Remarks to General Issues Committee
David Adames, President and CEO
Hamilton Chamber of Commerce
Monday February 25, 2013

Good morning members of Council. I am pleased to be here today to represent the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber has an LRT task force that comprises representatives from our Divisions and Committees, City Council (Councillors Farr, Ferguson and McHattie as well as the Mayor), Hamilton HIVE, the Realtors Association of Hamilton Burlington and the Hamilton Halton Home Builders Association.

The Hamilton Chamber has had a long-standing policy position of supporting public transit infrastructure – both all-day two-way GO Train service and LRT. As we know, the GO Train project is proceeding.

Today is about LRT and my comments will build on those that I shared at both the October 11, 2011 and December 11, 2012 meetings of the GIC.

We are here to speak in favour of staff’s recommendations in today’s report.

The Hamilton Chamber believes that today’s decision is clear and straightforward: approve the report and send Hamilton’s “Rapid Ready” proposal to Metrolinx.

By doing so, Hamilton’s plan will be placed in the queue of projects that Metrolinx is evaluating, especially as Metrolinx is developing its Investment Strategy that will go to the provincial cabinet by June 1, 2013.

There is a continuum associated with Metrolinx’s Big Move transit plan. Hamilton has been part of the process since the beginning and we are moving through that timeline – today is an important part of the process where we have an opportunity to put forward Hamilton’s plan to Metrolinx.

As we deliberate on today’s report is it important to keep the fundamental question in front of us:

Why is LRT important for Hamilton – or put another way – what is the public policy imperative for LRT?

It is about infrastructure and building infrastructure for future growth.
Infrastructure is key to economic development.

This was true years ago and it is still true today. Hamilton’s economy flourished in the 19th and 20th centuries by developing and leveraging our infrastructure assets such as transportation (Great Lakes Port, airport, rail and roads) and energy – access to affordable electricity in particular which developed our manufacturing industry and led to the growth of Hamilton as one of Canada’s largest cities and largest economies.

When we contemplate LRT, we need to think about what the city will look like in the future – 2025 and beyond - and how we will grow our population; support our residents and businesses and contribute to the provincial and national economies.

Imagine for a moment we are in 2030 – Hamilton’s population is approaching 650,000 and we don’t have modern public transit, yet Toronto, Mississauga, Peel Region and Durham Region, along with cities like Kitchener-Waterloo and Ottawa do.

Where do we think new companies, knowledge workers and young professionals will want to live and work?

Now think of the reverse situation where we have “future state” infrastructure like LRT in 2030. We will then be positioned to grow our businesses, attract workers that these very businesses will need to compete, expand our tax base and leverage our other critical infrastructure such as our leading universities, college, healthcare system and natural environment.

We would be able to promote the additional benefits of LRT such as providing a healthy environment supporting healthier lifestyles for our residents.

LRT provides Hamilton with infrastructure that both enables the city to grow our tax base and local employment opportunities but also to compete with other municipalities in southern Ontario and contribute to the regional economy.

LRT will strengthen the regional economy as we would have LRT to connect our inter-regional GO Transit system.

The good news here is that Hamilton has had the foresight to be part of Metrolinx’s Big Move planning from the get-go and now we have a proposal with well-considered homework behind it.

It is rare when a project aligns so well with the City’s key policies – our Official Plan, Strategic Plan and Transportation Master Plan as well as provincial policies – in particular Places to Grow and the objectives of Metrolinx’s Big Move plan. LRT also supports other City policies as summarized on page 13 of the Rapid Ready report.

This alignment positions Hamilton’s LRT project in good stead to move it forward as part of the Big Move.
Now probably one key question that is in the mind of Council today and most likely by many constituents is “can we afford LRT”. We now have more helpful information as a result of today’s report to help us assess return on investment from LRT.

Some of the key economic impact numbers for LRT include:

- Enabling more development projects along its corridors (108 projects vs. 32 without LRT)
- Provide a tax benefit of approximately $22.4 million
- Spur building permit fees and development charge revenue of approximately $30.2 million
- Provide upwards of 6,000 construction jobs (including 3,500 in Hamilton)
- And provide a contribution to provincial GDP of approximately $443 million

It is still too early, thought, to make a final determination on LRT’s affordability because that is not what today’s report is about.

By approving and submitting this report, Hamilton’s project can move forward to be considered as part of the overall investment plan for the Big Move.

We want Hamilton’s project to be considered as part of this Investment Strategy as other GTHA municipalities’ projects will be. We believe it is a fair assumption that new funding tools will be implemented – so Hamiltonians will be paying for transit infrastructure regardless.

We should therefore be receiving our share of that funding for LRT in our city so we can be competitive in the future.

We can all come together and argue for Hamilton’s fair share of transit funding.

In conclusion, the Hamilton Chamber supports the recommendation in the staff report and urges Council to approve the report and submit the “Rapid Ready – Expanding Mobility Choices in Hamilton (January 2013) to Metrolinx.

Growth is, and will continue to happen to Hamilton and to the GTHA.

A key question is how do we manage that growth and accelerate that growth to our advantage. Without question, infrastructure such as LRT is key.

For the province, Hamilton is a critical piece to the regional economic puzzle – a well functioning local economy helps this part of the province and contributes to the provincial tax base – this provides rationale for the province to invest in Hamilton’s LRT system – as they have done for other recent infrastructure such as the Red Hill and Lincoln Alexander Parkway; servicing the Red Hill Business Park; investments in post-secondary institutions and our health care facilities).
The Hamilton Chamber is here to support Council and our community on this important project going forward through our LRT Task Force, chaired by John Ennis and assisted by interim President and CEO Richard Koroscil.

Thank you