

# Starting Hamilton's LRT on the right track

Council is about to make a decision on which of four light rail models it will select

ERIC TUCK

When talking transit in Hamilton, there's never been a more crucial crossroads than the one we are currently at — in terms of getting the best return on our collective investment.

City council is about to make a long-term decision on which of the four LRT models, currently on the table for consideration, they will select and request from Metrolinx. Regrettably, none of these are the best option for our city.

As a transit professional with more than 35 years of experience in Hamilton, across Canada and the United States, I have spent the last 10 years extensively studying LRT, the current P3 model, and the track record of Metrolinx LRT projects, which can only be described as dismal and disappointing at best.

The current four options city council are considering are the same used in the Ottawa O-Train and Eglinton Crosstown LRT projects. They are based on variations of the D-FBOM (design, finance, build, operate and maintain) model, which utilizes a number of private corporations that subsequently allow numerous private subcontractors to bid on and perform the work. Big private corporations have a primary responsibility to deliver greater profits for their respective shareholders year-over-year. Public transit should not be for profit.

City LRT staff — funded by Metrolinx — are recommending Option 2: a fully privatized operations and maintenance model, which eliminates union jobs. If city council agrees to go with Option 2, it would be the worst choice for Hamilton, as it gives us no accountability, no control and no say. The contract would lock the city into a 10-year or more deal with no recourse, and with the recent track record of LRTs, it could cost taxpayers billions.

## No accountability

When things go wrong, there is no accountability, no local control and often no answers.

These projects have been over budget, have experienced extensive delays and suffered catastrophic failures rife with ongoing litigation, finger pointing when there's a problem — all under the watchful eye of Metrolinx, the provincial body charged with overseeing the RFP process. All four of the current options leave local taxpayers, riders and councils out of the loop, with no answers or accountability. Just look at Toronto's Crosstown (Eglinton) LRT — 13 years in the making, riddled with problems, billions in cost overruns and still no completion date.

Anyone who has done their homework and knows the history of Hamilton will realize that a fifth option should be on the table — and it's the best opportunity to ensure that Hamilton's LRT won't fall prey to the same failures.

All of the options currently being considered by city council fail to deliver on the safety aspect. I would remind city council that safety, which should be a major concern, is not part of the overall assessment and is vital from a safe streets perspective. The fifth option would have HSR operate and maintain the LRT. I am confident HSR's safety record and overall performance record would outrank any private operators.

Hamilton must do its best to secure a better model that limits the risk by reducing the players and ensuring local control with local oversight and accountability, especially where it matters most — on the day-to-day operations and maintenance.

Hamilton taxpayers have made their choice clear, as the Keep Transit Public (KTP) coalition has demonstrated time and time again by delivering a petition with thousands of signatures and many local labour and community allies endorsing an HSR/ATU operations and maintenance preference. HSR has 150 years of experience in operating and maintaining public transit for Hamilton, including more than 75 years of street rail services.

This fifth option would deliver proposals for the design, finance and build work that would deliver a working, tested and fully functional LRT to Hamilton Street Railway — and would specify the operations and maintenance should remain the responsibility of HSR.

HSR would then be responsible for day-to-day operations and general maintenance, as well as direct oversight and enforcement of all heavy duty, 30-year warranty work of the rolling stock and rails, which would be carried out by the manufacturer or trained in-house staff where warranted.

Let's hope city council delivers on a request for the very best option for Hamilton and demands that Metrolinx acknowledges and implements a model that will deliver safe, reliable and affordable services seamlessly across our city not only for today's generation but for many years to come.

ERIC TUCK IS PRESIDENT OF ATU LOCAL 107.

# Holocaust, memory and the lesson of a streetcar

DAVE DAVIS

On the night of Jan. 27 each year, a streetcar makes its way around Warsaw, the Polish capital.

They say it is a cold, dark, silent and circuitous ride in a unique vehicle. The tram is marked front and the back by Stars of David, symbols of the Jewish people, recognizable shapes the world over.

To the casual observer (how could there be casual observers here?), the streetcar carries only the conductor. Internal lights illuminate the empty seats and dangling hand straps that identify streetcars everywhere. For the Jews of Warsaw (the World Jewish Congress reports fewer than 5,000 living there today, a tiny fraction of the thousands who called it home before the Second World War), the streetcar must evoke the memory of loss, tears of remembrance.

For the observer of history, the streetcar is full, bursting at its seams.

It overflows with the ghosts of nearly half a million Jews killed in the Warsaw Ghetto, their fate assured by Nazi evil. They were brutalized, starved to death or shot. In the majority of cases, they were removed from the ghetto, forced into boxcars, driven to death camps, gassed and incinerated. This final process — a sliver of the final solution — was called the Grossaktion, the Nazi term for the forced deportation in cattle cars and execution in gas chambers. This was the fate of hundreds of thousands of Warsaw's Jews in the summer and early fall of 1942.

What was the problem that led to this solution? That Jews existed at all, a fact anathema to Nazi sensibilities. If you ever need to search for an example of genocide, here it is.

You do, however, have to search for the remains of the ghetto today, virtually obliterated in the Nazi assault on it in the spring of 1943. Historical plaques mark a few buildings sitting at the edge of the ghetto. At the street level, pedestrians step over brass signage that reads "MUR GHETTA/GHETTO WALL 1942," marking a few metres of the walls' gerrymandered path.

The area hosts an impressive museum called Polin, displaying the 1,000-year history of Jews in the country. Its Finnish architects have created an inspired and evocative architectural masterpiece. Hidden away near the former site of the



CZAREK SOKOLOWSKI THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTO

An old streetcar with the Star of David, like the one that travelled through Warsaw Ghetto during the Second World War, goes down a street in Warsaw, Poland, in 2021 to mark the anniversary of the liberation of the German death camp Auschwitz.

