TTC faces perfect storm with costs rising, ridership slumping

By MARCUS OLENIUK

The province's transit agency made under Rob Ford's administration, and that frequent customers got some relief this year due to a fare cut, but the TTC is now facing an ongoing ridership decline that could lead to fare increases.

"About 9,500 more riders per day than we thought," TTC chair Josh Colle said. "And that's a big discrepancy for us."

Colle said the TTC's ridership has dropped by 1.7 per cent year-over-year so far this year, with an "unusual" drop in ridership on the Yonge-University-Spadina line, which had been growing at a rate of 7 per cent per year.

That's a low ridership growth rate for the TTC, which Colle said is "sustained ridership growth that is only now starting to plateau."

"We'll do everything we can to make sure service is retained," he said, adding that he hoped to avoid fare increases in the budget "by increasing revenue in other ways." But savings from many of those initiatives won't begin to be realized for at least another year, he said.

"I don't see this as a crisis," Colle said, adding that the agency has already made cuts in the past, including reductions in subway service.

"We've been through this before and will get through this," he said.

But Councillor Gord Perks (Ward 14, Parkdale High Park) warns that cutting service in response to a drop in ridership is "not a good idea."

"You can't just go in and cut service where ridership has decreased," Perks said. "We have to find other ways to increase revenue, or the province or the city has to give us more money."