

# Candidate hopes to improve TTC, conquer gridlock

By SAMANTHA BUTLER

With public transit becoming a hot-button issue in the municipal election campaign, one of the candidates in the contentious Ward 29 city council race has come forward with something of a transit wish-list.

John Richardson, who is trying again for the council seat from Toronto-Danforth, is just back from a trip to China, where he says he gained inspiration for changes he thinks should be made to Toronto's bus and subway system.

"We need to look to other cities and learn from other cities," he said.

In Shanghai and Beijing, he said, gridlock is minimal, despite the second- and fourth-highest population densities in the world. In contrast to the one-hour journey from Toronto Pearson Airport to his East York home when he got back, Richardson travelled from the Beijing airport to his downtown destination in eight minutes — on a German-engineered Maglev train, at speeds topping 400 km/h.

In the city, transit takes a person anywhere on the system for only two Chinese dollars, about 30 Canadian cents.

Toronto currently faces a crisis in transit planning. In late March, the provincial government postponed a promised \$4 billion in transit spending.

Meanwhile, both TTC Chair Adam Giambrone and Mayor David Miller, principal proponents of Toronto's Transit City plan, have announced their imminent withdrawal from municipal politics. And Toronto has been ranked last among 20 international cities in a transit gridlock assessment in late March.

Richardson said the creation of the city's subway in 1949 was inspired by a similar problem, when a booming post-war population began to flood the city.

"We're in the same situation now," he said. "We've got this gridlock and we've got to do something about it."

With Toronto's municipal elections set for October, some mayoral contenders are already declaring their positions on the

future of the TTC.

Sarah Thompson suggests a \$6.6-billion subway expansion, while Rob Ford wants to rein in spending and make the TTC an essential service to prevent any strikes. Rocco Rossi, meanwhile, wants to remove politicians completely from oversight of transit and shift management away from city hall.

Spending money on the TTC is not something Richardson shies away from.

"I think Mayor Miller had it right when he said that we can't think about what transit is going to cost us. We have to think about what it's going to cost us not to improve transit."



RICHARDSON

Richardson is a self-employed businessman who finished fifth out of six candidates for Ward 29 councillor in 2006. This year, the race is more open in Toronto-Danforth because of the retirement of veteran councillor Case Ootes. But the presumed front-runners are Jane Pitfield on the right and Mary Fragedakis on the left.

Pitfield is a former Don Valley West councillor and mayoral contender. Fragedakis is a businesswoman who has been endorsed by local New Democratic MPPs Peter Tabuns and Michael Prue.

Richardson said that municipal politicians need to be prepared to "think big," and commit to long-term planning. "We've got to think beyond today."

He's said he's also confident that Toronto can anticipate many years "in the (economic) driver's seat" if it focuses on developing sustainable management of Lake Ontario.

"People here have no idea how fortunate and blessed they are in terms of the water.... There are many parts of the world, and China is one, where you don't drink water out of the taps in the hotels."

"There will be no more wars fought over oil, but there will be over water. We're sitting on the largest body of fresh water in the world," he said. "There's a lot we can do."