Good afternoon Mayor Bratina and council members of the General Issues Committee council. I very much appreciate having the opportunity to speak to you today. My comments today will focus on the city’s public transit system and the proposed 2014 Transit Service Enhancement Plan.

We strongly support the improvements being proposed and urge councillors to support the inclusion of these needed improvements in this year’s budget. We are very aware of growing demands from institutions like Redeemer University on Rymal Road, for instance—and understand and support their desire to be able to connect their students to the rest of the city through a bus route with reasonable levels of service—including weekend service. This will also be a significant improvement for Binbrook residents linking in to the system via TransCab. We also see the huge value in offering year-round connections to our ever-evolving waterfront area and the proposed enhancement to A-line services will go a long way to achieving this. Enhancing the public transit services provided by our existing HSR system makes so much sense from a sustainability point of view.

However, there is also a very strong argument to be made that the city needs to be more ambitious than this. While I keep reading comments about ‘the need to invest in our inadequate transit system’ and I wholly agree we need to pay attention on this front - this is not justification to abandon the aggressive pursuit of the higher level goals we have for public transit in Hamilton – namely LRT. The Rapid Ready report, endorsed by Council early last year, set out a fast-tracked scenario to follow should funding be approved by Metrolinx—but the community is now unclear as to where efforts are at with securing this funding or whether council is even in agreement that efforts should continue on this front. This is despite detailed information in the RapidReady report pointing to the huge benefits an east-west LRT would bring to our city.

I want to share a story with you about a recent conversation I had with an activist friend from Kitchener-Waterloo. I hadn’t seen this friend for a while and one of the first things he asked about was Hamilton’s progress on LRT. He said, ‘Hamilton was the first out of the gate—where are things at today?’ I told him I was embarrassed to respond to his question. He then proceeded to share with me how excited he and so many others in KW are about the impacts they’re already seeing on the ground as a result of that region’s decision to pursue an LRT system. He said he knows naysayers who have completely changed their tune—now that they are seeing what is happening in KW as a result of the commitment to the system. Construction of their LRT system begins this year—with a 2017 completion date—which will
bring a 19km LRT system that will connect Waterloo-Kitchener and will include a BRT from Kitchener to Cambridge.

He described exciting developments on the ground – even in downtown Kitchener, which has struggled for so long. There are new commercial and residential developments being proposed along the route.

I found clear signs of this, for instance, on a KW Real Estate Company website which includes links to the LRT map because, as they explain, they are getting so many inquiries from potential investors who want details on routing and LRT stop locations.

I worry Hamilton is watching the LRT opportunity pass us by. It feels that much more painful when our neighbour to the west has jumped in with both feet and is already seeing the benefits of embracing a progressive addition to its transit mix.

I would like to finish with these words of wisdom:

> Not investing in transit poses a significant risk to the City. The obvious risk is that not achieving mode share targets would result in increased congestion and associated delays and a greater need to invest more heavily in roads. A not so obvious risk is that Hamilton residents continue to be captive to automobiles and the financial burden that this comes with. Even if transit investments allow a household to manage with one car instead of two, this can translate into significant savings over time.

> There are also risks in not addressing integrated mobility needs in response to changing demographics and an ageing population that will be increasingly dependent on getting around by transit or as a pedestrian. Negative impacts on health and community could result, particularly by limiting access to services and social activities.

> Economically, besides the obvious risk of increased congestion on competitiveness, Hamilton could lose the opportunity to create walkable neighbourhoods proven to be key attractors to the creative industries that Hamilton wants to build its economy upon.

Source of (italicized) text = the 2013 RapidReady Report that you endorsed last year – page 24

Thank you