Connecting Our City - LRT a Critical Next Step

This year, the MSU has placed a priority on improving transit for students. This has included inter-city and regional transit improvements to GO Transit, as well as other services. Moreover, our biggest achievement was the newly negotiated contract with Hamilton Street Railway (HSR), approved by students via referendum, implementing both 12-month service and the first late-night service in the city. These enhancements are set to commence in September 2014.

Yet one important issue for students remains outstanding. Since 2011, the MSU has committed to advocating on behalf of students to the municipality and the province, on the collaborative effort that is Light Rail Transit (LRT) implementation in Hamilton. An LRT line would most likely run from the McMaster area along Main or King Streets to the east end of the city. The opportunities for students presented by the proposed LRT system include faster access to areas throughout the city, 24-hour transit service to the downtown core, and all with an environmentally sound transit solution. LRT would decrease travelling times, ease congestion on heavily used routes and directly impact the lives of McMaster students both on- and off-campus.

Yet the benefits of LRT go beyond simply faster transit. The economics of LRT are very positive. A number of studies have shown that the introduction of LRT contributes to the overall welfare of a region, improving land values and facilitating new business. There is a lot of positivity in Hamilton around the current trajectory of the city, and an LRT line which will contribute to the welfare of the downtown core, would be beneficial to all Hamiltonians, including McMaster students.

Over the past several months, mixed messages have come from both the City and the province, concerning the future of LRT in Hamilton. City council has approved an LRT implementation plan with the first phase fully funded by the province; the province in turn has been hesitant to settle on timelines or funding sources for such a plan. Transit is likely to be a big issue in both the upcoming municipal elections, and a potential provincial election, with candidates at all levels jockeying for position with their respective transit plans.

But one thing remains clear; McMaster students would benefit dramatically from Light Rail Transit implemented in Hamilton. The proposal of a B-line LRT integration, including a stop at McMaster University, provides a direct impact to students to a degree that other transit proposals simply cannot match. The MSU will continue to advocate on these needs, building on our work to see a Hamilton transit system which best meets the needs of students here at Mac.

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