

## **MR. FORD GETS IT WRONG AGAIN: WORKERS VOTE FOR GOOD JOBS AND PUBLIC SERVICES, NOT FREE LICENSE STICKERS**

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In March 2022, the Ford government quietly scrapped equity hiring targets in arrangements for the \$28.5 billion subway program (consisting of the Ontario Line, Yonge North Subway Extension, Scarborough Subway Extension, and Eglinton West LRT), undoing years of progress to bring women, people of colour, and Indigenous and Black residents into this well-paid workforce.

For over a decade, this Labour Council – along with other allies – has been organizing, mobilizing and building momentum towards securing community benefits agreements (CBAs) with Metrolinx, a largely unaccountable Ontario crown agency. In anticipation of the announced \$8.4 billion Eglinton Crosstown LRT in 2011, labour and community groups began organizing to ensure that any public money used to build public infrastructure would address social and economic inequalities. The vision then – and still today – is to provide employment and other opportunities for members of local marginalized and low-income communities wherever there is public infrastructure being built. So why is Doug Ford's Conservative government not living up to Ontario's CBA commitments?

There are also serious questions about who should make public transit decisions at the local level, and how to ensure there is equitable access to transit. But first, it is important to explore the CBA approach.

This CBA model is not new but has been used in many jurisdictions around the world. In Los Angeles, the development of a downtown Staples Center in the early 2000s successfully delivered a range of community benefits for the surrounding communities. Benefits included the requirement that 70% of jobs created would pay a living wage, provide employment opportunities for historically and economically marginalized communities, and commit to seed money for affordable housing projects in surrounding neighbourhoods.

In Toronto, there is a long practice of negotiating local improvements under Section 37 of the Planning Act in exchange for greater height or density. In 2013, the Toronto Community Benefits Network (TCBN), a coalition of labour and community organizations, formed for the specific purpose of negotiating CBAs – to ensure that investments of public infrastructure provide equitable economic opportunities for all along with demands for environmental protections and enhancements.

In 2016, the previous Liberal government set a precedent in signing a CBA with the Toronto Community Benefits Network to build the Eglinton Crosstown LRT. It was declared that a target of 10 % of work hours for the project would go to local groups that have historically faced employment barriers, like racialized residents, women and newcomers. A similar deal was struck for the Finch West LRT. In a region as diverse as this one, where 53% identify as racialized people and 47% are immigrants, and the average household income is lower than many, employment equity must be taken into account in employment related to the design and construction of transit systems.

After TCBN exposed the Ford government's scrapping of community benefits targets earlier this year, the government made a sudden reversal in the media several days later. Transportation Minister Caroline Mulroney pledged that the government will keep the hiring thresholds, citing that it had always been the plan. Despite this lip service, there is no written commitment by this government, and therefore no accountability, to deliver on Community Benefits and at least 10% minimum equity hiring thresholds (along with protection against environmental impacts by local communities).

On top of this, there are concerns about why successive governments have tried to pull public transit operations, maintenance, financing and building away from local accountable bodies, like the Toronto Transit Commission, and transfer them to Metrolinx? We remember the attempt by Ford's Conservatives to "upload" Toronto's subway system to the provincial level, which would likely have created a two-tier transit system: those who could afford to pay a higher fare to ride the subway, and those with less income who would have to rely on slower busses to get to work, school, and around the city. While labour and community were able to defeat this move, there are regular attempts by the province to transfer various responsibilities from the TTC and other local public authorities to the less-accountable Metrolinx. We need to defeat Ford this June, so he doesn't have the chance to do this again.

When will low-income transit users be able to afford to use the TTC, and when will quality transit services be available to marginalized communities in inner and outer suburbs? Transit equity is vitally important: we must make sure that public transit is affordable and accessible for all. While the City of Toronto plays a pivotal role in this policy approach, it can't do this on its own; this requires operations funding support from other levels of government. In Scarborough, residents will wait until 2030 to have a replacement for the Scarborough Rapid Transit line (SRT) scheduled to close in 2023.

After four years of a Ford government, no one is surprised at the backpedaling on transit policy – handing over decision-making power to those who lack transparency and accountability while sacrificing the very real day-to-day needs of marginalized communities for equitable access to transit and to the jobs that build public transit in the first place. It is shameful policy-making by a shameless government.

The latest examples of shamelessness include their effort to buy voters' good will for the June 2<sup>nd</sup> election. The Ontario government is sending out a refund cheque for hundreds of dollars to those who have renewed their licence plate stickers in the last two years. Similarly, the Ford government is promising voters to temporarily reduce taxes on gas and diesel for six months from July 1<sup>st</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022. Regarding child care, Ford has insisted that there be a larger role for profit-making companies in the federal-provincial deal and a lower-than-living wage minimum for trained child care workers. Memorably, a key slogan from the 2018 provincial election was "Buck a Beer."

The government is clearly one that pays lip service to equity and does more harm for workers. The strategy and tactics from this Ford-led Progressive Conservative party isn't new, but the question is whether voters will vote with their pocketbook or with their conscience.

#### **Labour Council resolves to:**

- Ask affiliates and delegates to sign TCBN's letter to Metrolinx - **Campaign for Good Jobs and Inclusive Local Economies** - at [THIS LINK](#)
- Ask affiliates to communicate with their members about Ford's failures and shamelessness as we approach the June 2<sup>nd</sup> provincial election. Affiliates can use [the OFL's Ford Tracker for more information](#)
- Urge affiliates to turn out as many members as possible for the May 1<sup>st</sup> Day of Action
- Call on affiliated unions to reconfirm their leadership and recognition of the need for diversity and equity in the workplace
- Demand that the Provincial Government and Metrolinx put their commitment for 10% equity hiring in writing
- Endorse Labour Council ally TTC Riders' call for a viable transit alternative while riders wait for the replacement of the Scarborough Rapid Transit line in 2030
- Call on all three levels of government to fund and ensure equitable access to public transit