



Liberty on the GO

Liberty Village is a Rapidly Growing Employment and Residential Neighbourhood

With only East Liberty Street available to get out by car from between the two rail corridors surrounding Liberty Village, residents and those working in the community depend on public transit.

Liberty Village and King Street West are some of our fastest growing communities. 500 Businesses employ over 7,500 people. More condominiums are being occupied over the next 12 months and it is estimated that there will soon be 6,000 people living in Liberty Village. This growth will only continue. This means that close to 15,000 people are attempting to move in and out of Liberty Village each day.

The pressure facing Liberty Village is not only that faced daily by my constituents, but also the need for thousands of employees to get to work in Liberty Village daily. Improving transit in Liberty Village is as much a regional transit issue as it is a local commuter issue.

The 504 King Streetcar is full

The existing public transportation options in Liberty Village include: the 504 King Streetcar, the 63 Ossington Bus and the Lakeshore West GO Train. The Kitchener line runs through the community but does not stop.

The 504 King streetcar is the primary public transit route serving King Street West and Liberty Village. The 504 is currently operating above capacity. In 2012 it was the TTC's busiest streetcar route with 56,700 passenger trips daily. With the addition of thousands more residents along King Street West and in Liberty Village over the coming months, the demand on the 504 will only grow.

For years, various attempts have been made by the TTC to address overcapacity on the 504 Streetcar through the addition of streetcars and restrictions on the road. The problems persist and on any given day transit riders are left to wait while full streetcars pass by.

The Ossington bus is a local bus and does not function effectively as a commuter transit line. With Ossington station on Bloor Street 4km away and the line carrying more than 21,600 riders per day, the bus simply does not provide a good option for many commuters. It takes too long to get to the Ossington subway station as the bus fights through traffic and there are only 15 buses in peak periods; many other surface routes at this level of ridership offer better service with more vehicles on the road in peak times.

Liberty Village on the GO

With thousands of residential units expected to be occupied along King Street and in Liberty Village, we need to create new capacity immediately within existing transit routes. There are unique options for increasing capacity without significant capital investment. We can do this through a partnership between the City and Metrolinx to increase ridership on the existing GO Transit Lakeshore line and create a Liberty Village station on the Kitchener Line.

While Liberty Village is uniquely positioned within two commuter rail lines operated by GO - the Kitchener line to the north and the Lakeshore line to the south - it is only served by one of these lines. There is currently no station on the Kitchener line, although Toronto City Council has requested a station.

The Lakeshore West Exhibition Station is accessible from Liberty Village by way of a tunnel from Atlantic Avenue and Metrolinx is currently undergoing platform improvements at the station. Recently, service on the Lakeshore line significantly and at Exhibition station was increased to every 30 minutes. Trains run more frequently on the Lakeshore line, however the express trains leaving from Clarkson GO Station travel uninterrupted to Union Station and do not stop at Exhibition Station.

As the Lakeshore line and the Georgetown line approach Toronto's downtown, they are already quite full of commuters from the GTHA. However, not only is there some capacity remaining on the trains for at least a brief ride to Union Station, but there are hundreds getting off of the Exhibition GO Station to go to work, freeing up some room for others to board the train.

Exhibition GO Station is a short walk from the heart of Liberty Village and will get you to the subway faster than the 504 Streetcar during rush hour.

The Exhibition GO Station is just as close as the King Streetcar stop, but with a faster and more reliable service. The closest Streetcar stop to most residents in Liberty Village (measured from the corner of Lynn Williams Street and East Liberty Street) is roughly the same distance as the Exhibition GO station: approximately 900 metres or an 11 minute walk. Currently, a trip from Exhibition Place station eastbound to Union Station on the Lakeshore GO line takes less than 8 minutes. If you add in the time it takes to walk to Exhibition GO Station from the centre of Liberty Village, you will find yourself at Union Station in less than 20 minutes. Importantly, the GO train schedule makes the Lakeshore line a more reliable and predictable option for commuters.

Meanwhile, the King Streetcar is unfortunately not reliable for transit riders in Liberty Village as it is routinely full by the time it reaches stops east of Atlantic Avenue. While it may be the same walking distance to the closest King Streetcar stop, it is not the same experience. During rush hour not only can you find yourself sitting in traffic, but it is difficult to find a streetcar that you can squeeze onto. The same trip to St Andrew subway station, just one station north of Union Station, could take 20 to 30 minutes longer than taking the GO train.

A unique opportunity to build a Liberty Village GO Station while the land is available

A Liberty Village GO Station is equally about building regional transit to bring the GTHA into the downtown to work, as it is to provide options for residents. We have a unique opportunity to build a Liberty Village-King West Station on the north rail corridor, the Kitchener line. There is potential to use land on both the north and south side of the rail corridor and the City of Toronto has committed to building the King-Liberty Pedestrian and Cycling Bridge. Having the City build the bridge would be a significant contribution to the costs of building a station.

Creating a Fairer Fare through Fare Integration

It costs \$4.85 to take the GO Train from Exhibition Station to Union Station and travel just over 3 kilometres. This is the highest cost per kilometre on the GO and is in fact more than double the second highest cost per kilometre. If a transit rider were then to get on the TTC they would pay an additional \$3 (a little less if using a token or Metropass). It would therefore cost \$8 for only one trip.

It doesn't have to be this way.

Toronto is one of the only cities in the GTHA that does not have fare integration with GO Transit. Not only are there fare discounts across the system for PRESTO users, but many cities offer discounted local transit fares for those exiting the GO system.

In Brampton, GO riders pay just 70 cents per ride to travel on Brampton Transit to GO stations. In Durham Region, transit riders can ride on GO Transit Buses with a local transit ticket and GO riders with valid GO tickets pay only 65 cents per ride to travel on the Durham Region Transit system to and from GO Stations. In Milton, GO riders who show a valid GO pass, ticket or PRESTO card when boarding pay only 60 cents per ride to travel to and from Milton GO Station on Milton Transit. In York Region, GO Riders with valid tickets or passes pay 75 cents per ride to travel to and from GO Stations on York Region Transit and there are many GO Stations throughout York Region. This is also the case in Mississauga and many other municipalities. Toronto does not have a similar arrangement with GO Transit.

PRESTO

A goal of every integrated transit system should be to deliver a fair and seamless fare structure for commuters. This is one of the reasons PRESTO has been introduced across GO Transit and in municipalities throughout the GTHA. The idea behind PRESTO is that it should be easier for commuters to pay their fares while traveling within and between transit systems. Their PRESTO card calculates the cost of their trip and deducts it from the balance on their card - all in less than a second.

PRESTO is how we can very easily achieve the pilot fare integration I am recommending for Exhibition GO Station and Union Station. Both Exhibition GO Station and Union Subway Station have PRESTO set up. Through a fare integration arrangement between the TTC and GO Transit, the cost of each trip could be made much more affordable.

Conclusion

There is a pressing need to fix transit to and from Liberty Village and my recommendations propose one short term and one long term solution. Almost immediately, the City can work with Metrolinx to create an integrated fare between Exhibition GO and Union Station through the existing PRESTO infrastructure in both stations. An integrated and reduced fare at Exhibition GO would encourage more Liberty Village residents to use GO Transit, freeing up vital room on the 504 King Streetcar. If at the end of the day, 100 more residents in Liberty Village decide to try using the Exhibition GO Station, that represents 100 more spaces on the 504 King Streetcar and a better and more reliable commute for everyone.