

Candidates support doing more for transit

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FULL TEXT

Facing the charge that transportation in Canada has suffered under decades of chronic underfunding by Liberal and Conservative governments, Toronto incumbent Adam Vaughan conceded the point.

"She's right," the longtime city councillor said, responding to Diana Yoon, his New Democratic rival for the downtown Toronto riding of Spadina-Fort York. "All levels of government have avoided the issue," he said. But the Liberals are turning that around, Vaughan said, defending his party's record at the Transit Futures debate at the University of Toronto Tuesday: \$180 billion in funding for infrastructure over the next 10 years, \$28 billion of that for public transit, \$4.9 billion of that for Toronto itself, he said.

In a debate without representation from the right side of the political spectrum, Vaughan, Yoon and Green Party candidate Tim Grant (University-Rosedale) agreed that the nation's transit networks need massive new investment. The disagreement, then, was on the details of what that should mean on the ground.

Vaughan spoke to how his party has made federal money available to help cities pay for things such as pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure. Grant and Yoon called for a dedicated federal funding strategy.

The Green candidate called for a "hub and spoke" national transit network built around rail and electric buses. Yoon pointed to the NDP plan for "fare-free" public transit.

Between now and election day on Oct. 21, the Star is looking at how local issues are shaping the campaign, and how your federal vote may influence what matters in your neighbourhood.

Public transit projects are typically led by local or provincial governments that turn to Ottawa to help pay the sometimes astronomical cost of initiatives like new subways.

Canada's large municipalities have long been frustrated with how short-term or one-time injections of federal money limit their ability to make long-term investments or pursue billions of dollars worth of needed repairs and maintenance.

The TTC alone needs more than \$30 billion in capital investment over the next 15 years, about two-thirds of which is unfunded, according to internal reports.

On Toronto's biggest transit proposal - Premier Doug Ford's Ontario Line - the three candidates were in firm agreement.

"The Ontario Line is a joke," Vaughan said, responding to a question from moderator Ben Spurr, the Star's transportation reporter, on whether his party would support the line.

The plan is a "hypothetical idea," he said to nods from Grant and Yoon.

The Liberals "will fund real proposals from cities," he said, pointing to unanswered questions in the province's plan, like how to tunnel under condo-tower basements along the proposed route through downtown Toronto.

The line, which Ford has called the "crown jewel" of the province's transit plan, is projected to cost about \$11 billion. It has been pitched as a bigger and better replacement for the downtown relief line planned by the city and the TTC.

The Ontario Line is also planned to take pressure off the TTC's overcrowded Line 1, but would be twice as long, running from the Ontario Science Centre south to the Lakeshore East rail corridor then underground through downtown to an end point at the Canadian National Exhibition.

After the province asked Ottawa to help pay for the line this summer, the Liberal government said it had not been

given enough information about the plan for it to win approval.

The debate ended on the candidates' strongest point of agreement: the role of transit investment in fighting climate change.

Both the Liberals and the New Democrats have called for all new cars sold to be zero-emission by 2040; the Greens are calling for the same by 2030.

The three parties are all calling for large investments in electrifying public transit and rail infrastructure, as well as tax credits for electric vehicles.

Yoon said climate is her "motivating force."

"Now is the time to push hard and to push fast on this," Vaughan said.

"It's not rocket science what we need to do," Grant said.

The Conservative Party of Canada was invited to send a candidate to the debate at the U of T's Innis College, but declined, said organizer and transportation consultant Martin Collier.

People's Party of Canada candidate Renata Ford was also invited to participate, but did not appear. The widow of former mayor Rob Ford is running in Etobicoke North, the riding held provincially by Premier Doug Ford, her brother-in-law.

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