

## A unique opportunity?

THE TALK THESE DAYS is about the need for better infrastructure, and the figures tossed about are in the billions of dollars. But as we see it, some improvements can be made without any huge expense and require little more than some ingenuity.

A classic example is in the area of commuter rail service. Undoubtedly, the great success story in Ontario is the GO (Government of Ontario) train, which next year will celebrate its 50th anniversary.

Launched on May 23, 1967 it began with single-deck coaches running between Oakville and Pickering plus limited rush-hour service to Hamilton. GO Bus service, which started out in 1970 as an extension of the original Lakeshore train line, has since become a full-fledged network feeding the rail service and serves communities trains do not reach.

Today, the double-decker trains run from as far west as Kitchener and as far north as Barrie, and Orangeville has had GO buses for nearly 20 years.

GO Transit's success can perhaps best be measured by the fact each of the trains on the Lakeshore, Kitchener, Milton and Barrie lines can deliver roughly 2,000 passengers to downtown Toronto, and with up to three trains per hour in the morning an evening rush periods that means at least 20,000 commuters reach their jobs without needing their cars.

In the circumstances, it would be interesting to see how much the current Toronto-area gridlocks would be if for some reason (such as a strike) the GO trains weren't available.

But however good the existing service may be, it has one major failing that ought to be corrected as soon as possible. That failing is in the lack of appropriate rail vehicles in off-peak hours.

As we see it, it makes no sense for trains with 10 or more double-deck coaches to be running between the morning and evening rush hours as well as on evenings and weekends when trains similar to the UP (Union-Pearson) Express could handle the volume.

The argument we'd expect is that such smaller trains would cost a lot and not be of much use during peak periods.

But our answer to that is that those same 'mini' trains could and should be used to serve communities that currently have either no GO service or just bus service yet do have rail lines. Three examples are Orangeville/Caledon, Alliston/New Tecumseth and Peterborough.

However, of the three, only one offers a crucial opportunity ? that of quickly demonstrating the viability of such commuter services.

As we see it, that opportunity lies in the existence of a train for such a demonstration.

That train is the Credit Valley Explorer, and the demonstration would be morning and evening runs between Orangeville and Streetsville with stops at Alton, Inglewood and Brampton and connections with trains on GO Transit's Kitchener and Milton lines.

Obviously, to be viable the demonstration would have to be attractive to commuters who have jobs in Brampton, Mississauga or Toronto. And to be attractive it would have to be competitive in terms of both cost and time.

Since the speed of trains on the Orangeville-owned Orangeville-Brampton Railway is currently limited to 30 miles an hour (50 km/h), some track work would be required to permit the trains to operate as they once did, when CP's 'Dayliners' made the trip from Owen Sound to Toronto in three hours and it took less than 90 minutes between Orangeville and Union Station.

We obviously don't know, but suspect that a modest investment by GO Transit would bring the rails and roadbed up to a standard that would allow a train out of Orangeville to reach Brampton in an hour and Streetsville in another 20 minutes.

We think the combination of good connections, affordable GO fares and comfortable coaches would indeed prove attractive.

Isn't it an idea worth pursuing?