

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

OPTA, in co-operation with CUTA, has submitted its annual pre-budget submission to Finance Minister Dwight Duncan. Entitled "Investing in Transit in Challenging Times", OPTA reminds legislators that good quality transit is a vital link to spurring economic growth, attracting investment, and ensuring sustainable communities. The submission makes a number of recommendations including:

- Increasing the dedicated gas tax funding from 2 to 3 cents/litre;
- Establishing consistent and less aggressive implementation timeliness for all AODA standards;
- Maintaining the Ontario Bus Replacement Program;
- Establishing an Environmental Investment Fund to assist the acquisition of new vehicles that incorporate environmentally sustainable propulsion technologies;
- Amending the Development charges Act of 1997 to eliminate the relative disadvantage of transit to other municipal services;
- Ensuring that operating funds are maintained at sufficient levels to service a growing capital base as transit needs expand.

VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

Under the leadership of a joint working group, OPTA and CUTA have submitted a brief to the Ministry of Labour which is looking at changes to the Ontario Health and Safety Act (OHSA) as it pertains to violence in the workplace.

- With respect to **domestic violence**, OPTA is opposed to amending the Act to specifically reference "domestic violence" arguing instead for a broadly based risk assessment and remediation approach.
- With respect to the **right to refuse** work, OPTA cited several reasons that the OHSA should not be amended to permit work refusals in circumstances where an employee believes that workplace related harassment or violence is likely to endanger him or herself or another worker. However, if the Province decides to introduce such a provision, OPTA wants a standard in place similar to Alberta where the employee must meet an objective test for making such a claim in order to minimize abuse.

BILL 118 - COUNTERING DISTRACTED DRIVING

Commonly known as the bill to ban cell phones while driving, OPTA is working with the MTO to examine the impact of Bill 118 on the in-service use of on-board transit vehicle communications devices. London Transit is the "test system" for this review, which will provide commentary on devices such as on-board automatic vehicle location system hardware, public announcement systems, portable radios, laptops, and emergency communications equipment. The results will be shared with all OPTA members in a few weeks, and will provide guidance as to what modifications and/or exemptions from the Bill that transit systems will need to seek.

SKILFORM "TAXI MODULE" BEING DEVELOPED

Many of you will be familiar with OPTA's SkilForm Train the Trainer course on providing customer service to persons with disabilities. Developed a few years ago to help transit systems meet the training requirements under the ODA legislation for Customer Service, SkilForm will be modified in the coming weeks to meet the needs of the taxi industry. OPTA will undertake the project with funding from the Ministry of Community and Social Services and work in partnership with OTEC-Training and HR Solutions who helped to develop the original curriculum. An Advisory Committee has been assembled to guide the project consisting of representatives of the taxi industry, the Ministry, and several disability advocates groups.

CVOR RENEWAL

Starting December 1, 2008 all CVOR certificates will be assigned an expiry date. Existing (non-expiring) certificates are being assigned an expiry date over a two-year transition period. New applicants for CVOR certificates will be assigned an expiry date at time of issuance. For more information, please visit: www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/trucks/cvor/

OTE APRIL 20-22: PLANNING NOW UNDERWAY

Most of you by now will have received a little blue flier in the mail announcing the date for the next Ontario Transportation Exposition, or OTE, to be held April 20-22nd at the Toronto International Centre and the Holiday Inn Airport Select Hotel. We are planning a number of conference sessions aimed at attracting both general management as well as maintenance/technical people. Some of the topics on the program include:

- AODA Implementation
- Designing an Apprenticeship Program
- Use of Smart Bus Technology
- Fleet Maintenance Systems
- Experience to Date with Alternative Fuels
- Impact of Human Rights Code changes

Please mark April 20-22nd in your calendars and plan to attend!



OPTA CHALLENGES NO-FAULT INSURANCE REGIME

OPTA and CUTA have submitted a letter to the Ontario Auto Insurance Five-Year Review calling for the exemption of public transit from the provisions of the Statutory Accident Benefit Schedule (the "no-fault" regime). In an effort to minimize skyrocketing insurance costs, the brief urges the province to exempt public transit from the no-fault regime and return bodily injury claims relating to surface vehicles owned by public transit systems to a pure tort regime. The final recommendations resulting from the Five-Year Review will not be available until later in the year.

DRIVER INSTRUCTION CLASSES FOR 2009

Class sessions have already begun for the highly acclaimed Professional Instructor in Driver Education [or P.R.I.D.E.] program, a one-of-a-kind program that teaches driver instructors how to properly train drivers within their fleet. The first class was held January 18-23, and dates for the next few programs are as follows:

- Feb. 8-13
- July 5-10
- Aug. 9-14
- Oct. 18-23

Space is still available for February, so if you are interested in sending someone from your organization, please contact **Norm Cheesman** at OPTA. A special word of thanks to those transit systems who have lent the use of a vehicle for the week-long sessions – loaner buses are usually required and always appreciated.

AODA IMPLEMENTATION: AN UPDATE

The December 4th Workshop on AODA was well attended and chocked full with good information. OPTA continues to press for realistic, co-ordinated timeframes, and has called on the Minister of Community and Social Services to re-issue the final draft Transportation Standard for a second round of public comment before it is finalized in order to ensure that all concerns are dealt with in open forum. Meanwhile, the Information and Communications Standard is now out for public comment and systems are encouraged to provide their views directly to the Minister. Finally, a reminder that the Customer Service Standard compliance date for public sector organizations is January 1, 2010. For more information on AODA standards and timelines, please visit: www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/mcsc/english/pillars/accessibilityOntario.

MTO ANNOUNCEMENTS

The MTO is expected to announce the 2009 gas tax allocations to municipalities "any day now", but the OBRP announcement won't be made until March. OPTA will relay any information as soon as it becomes available.