

INDEPENDENT ANALYSIS

The Only Thing Standing in the Way of All-Day Milton GO Train Service: Politics



Expanding the GO Milton Line by building more track on the existing right-of-way is the fastest and most cost-effective way to deliver the service Milton needs now. Photo by Stephen C. Host

Since the day it was launched in 1981, the way to provide all-day, two-way service every day on GO's Milton Line has been known: more tracks and more trains.

Numerous studies by GO and the line's owner, Canadian Pacific (CP), have shown what is required to boost service on a route that will generate massive economic, social and environmental benefits comparable to those already found on GO's continuously-improved Lakeshore Line. The answer remains simple: More tracks to handle more trains to carry many more passengers throughout the day, every day of the week.

Instead of following the advice in a long list of taxpayer-funded studies, Queen's Park has embraced a new "solution" that has actually become a roadblock. Called the Missing Link, this scheme would build a new line for CN from Bramalea to where its current north-south freight line passes over the CP east-west line south of Bronte Street and Steeles Avenue in Milton. This scheme would allegedly divert all the CN freight trains from the busy Bramalea-Georgetown section of its own line, which is used by GO's Kitchener Line trains. It would also take all of CP's freight trains off its line through Milton, supposedly allowing for more GO trains on both routes.

While Queen's Park says this would divert all the CP freight trains off the Milton-North Toronto-Scarborough line and allow for more GO Milton trains, it won't. What hasn't been revealed is that most of the promised benefits in the Missing Link are now missing in action.

Shockingly, this unworkable proposal was accepted and endorsed by Milton and other local councils without any independent analysis. Milton's review may be found online at: <https://www.milton.ca/MeetingDocuments/Council/agendas2015/rpts2015/ENG-020-15%20The%20Missing%20Link%20Final%20Report.pdf>

Originally pegged at a cost of \$5.3 billion in 2015, the Missing Link has already grown to at least \$8 billion and it will require eight years or more to construct. Furthermore, the tough terms that were set by CN led CP to opt out because it would actually harm their freight operation. Therefore, the promised track capacity the Missing Link was going to free up on the CP line for more GO Milton trains won't be freed up at all.

The answer to this classic example of political foot dragging is what CP and the highly-qualified GO management teams of the past proposed: Build two more tracks on the existing right-of-way all the way from West Toronto to Milton. This option was quickly discarded in the Missing Link study that has now become the provincial government's gospel. The cost of the Milton Line track expansion project in 2015 was estimated to be \$3.5 billion. Doing the same on the GO Kitchener Line to increase that service was \$1.5 billion. In total, this would be \$5.0 billion.

To put this in perspective, adding two tracks to the GO Milton Line would be \$1.3 billion less than the cost of the proposed Gordie Howe Bridge at Windsor (not including the connecting highways) and roughly the same as Toronto's proposed one-stop subway in Scarborough.

Furthermore, adding the two new tracks alongside the two existing ones to provide the all-day GO service to Milton is the only way to also extend some of the trains to Campbellville and Cambridge. Without the expanded capacity between West Toronto and Milton, and additional infrastructure investment west to Cambridge, this service cannot be launched.

As for more GO trains, they're on the way. At a pre-election photo-op event in Burlington on April 30, the Kathleen Wynne and Justin Trudeau governments announced the purchase of 53 additional GO bi-level coaches. More can be easily ordered and built here in Ontario at Thunder Bay for the overdue and urgently-need GO Milton service.

This political game of offering up more studies, alternate plans and nothing but empty promises needs to be stopped dead in its tracks. GO's Milton Line is second only to the Lakeshore Line in terms of ridership. It is bulging at the seams and it needs to be expanded. The way to do that is well known and nothing but politics is standing in the way.

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