



# THE BAY OBSERVER

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## Is Metrolinx missing the boat?

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As outlined in the November 7<sup>th</sup> issue of this newspaper we've been given a lot to consider in the agency's 25-year plan for renewal of the regions transportation infrastructure. Efficient mass transit for people and unimpeded goods movement will play a critical part in ensuring our economy can meet the challenges of the future and with their deliberations and recommendations influencing where governments will spend a reported \$50 billion practicality and common sense would dictate that ALL options be considered.

So why hasn't the potential of waterborne carriage of people and freight been considered as a viable alternative to land based transportation? It's almost as if the marine option was considered and ruled out or escaped the attention of the planners entirely which seems hard to believe when the study area borders one of the five Great Lakes.

It was former Transportation Minister Donna Cansfield back in early 2007 who embraced the notion of GO Boats as an option worthy of consideration. And likely because of his past involvement as Chair of the Hamilton Port Authority Mayor Eisenberger went on record as being cautiously supportive of the idea.

Which makes the absence of any reference to ferries especially perplexing.

Perhaps it's too simple; after all there's no rail needing to be laid down, no special bus-only lanes to be created, the pier facilities are basically in place in Hamilton and Toronto and could easily be created in St. Catherines, Mississauga or Oakville. As far as infrastructure is concerned any marine passenger terminal we've seen looks eerily like a newer GO-train station and requires the same parking and bus interface arrangement.

A local designer of ultra-modern fast ferries Ian Taylor, President of Reflex Advanced Marine in Dundas told this newspaper that given a similar level of funding as rail and bus a passenger ferry could compete in this arena. He seems to know what he's taking about; the company website features some pretty futuristic looking units and he'd like nothing better than to build one, two or even a dozen and paint them in GO Transit colours.

He estimates that a 350-passenger ferry could make the trip from the lift bridge at the entrance to Hamilton harbour and be docking at Toronto's Harbourfront about 40 minutes later. During that time passengers would be able to sip a Starbucks coffee and enjoy the Bay Observer purchased at the onboard newsstand. And while it would be obligatory to

walk your bicycle onto one of the four bi-level gangways locking it wouldn't be necessary because, well, you're on the water so it's not as if it would be stolen.

Unlike a large number of GO Trains that spend the better part of the off-peak hours and weekends parked there's also the potential of chartering them to tour operators who could take passengers into Niagara casinos or wine country. Add to that the possibility of revenue from courier companies who'd be encouraged to take advantage of the craft's limited freight capacity and you might find GO Transit's balance sheet turning a lovely shade of black instead of red.

The craft that Reflex designs are designed to be exceptionally passenger friendly (that's marine talk for stable and quiet) and capable of operating in any weather short of a full-blown storm. Ian claims that they would exceed all current and planned future standards for safety and with water jets replacing propellers and Kevlar hulls they would be easy to maintain. And while we appreciate that the environmental lobby is all for mass transit they'll be positively euphoric to learn that the craft would be powered by modern economical diesel engines setup to run on a new age fuel - bio-diesel.

It all sounds pretty civilized and begs the question..why are the folks at Metrolinx afraid of the water?

Bob Matthews  
Bay Observer