

## **Who's on board? How do the federal parties compare on commitments to public transit?**

CUTA presents its analysis of the parties' commitments on public transit and their alignment with our industry's interests.

We summarize the Liberals, Conservatives, NDP and Greens platforms below, in the order in which they ranked in size (number of seats) in the last Parliament. We also provide context on the different parties' transit electrification targets and the timelines they are putting forward to achieve this change.

### **Liberals**

#### *Platform commitments*

- Permanent transit funding of \$3 billion annually that is not currently budgeted for in the next four years.
- \$700 million over four years for fleet electrification, including 5,000 new zero-emission buses for transit systems and school boards.
- All new transit investments will need to support zero-emission vehicles beginning in 2023.
- A pledge to reinvest unused infrastructure funds into the federal Gas Tax Fund by the end of 2021 if provinces and territories fail to identify eligible projects by that date.

#### *Analysis*

CUTA has pressed the federal government over the last few years to identify ways of getting transit funding to communities faster. Topping up the Gas Tax Fund (GTF) with unspent infrastructure investments is a good way of doing this. However, it is critical that funding that is allocated to transit in the Investing in Canada Plan (ICIP) remains dedicated to transit in future GTF top-ups.

CUTA is pleased to see the federal government commit \$700 million to help finance the transition to green transit fleets. Many cities are setting targets to green their fleets by 2040. Some provinces have also set their own zero-emission fleet mandates, including Quebec where transit systems can only procure electric buses as from 2025. The Liberals have set a green procurement-only deadline of 2023. Transit systems will need this funding to facilitate the transition due to the higher purchasing costs of electric buses over diesel. We must ensure that going green does not reduce the number of buses on our roads, and this is an important step in that direction. We are also pleased to see the government commit to permanent transit funding as this will provide better planning certainty for major transit infrastructure projects that take years and years to build.



## Conservatives

### *Platform commitments*

- Reintroduction of the (green) Public Transit Tax Credit.
- A commitment to preserving existing Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB) projects, but getting rid of the bank.
- Financial support for major projects including the GTA's Ontario Line and Quebec City's *Réseau structurant*.

### *Analysis*

The Conservatives unveiled their costed election platform on Friday, October 11. It states that a Conservative government will maintain funding for all transit projects committed to by the Liberals, and maintain statutory spending as well, including the Gas Tax Fund. In order to balance the budget over a five-year timeframe, the Conservatives have pledged to extend the Investing in Canada Plan by three years so that the \$187 billion program is spent over a 15-year period, and not the current 12-year timeframe. The Conservatives are not cutting infrastructure spending, but rather delaying uncommitted funds further into the future. CUTA has recent [research](#) that shows that there is a high percentage of unmet funding needs in transit that is leading to projects not getting off the ground in a timely manner.

In keeping with their focus on affordability measures for Canadians, the Conservatives committed to bring back the public transit tax credit that was cancelled in Budget 2017. This is an important measure to make riding transit less expensive and encourage its use over single occupancy vehicles. CUTA is also pleased that the party has committed to maintain funds allocated to transit projects via the Canada Infrastructure Bank, and for the party's support for cutting commute times which has translated into specific project announcements including the Ontario line and Yonge subway extension.

## NDP

### *Platform commitments*

- \$6.5 billion over four years that is dedicated to transit, including:
  - Funding to support fare-free public transit in municipalities that want to opt-in.
  - Permanent capital funding.
  - Fully electric transit fleets by 2030.
- Support for the Windsor-Quebec City High Frequency Rail Corridor.
- Support for rural inter-city bus services to replace routes that were eliminated in Western Canada and Northern Ontario in October 2018.

### *Analysis*

So far, the NDP has allocated more funding to transit than any other political party. CUTA supports this ambition. The NDP sees transit as a solution in the fight against climate change, and has prioritized zero-emission buses in the near-term future. While there is no industry consensus on fare-free transit, CUTA supports measures to make transit more affordable as recent [research](#) suggests that this increases ridership. Political party support for VIA Rail's High Frequency Rail project is welcomed as better



intercity rail service moves Canadians out of passenger cars and integrates them more effectively into urban transit when they've reached their destination.

## **Greens**

### *Platform commitments*

- Put in place a National Transportation Strategy.
- Commit to permanently doubling the federal Gas Tax Fund.
- Commit to fully electric transit fleets by 2040.
- Increase VIA Rail services across Canada by developing regional rail networks.
- Commitment to high speed rail: Toronto-Ottawa-Quebec City and Edmonton-Calgary.

### *Analysis*

CUTA believes that a national strategy on public transportation is an effective way to integrate existing policies into a holistic approach that best captures the economic, environmental and social benefits of transit. The Greens' commitment to double the GTF to municipalities year over year will provide them with funding to build out their transit systems in the future. The party's support for growing VIA Rail's capacity to serve smaller communities is also welcome for the same reasons outlined in the paragraph above. Political parties that want our industry to move to zero-emission transit fleets by 2040 need to understand the high costs of doing this. We are waiting to hear how the Greens would support our industry in achieving this change.

## **Targets and timelines for transit electrification**

The political parties have different timelines to move to zero-emission public transportation. The shorter the time frame the greater the cost, and the more support transit systems will need. If you are looking at the NDP's ambitious 2030 target, you need to consider the following:

- Taking diesel buses off the road before their expected end-of-life cycle.
- Higher purchasing prices for electric buses vs. other fuel types.
- The need to install proper infrastructure for charging and maintenance, and retrofitting facilities to do so.

There are other technologies that transit systems can use to lower emissions from their buses and trains. For example, natural gas and hybrid buses are better suited to different geographies and specific climates. CUTA does not advocate for electrification over other fuel types. However, we do push for greener fleets, whatever the technology used.

The biggest contribution that transit makes to reducing greenhouse gas emissions is through modal shift, which means getting people out of cars and on to public transportation. Transit also encourages better land use in cities, increasing population density and reducing emissions by shortening commutes.

CUTA applauds the commitments that all political parties have made to transit. We called on the parties to prioritize transit ahead of the election campaign, and they are doing just that. Our association does



not promote one party over the next. We look forward to working with the political party that will form the next federal government to implement their transit platform.

