March 2, 2010

Mayor Fred Eisenberger &
Members of Council
City of Hamilton
77 James St. N.
Hamilton, Ontario L8R 3K3

Dear Mayor Fred and Members of City Council:

On behalf of the Board of Management of the Downtown Hamilton Business Improvement Area I am writing to offer our support for “Light Rapid Transit” for the City of Hamilton. We commend Jill Stephens, Acting Director of Strategic Planning and Rapid Transit with the City for her patience and practical approach to the process of developing the city’s recommendations to Metrolinx and involving the Downtown Hamilton BIA and its members in the process.

However our Board and membership still have many questions regarding what this will look like for Hamilton and will continue to work with the City and our members to solve some of the issues that businesses downtown may experience.

Some of our issues include:

1. The development of a two way LRT system on King Street East between John and Wellington Streets in the middle of the roadway and the reasoning behind why this route is the highest priority. Our members feel that a split track, one going east on Main and one going west on King might better accommodate the needs of LRT and the ease by which people can still drive downtown to work, place and do business.

2. King Street East turned into two way with the removal of parking along both sides where it exists today and the possibility of a complete road closure. Our members feel that a compromise must exist to allow for vehicular traffic to access those businesses in the core, still accommodating LRT and provide a safe and pedestrian friendly environment. Loading and access to the Crowne Plaza Hotel and parking ramp on King is of prime concern.
3. The inability of vehicles travelling west on King to turn left into major developments such as Terraces on King, the Crowne Plaza Hotel and eventually the restored Connaught facility in whatever form it ultimately takes. Our members are concerned about access to these properties and the inconvenience of customers to travel further west than today to turn around and come back to their location. Access in front of the hotels is critical and must be accommodated.

4. Cross Streets such as Mary, Catharine, John, Hughson in the Downtown BIA zone may be slated to dead end at King if closed permanently or be scheduled to turn two-way. Some of these streets are too narrow to accommodate two-way traffic without significant costs to redo the streetscape improvements that were just completed in 2006 and will remove much needed parking and loading zones on those cross-streets.

5. 4 Station locations were suggested as the optimal number between Wellington and Bay and while locations were not recommended as yet, it was determined that stations would be in the middle of the road allowance. Members are wary of track configurations at ground level and ease of loading and unloading passengers in the middle of the street especially for the elderly, wheelchair bound customers, or people pushing small children in strollers. The BIA is also concerned about how the LRT will integrate with the new MacNab Street Bus Terminal since there are no plans that we have seen to allow for a seamless network of transit downtown.

6. All proposed sample types of LRT systems used by the City's Rapid Transit Team have been shown using overhead wiring to derive its power. The BIA believes that is a step backward for the beautification goals it has strived for over the past 20 years and would not like to see that kind of technology in Downtown Hamilton.

7. Costs and Business Losses during Construction While the Downtown BIA understands that the cost of such a system would be shared between the provincial government and the City of Hamilton it ultimately will be the taxpayer that foots the bill at both levels and we hope that the City will examine all options for LRT routes that do not increase costs. Businesses will no doubt suffer during an extended construction schedule since both King and Main Streets are feeder streets from east and west Hamilton and the 403.

8. The recent announcement of the possibility that the LRT line would start at Ottawa Street on King. The BIA believes that having the B line stop and start at Ottawa Street is detrimental to the plan to get people out of their cars and onto the LRT system.

We have spent a great deal of time and effort to inform our membership; both business owners and property owners of this proposal and have experienced a variety of reactions to the proposals from extremely favourable to highly sceptical. Mailings, meetings and personal visits by both BIA and City staff have taken place over the past year and we continue to look forward to open lines of communication as the City moves forward with this proposal.

Sincerely,

Tim Bullock
Chairman