July 9, 2008

Transmitted by email

To: His Worship, Mayor Fred Eisenbeger and
the members of Hamilton City Council

Re: Transit issues at Today’s Council Meeting.

I am writing this letter to you on behalf of the members of the Hamilton transit Users Group, and as their representative to the
Provincial Gas Tax Advisory Committee*

Over the past few days, since returning from a late June vacation, I have been discussing the report from the HSR on "free transit" options that was discussed at a special Public Works Committee yesterday. Like the committee, we found the report comprehensive and a thorough examination of some of the issues that face the HSR, and was pleased that the verbal presentation of Don Hull managed to highlight a number of issues that indicate the concerns of riders include more than simply the price.

We were pleased to see the committee action to take the symbolic step of offering the potential of free transit on up to two smog days in the remainder of this year. This is a move that will be well received by low income riders who have been feeling particularly put upon in recent times. Coming as it does in summer, we feel it won't affect other areas of concern to our group such as capacity problems, as these pressures are always less during the summer months.

There is one recommendation that we wish to bring forward in the hope that this could be included in the recommendations during your deliberations today. The way this report has come forward points again to a weakness in city process that precludes wide public involvement in critical decisions.

As Don Hull indicated yesterday, and I paraphrase, one could see this report as the blueprint for a short-term strategic plan for the HSR. Clearly, something this important needs more public discussion. By chance, we learned in mid-June at another committee meeting, that the report was coming, and I know that I have only had a handful of days to think about the issue, and the report itself has only been publicly available since last week.

Our suggestion* There is time to organize some public dialogue on the suggestions in this reporting advance of the 2009 budget deliberations. Perhaps a consensus can be developed on a handful of recommendations that the public would like to see. Perhaps it would become clear that the public doesn't want any changes in this area.

A vehicle that we suggest who could be given a mandate to conduct an innovative community consultation without a great deal of resources is the existing gas tax committee which has been largely inactive and could use a new project to focus their attentions. This could be in conjunction with other city advisory committees and community groups, but it would be
these volunteers who would take the lead, and organize a community report
to council, perhaps by the end of October.

There are many other comments that our group would like to make about
these reports, but in the interest of brevity, I will leave them to
another time and simply indicate, that we also support the general
direction that public works committee is recommending to council regarding
a downtown transit centre and the downtown transit master plan.

My thanks for attention

Sincerely

Peter Hutton