

# A 33% increase in bus fares- are you (insert expletive) kiddin' me?

*More to the Story*

By Ben Bennett

Next week, a bunch of politicians and bureaucrats will sit down around a table and see if they can save the planet. Or to put it more accurately, save our continued existence on the planet.

That may sound melodramatic but is there any doubt that climate change is going to kill us? And while there may be dinosaurs out there who still dispute this fact, the folks making the decisions next week in Paris seem to all get it now. Thank heavens there is no one there called Bush and no one called Harper. Thank heavens the Canadian delegation will be there to help and not hinder.

Barack Obama seems to see action on this file as part of his legacy in his final year as United States president. If we can get something beyond a nominal commitment to act, maybe we have chance. Without it, frankly, we are signing death warrants for sure for anyone living in low-lying areas of the world (goodbye Bangladesh and Miami). We will also have increased the risk to everyone everywhere, it seems, of injury and possibly death by high winds, floods, hurricanes, forest fires, you name it.

I may be dreaming here, but I do get the sense this time around that the big guys who make the big decisions may actually understand, finally, that we must act and that action must be significant, even if it will have an economic impact in the short term – as it surely will.

So while these men and women have been elected to look after the global issues on our behalf, another group of politicians and bureaucrats will also be sitting around a table. Their job, it seems, is to save a tax increase beyond the cost of living. That, after all, is the most serious problem facing Guelph today and all things must be sacrificed on that altar to ensure it happens.

It is so serious, our daily transit users, Guelph's richest one per cent, may have to pay up to \$500 a year extra to take the bus.

Maybe that is not a fair way to characterize the mission of the city council and staff next week, but it is the only way I can find to make any sense of a staff report that takes money away from transit but has millions to pay for new parking structures.

Based on recent columns and letters, I am not the only one who sees the unfairness of expecting transit users to pay a 33% increase fares for a reduced bus service. Never mind the fact that higher fares will reduce transit use and drive the service spiral ever downward – not exactly a new theory – but who in his or her right mind puts a 33% increase in anything on the table at budget time?

The insensitivity of this suggestion is breath-taking. Every four years all the candidates take great pains to talk about taking action to address poverty in this city. Were any of the bureaucrats listening?

I don't know what, if any, direct or implied guidance was given to staff on the budget so let us not be too quick to judge. But if this recommendation finds its way through the process the city may as well disband its poverty task force and remove any pretence that city hall gives a damn.

If the world's politicians can finally get their act together on the climate file, why on earth are we looking to reduce transit?

Compare the subsidy we give transit to the subsidy we give to parking. It's not even close.

More transit means fewer cars; fewer cars mean fewer greenhouse gases; and, ironically, that also means more parking spaces available. Let me just say that again: better transit means more parking spaces – compare that to the cost of building another ugly parking garage.

We are talking about a few hundred thousand to keep transit as it is (and a few more to make it better) versus more than \$10 million to build a concrete structure so people can park close to the train when they are leaving the city to spend their money somewhere else.

Look to Paris, council, dump this bone-headed fare increase idea, and send a signal that you get it, too.

(Ben Bennett's past columns can be found at [www.bbc.guelph.org](http://www.bbc.guelph.org).)