

Scarborough councillors agreeable to putting Eglinton LRT above ground

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In 2010, Scarborough voters who supported Mayor Rob Ford signed on to a plan to keep surface light rail off of Sheppard and Eglinton avenues.

When he was elected, Ford wasted little time in scuttling that surface transit, cancelling the Sheppard LRT and convincing Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty to turn the Eglinton LRT from a combined underground and surface route into a light rail subway. He did so with the support of many councillors from Scarborough.

That was then.

This week, most councillors who represent communities along Eglinton Avenue in Scarborough are open to an emerging plan to put the underground Eglinton LRT on the shelf and return to the original Transit City design.

That plan, floated by TTC Chair Karen Stintz, would see the light rail service emerge from underground at Brentcliffe Road in Leaside and occupy a centre-lane right-of-way along Eglinton through North York and Scarborough.

That would save about \$1.5 billion, which Stintz said could be put toward building a small portion of the mayor's planned Sheppard subway - extending it from Don Mills Road to Victoria Park Avenue.

In interviews, Scarborough councillors Michael Thompson, Michelle Berardinetti and Glenn De Baeremaeker all said that they'd support such a plan.

Paul Ainslie, who represents Scarborough East, said he'd still prefer a subway.

"I've never been a big fan of the whole Transit City plan, because the one they wanted to put through my ward, I didn't see a lot of forethought put into it," he said. "It's great to have an LRT and great to get people on public transit, but I want to know they have the foresight as to how they're going to impact that area, being at grade down the middle of Eglinton Avenue."

Ainslie was a lone voice among those who spoke with The Scarborough Mirror.

Berardinetti, who sits on Mayor Ford's executive committee along with Ainslie, said she'd be open to anything that got rapid transit into Ward 35 (Scarborough Southwest) more quickly.

"I think it's an urgency to get whatever we can get in, in a prudent but quickish manner," she said. "I love subways, most people would love a subway - but the problem is the feasibility of it. The overriding issue during the election was TTC or gridlock. It's definitely something that resonates. If you can do something for Scarborough - deliver transit."

Scarborough Centre Councillor Thompson, also a member of Ford's executive committee, agreed with Berardinetti.

"I would be in favour of it if in fact at the end of the day we can't find the money," he said. "I supported a Sheppard LRT in the last iteration. I hadn't changed my position. Even when people were promoting subways for Sheppard, I just wanted transit for Sheppard that was doable and that we could actually get going as quickly as possible."

De Baeremaeker, a long-time proponent of Transit City, said that an underground LRT never made sense along Eglinton in Scarborough or North York.

"When it goes west of Victoria Park, there are some car dealerships, there's some plazas, but there aren't many people," he said. "To build it there just didn't make any sense. It was too expensive."

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