Great Synagogue, there is an even more-inspiring institution, less notable for its architecture and more for what it contains. The Emanuel Ringelblum Historical Institute holds the written product of the Jews' captivity behind the ghetto walls — the calendars and love letters, the photos and essays, and thousands of other documents — of those who perished.

I haven't observed it personally, but the streetcar must carry sounds on its Jan. 27 journey — the ringing of a bell as the streetcar passes by, the rumble and rattle of the car's wheels on the streetcar tracks. Perhaps, if they listen closely, witnesses can hear the ghosts, the cries of children ripped from their mothers, the shouts of men watching their wives raped and brutalized, the pounding on the doors from the inside of those overpacked, obscene cattle cars.

Perhaps it's this that pulls at me: long after the end of the second great war, antisemitism has begun its rise again, its slither just below our hearing, as it crawls on its belly across the world, across North America, even into Hamilton, thousands of miles from Warsaw. And, perhaps especially in this January, ever since Oct. 7.

Since that attack on Israeli citizens, and the subsequent response, I've been searching for something that would capture how the world

sees the Hamas-Israel conflict — a painting, a photograph, a musical piece — anything to move us toward peace.

Perhaps, I think, something like the photograph of the clothes-less little girl, running from napalm, the picture that is credited with bringing home the brutality of the Vietnam War. Perhaps a painting, like Edvard Munch's "The Scream," a sudden, soundless plunge into insanity. Perhaps music, I think. There are hundreds of pieces that might serve the cause: Mozart's "Requiem," Bach's "St. Matthew Passion," especially Peter's aria: "Have mercy my God, for the sake of my tears."

Brilliant and sad as these images and sounds are, perhaps it is the streetcar that captures the current sadness best. On its circular journey that meets its end as it meets its beginning, carrying nothing more than memory and hope. Ultimately going nowhere. Ultimately very sad. Ultimately hopeful, however: after its nighttime journey finishes, the streetcar is greeted by day-break.

Saturday is International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Remember.

DAVE DAVIS IS A RETIRED FAMILY DOCTOR AND WRITER. HIS NOVELS HAVE WON INTERNATIONAL AWARDS. VISIT AMAZON OR DRDAVEDAVIS.COM.

# One day at a time under the African sun



THOMAS FROESE  
OPINION

MUKONO, UGANDA There's a red dirt road in front of the university guest house where I sometimes sit, in the doorway, barefooted. I watch the African sunrise. And the monkeys. I listen to the birds. Or watch children pass by. They remind me of Hannah, our youngest.

"Hello," several said the other day, waving.

"Hello," I said.

"How are you?" they said. "Are you fine?"

"Yes," I said. "I'm fine."

"Happy New Year," one said, and I said the same. They laughed. "Nice to see you," said another, and I said it was nice to see them too. One repeated, "Happy New Year," before there was silence and before the last one then said, "Good night."

Gosh, my heart felt like it would burst in the purity and humour of the moment. It was, in fact, about noon.

The dirt road leads to a playground that Ugandan children still use. With some help, I'd built it years ago. Across from the playground, on a hill, is a simple bungalow with a faded tin roof, the modest home that my family built and

lived in during our dozen years here.

Travel the opposite direction and the road goes through this campus' green rolling hills to the main road. Turn east and eventually you reach a beach town on Lake Victoria called Jinja. It's the source of the Nile River. And the source of Hannah.

There's an orphanage there that my wife and I visited once. I took a photo of the youngest children sleeping, row-by-row, in little pull-out beds. They were something. A few years later we returned, and found Hannah. Or she found us.

Of course, there are plenty of orphans, about 140 million, in the world. Almost one-third are African. Uganda has more than two million. If they're not with an auntie or grandmother, they're in one orphanage or another. Many are loved deeply. Some are neglected horribly.

But you don't pick up a child from a place like Uganda like you pick up a bag of groceries. There are processes.

Developing nations frown on westerners wanting to blow in and adopt children without care for their culture. And even while Hannah was with us, in foster care, from the start, the winding road to full, legal adoption taught us the patience of Job.

The Jinja court "lost" the adoption files. Judges were absent.

Bribes, common enough, were not given by us. "So I'm not in this family?" Hannah once asked after yet another strange occurrence. Still, we — our family of five — continued life together, one day at a time, including Hannah, in the adventure of it.

Five years into proceedings, the phone call came. Adoption was approved. The call came, fittingly enough, on Hannah's eighth birthday.

Years later, in 2017, we returned full time to Canada. The kids needed to know Canada better.

Now it's the 10th anniversary of that celebratory phone call. In fact, the day before I got on a plane to fly to Uganda for some teaching, we celebrated Hannah's 18th. She herself now plans to be a teacher, for younger kids, like those near my guest house doorway.

Sitting here, I just had another conversation. He was a young man. I was touched by his face, his countenance and spirit of humility. He'd been lining up work abroad, but, in the effort to migrate, lost all his savings.

"Things happen for a reason," he said to me. He smiled when I asked how to say this in his local language. "Eyo eyi ki 'yeru asisile si," he said. It's true. Hannah knows. Or maybe things just happen, but, with reasoning and time, we can still make something good of it.

This is the least we can do, wherever we find ourselves. Get out. Say hello. Look in someone's face. Hear their story. Maybe even appreciate another language. And remember the children. It's all that this old world has, really. Remember they grow up, too.

READ THOMAS FROESE AT THOMASFROESE.COM.

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