indicated we need to match land use (both current and future) with transit requirements. She said you can't always 'build it and they will come'. Michael noted the recent success of the St. Clair streetcar line and the ability to upgrade lines as time goes on. The cost/benefit ratio of each technology is also a challenge as some types of transit are very expensive.

Some alternate methods of transit which are not as expensive also need to be considered. These include van pooling, car pooling and circulating buses feeding into a trunk network. Leslie agreed that each mode has a role to play and that Metrolinx has a Smart Commute program designed to increase car pooling.

Building Ridership

Delegates noted that we need to get people out of their cars, by making transit easy and safe to use. The cost of congestion and high gas prices are encouraging people to move towards transit - there is now a real cost to businesses and drivers. But our transit system needs to be maintained, so a 'state of good repair' is always funding priority number one. Transit must be comfortable, convenient and accessible to be competitive with the car. All participants agreed that support for transit cannot be built by 'beating down' drivers - it has to be attractive to potential riders.

Improved Road Investments

Highway and road investments are also critical to reducing congestion. Gerry outlined the province's commitment to large highway projects; while Leslie pointed out that the current network is not used as efficiently as it could be. For example, there are empty trucks on our highways and individual cars carry on average 1.2 people per trip. There are inexpensive measures that can be effected quickly such as car pooling and improved logistical movement of goods.

Financing Transit

Delegates asked who will pay for the required investments and for the ongoing operating expenses of transit? The public needs to be engaged in this discussion.

To reduce cost pressures, delegates discussed undertaking minor improvements to reduce congestion that are relatively easy to implement such as left turn lanes, signal improvements and proper signage. Leslie outlined the challenge in breaking down silos within the government bureaucracy and for more need for co-ordination among departments. Delegates were hopeful that Metrolinx could play this co-ordinating role.

Matching Transit to Development

Participants felt there was a need to align transit with job centres and housing to improve transportation efficiency. For example, a large job density at Scarborough Town Centre would mean people commute in for work and would take advantage of the empty subway leaving downtown in the morning. Different fare systems such as fare-by-distance could be considered and may help reduce congestion. There are, however, social costs in fare-by-distance since those that can't afford to live downtown would pay the most to get to work.

National Transit Strategy

Finally, discussion moved to the need for the involvement of the Government of Canada in funding urban transit. Michael said that the provision of grants and funding is piecemeal in Canada while in other countries the federal government contributes because they know it is important. Leslie added that there is support for a National Transit Strategy, so there is an opportunity to get the federal government on board.

Closing Remarks

These focused on the key pieces necessary going forward. Gerry outlined the investments so far and those to come, and emphasized the need to keep moving forward. Michael stressed the need to get local councillors engaged and involved as a priority, because councillors can make things happen on the ground. Finally, Leslie pointed to the fact that everything costs money. There is a transit vision and momentum towards achieving it all, but we need to start the discussion on how we will pay for it all. We need all governments involved and the public involved in the conversation so that we can get around our region more easily.

Conclusions

There was a consensus among delegates that the momentum towards the provision of improved transit to cope with an ever increasing population and its need for mobility must be maintained. The good progress made so far must be continued so we can reduce congestion and thereby assist economic development and improve the life of Ontarians.

Post-Script

In the weeks following the Renaissance Conference, the Province of Ontario and the City of Toronto signed a Memorandum of Understanding which would put transit in Toronto underground.

The parties committed to the following:

- The Province of Ontario will direct all of their funding towards the Eglinton Crosstown LRT and Scarborough LRT. This would be one continuous line, with the Eglinton portion running almost completely underground from Black Creek to Kennedy Station. The Scarborough LRT portion would run along the existing RT alignment, elevated to Scarborough Town Centre. If funding is left over, these funds may be allocated to the Sheppard Subway extension.
- The City of Toronto committed to plan and finance the Sheppard subway extension. The subway will be extended to Downsview in the west from the existing Sheppard-Yonge station. In the east, the subway will be extended from Don Mills Station to Scarborough Centre.
- The City of Toronto committed to enhanced bus service along Finch Avenue West, from the new Finch West subway station to Highway 27 in Etobicoke.

