

June 17, 2009

## **10 good ideas for mayoral candidates**

RICHARD GILBERT

Everyone I've talked with about Toronto's upcoming municipal election has expressed dissatisfaction with the current crop of mayoral candidates or their platforms, or both.

It may be too late to recruit better candidates, but it's not too late to discuss better policies. My many discussions suggest that a candidate who embraces most of the following 10 positions could well garner decisive support in the election for mayor of Toronto:

- **Contract out TTC operations.** Experience elsewhere, notably in Sweden, has shown that moving to tightly regulated private-sector operation improves service, raises productivity, increases customer satisfaction, enhances employee morale and allows subsidies to achieve more.
- **Rethink Transit City within available funding arrangements.** The present plan is deeply flawed because it advances one solution (light rail) to a wide range of transit opportunities and because it has no complementary land use plan. Install subways where sufficient development can be stimulated to justify them. For many other routes, use electric trolley buses, which can provide most of the advantages of light rail at one-tenth of the capital cost, thereby allowing investments in transit to reach many more residents.
- **Maximize use of existing transit assets.** Most of Toronto's subway stations are in areas of relatively low density, resulting in underuse of expensive infrastructure. The Spadina line needs the most attention in this respect, both the present and the proposed stations.
- **Rethink our waste collection system.** Use of bins has created too many problems. They have made our neighbourhoods ugly and our sidewalks impassable on collection days.
- **Privatize waste collection.** Through improved management, privatization could reduce costs and the incidence of long strikes, and greatly enhance customer service. The city administration could then focus on planning, regulation and facilitation of waste services, and on the provision of accurate information about waste, including what happens to material put out for recycling. Our local government would be steering rather than rowing.
- **Rethink the current focus on sending waste to landfill when it cannot be reduced or recycled.** Energy-from-waste (incineration) is more environmentally sound and responsible, whether from an emissions, energy-security or land-use perspective. Several surveys have shown that Toronto residents overwhelmingly support incineration over landfill.

- **Put energy considerations front and centre in all municipal decision-making.** The oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico is the strongest sign yet that we're reaching the end of ever-expanding supplies of inexpensive energy. The challenge of maintaining comfort, convenience and efficient mobility in an era of tightening energy constraints is enormous. Municipalities must play a major role, particularly with respect to land development. To reduce energy consumption in buildings and for travel, Toronto should be accommodating most of the region's population growth rather than a small fraction of it.
- **Change the plans for Union Station.** The present plans will result in a drab rail hub that will be inadequate for the resurgence of train travel to be expected in an energy-constrained world. The proposed underground retail concourse will be an unwarranted burden on property taxes.
- **Implement a version of the 1970s' Harbour City plan.** This plan was devised by famed Toronto architect Eberhard Zeidler and endorsed by urban guru Jane Jacobs. It could involve redeveloping the Island Airport lands as a car-free community, linked to development on several newly created islands, to the east and west, all as part of a goal of substantially increasing Toronto's population.
- **Change how Toronto City Council is composed.** We need fewer ward councillors and some councillors elected at large. This would address what seems to have become a surfeit of parochialism at city hall.

Richard Gilbert, a Toronto councillor from 1976-1991, is now a consultant on transportation and energy and the author, with Anthony Perl, of the recently published second edition of *Transport Revolutions: Moving People and Freight without Oil*.