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Hon. Caroline Mulroney
Minister of Transportation
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Phil Verster
President and Chief Executive Officer, Metrolinx
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Dear Minister Mulroney and Mr. Verster:

I am writing to ask for the full public disclosure of how much Metrolinx is spending to pay Instagram “influencers” to promote non-existent transit routes. As you are aware from reporting from both the Toronto Star and CBC, Metrolinx is currently funding popular Instagram users to advertise transit projects that don’t exist yet. The campaign consists of compensating Instagram “influencers” for posting glowing comments about future transit projects, including the Ontario Line – a route that is currently little more than lines on map. I am formally requesting those costs of this campaign be made public.

It’s unclear why Metrolinx would decide to pay individuals to advertise something that Ontarians won’t be able to use for nearly a decade. The Ontario Line was only conceived by Premier Ford earlier this year, after he threw out the City of Toronto’s planning and research for the Downtown Relief Line. None of the preliminary planning or design stages have been completed for the Ontario Line. Key information about train models and infrastructure is still unavailable.

Even the station locations and route map for the Ontario Line are unconfirmed, and cost estimates could be twice as high as originally announced. Toronto’s City Manager recently confirmed that less than 10 percent of the design for the Ontario Line is completed.

It’s also concerning that Metrolinx is currently choosing to spend money on influencer advertising, while cutting transit service and hiking fares. Earlier this year, Metrolinx reduced GO Bus service – including cutting some routes altogether – and raised fares-by-distance for commuters. If service cuts and fare increases are needed to keep Metrolinx and GO Transit running, transit users deserve to know exactly how much of their money is going to YouTube stars and fitness bloggers for these campaigns.

Ontarians deserve fast, reliable, and affordable new transit. What they don’t need is a flashy marketing campaign for a subway that won’t exist for years.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Jessica Bell

Jessica Bell
Official Opposition Critic, Transit
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