Health Care Delivery and Access Strategies

Chair: Wayne Arthurs, MPP Pickering – Scarborough East

Panellists: Jean Achmatowicz MacLeod
Board of Directors, Central East LHIN

Amelia Mc Cutcheon
VP, Acute Care Services and Chief Nursing Executive
Rouge Valley Health System

Dr. Peter Selby
Clinic Director-Addictions Programs
Centre for Addiction & Mental Health

Margarett Best, MPP Scarborough Guildwood
Minister of Health Promotion and Sport

Opening Remarks

Jean Achmatowicz MacLeod noted that the goals of the LHIN included improved access to hospital care and that its priority population is geriatric. Jean spoke of the Aging at Home strategy and its two new programs Geriatric Assessment and Intervention Network (**GAIN**) and **Home First**. The GAIN program enables services provided to older people to be tailored to fit their needs through assessment undertaken in specialized clinics. The Home First program creates the conditions to make it possible for patients to be discharged to their own home but be provided enhanced home care services.

Amelia McCutcheon said Health Care should be viewed as a partnership with government, community, health professionals and the public. She spoke of the current efforts to improve the hospital experience by improving access and performance. Amelia did note that citizens have a shared responsibility in taking care of their health and managing the costs to our health care system.

Dr. Selby indicated that human behaviour is an important factor in improving health care. In addition to care from health professionals, there are many things we can all do to help ourselves including not smoking, watching your diet, physical activity, moderate use of alcohol, careful use of medications by following prescribed instructions.

Margarett Best championed health and wellness for all Ontarians. She stressed the need to engage youth more in prevention of health problems. In recent years, there has been an increasing incidence of mental health issues among youth.

Open Discussion

Questions from the floor centred on how to deal with the following:

- Aging population
- Care of patients in medical facilities and at home

Care for the Aging

Concern was expressed over how best to care for our aging population with regard to people's access to medical attention and to their continuing treatment. Participants were concerned about the public, especially seniors, getting easy access to medical care. There is a recognized need for treatment avoiding hospitalization. It was felt we should look at the practicality of caring for people in their own homes as this would be more amenable to patients and may reduce costs.

Participants asked how we could best provide care for people incapable of looking after themselves in their own home. There is a shortage of suitable facilities for long term care; particularly for those individuals who would benefit from "sheltered housing" like is provided in Europe.

Health Care Delivery

It was generally agreed that there have been significant gains made in the area of wait times in the Emergency Departments throughout the City of Toronto. There have been general all round improvements in health care delivery province-wide through the establishment of the LHINs, the Community Care Access centres, Community Health Centres and the focus of providing health care services at the local level.

Mental health concerns

Mental health programmes for adults were seen to be somewhat inadequate. However, insufficient mental health programmes for children and youth was of even more concern. To date the issue seemed to be handled predominantly by law enforcement officers and Children's Aid societies. There is a need for new thinking in this area.

Some attendees saw a direct link between an increase in mental health issues and the incarceration of young people, as well as the breakdown in family structures and increased apprehension of children from families by the CAS.

Concern was raised about the need to improve collaboration among the various government ministries and health care agencies in order to help families deal effectively with mental health issues among children and youth. Dr Selby did indicate that early recognition of mental health problems and access to appropriate medical care could be possible if there were more focus on the needs of families, as this would assist in detection and management.

Patient and family Involvement in Health Care

Many participants were concerned about how to improve the care provided to an individual from a patient's perspective. It was agreed that patients and their families need to be more effectively engaged in the care provided.

Conclusions

Coordination of Care and Patient Advocacy

It was generally agreed that people find it difficult to navigate through the Health Care system which is, by its very nature, quite complex as it involves many different agencies, facilities and professionals.

Perhaps the government should initiate a study into how to help people use the system as easily and effectively as possible, from a patient's perspective.

Job Strategies - Keeping Ontario moving ahead

Chair: **Lorenzo Berardinetti, MPP Scarborough Southwest**

Panellists: **Vicki Bismilla**
VP Academic & Chief Learning Officer
Centennial College

Richard Joy
VP Public Policy & Government Relations
Toronto Board of Trade

Hon. Brad Duguid, MPP Scarborough-Centre
Minister of Energy

Opening Remarks

Vicki Bismilla talked about the importance of diversity in the workforce and acknowledged the importance of the work that the provincial government has done to break down some of the barriers for entry into the regulated professions. She also referred to the programming at Centennial College which deals with inclusiveness and inter-cultural relations. She noted that the Province had made some important steps through the establishment of the Access to Professions and Trades and the appointment of Dr. Jean Augustine as the first Fairness Commissioner. However, much more work needs to be done.

Richard Joy from the Toronto Board of Trade talked about the importance of regional coordination in the key areas of public transit, roads, regional planning, water & sewage facilities. He suggested that perhaps a long-term goal would be to create some kind of coordination body which had been called for under the Anne Golden Commission in 1996. His basic point was that the Greater Golden Horseshoe continues to be a major economic driver - not only for the province, but for Canada. He noted that future economic growth requires better regional coordination as we compete with other regional clusters globally. His second major theme was about the importance of investing in innovation as the basis for future economic growth. Richard noted that decisions by the Premier to create a Ministry of Innovation and investments in areas like MaRS were important steps, but he noted that we continue to retain a highly risk-averse investment climate. He pointed out that city regions like Boston and San Francisco invest much more than does the Greater Toronto Area.

Brad Duguid talked about some of the efforts made to date by the McGuinty Government that have sustained Ontario through some very difficult economic times. He noted that the decision to accelerate capital investment through the Capital Plan happened to occur through some incredible foresight which saw significant economic activity occur through public expenditure at a time when the global economy was suddenly in recession. He also noted investments in areas like the auto sector probably saved tens of thousands of jobs which could have left Ontario permanently and crippled Ontario's economy. The Green Energy and Economy Act also provided a significant boost to an emerging sector in renewable energy with the goal to make Ontario a global leader. He noted that there have been several examples of investment and jobs that have been created so far as a result of the government's decision to create a Feed-in-Tariff regime and that significant private investment has been stimulated as a result of this work.

Open Discussion

Much discussion emerged from the floor regarding the challenges facing the people of Ontario.

In particular, people were concerned about the ongoing difficulties for newcomers to acquire adequate access to professional positions. Examples were noted of continuing barriers to entry imposed by professions and there remained frustration that notwithstanding the actions of the provincial government, there was continuing resistance from some professional bodies to accelerating the pace of entry for newcomers with significant experience in their home countries. There was acknowledgement that much more work needed to be done - and that the initial work - while important - only laid the foundation for change. A major point was also noted that the most important change really involves one of "attitude" and that it would take time to move from a perspective that this is something to be overcome, as opposed to a real opportunity to tap into the global networks and talent of newcomers. Vicki noted that while there is often a focus on professions (ie. the foreign-trained physician driving a cab) - there are really important barriers in the professions as well - and that there are often many more skilled professionals who are working well below their capacity within a trade.

Conclusions

Some discussions also ensued about global competitiveness and the willingness within Ontario to create a "culture of risk-taking". It was noted that many of Ontario's leading lending institutions tend to have conservative practices (and while this may have sheltered some of the shocks of the global financial crisis) there are long-term implications for innovation and job creation. It was noted that Ontario needs more Communitech's in the Kitchener-Waterloo area where leading companies like RIM are spawning hundreds of innovative companies. It was also noted that this could not be a government led initiative - but rather the creation of conditions which allow investment and innovation to foster. We need to ensure the urban agenda becomes a major national priority.

To meet the challenge of consolidating and improving Ontario's economic performance, we need to encourage and facilitate more economic growth. Many participants agreed with the idea of creating a regional body along the lines proposed by the Anne Golden Commission in 1996. This could result in Metrolinx taking on additional responsibilities such as regional roads and regional planning. This could lead to better coordinated planning of roads, transit and development.

6. Overall Lessons from Conference - by Ian Elder, Editor

6.1 Congestion & Economic Growth

Congestion was identified as a prime problem in two workshops. It was agreed that Metrolinx is making progress and working with the Ontario Government and the cities to improve coordination of transportation services. However congestion is still a significant impediment to business and there arose a recommendation to increase the scope of Metrolinx to cover both road and transit planning.

6.2 Caring for People

The Government should investigate ways of providing health care to seniors to make it easier, more effective and better suited to their personal needs. In particular, ways should be found to make it easier for patients to navigate the system.

7. Acknowledgements and Appreciation

The organizers of the 2011 Renaissance Conference would like to express their appreciation for the contributions of the following:

Recorders and Facilitators - Emna Dhahak, Walter Pedersen, Mahalia Crichlow, Roger Xiarchos and Jay Paleja deserve thanks for their diligent note taking of speeches and discussions and for assisting with the proceedings of the various workshops.

Planning and Administration - We really appreciate Rose Gilmore for her countless hours of dedicated service in arranging the many aspects of the conference. We were very grateful for the wise council provided by the representatives of the various riding associations including Bob Bedford, Ian Daly, Suzanne Regimbal, Viresh Mathur and Hratch Aynedjian..

Last but not least, we also recognise Ross Sturge and Allan Cobb for their continuing support before and during the conference.