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PRIME MINISTER'S MEDIA AVAILABILITY

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DIMITRI SOUDAS (Prime Minister's Press Secretary):
So we'll start the media availability. We'll start with Paul Bliss, CTV. Paul?
You're gone? Ok, we'll continue with Shawn Mallen, Global. Right here.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, a big investment in transit...can you hear me all right?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): Yeah, just a lot of background noise, but I can hear you.

REPORTER: I'll speak up.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Yeah.

REPORTER: A big investment in transit and in reducing greenhouse gases. I wonder if on a political level this is all sort of investment in getting more conservative MPs elected in the GTA, given the polls are looking somewhat better. And if I'd ask the Premier how he feels about assisting in the prospect?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, there's, as you know, there's no election scheduled right now, and I'm not planning to have an election. But last budget our government did lay out a large amount of new money for transit infrastructure across the country. We've been consulting with the province, this province and other provinces and regional, municipal officials, and putting forward something that we think is desired and fits that priorities of ordinary people and ordinary working families, and that's what we're trying to do. You know, if that has political benefits, so be it, but obviously our job is to do the best running the country and working with other levels of government on shared priorities.

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DALTON MCGUINITY (Premier of Ontario): You know, I think the real question here is does this speak to the needs and concerns and aspirations of the people of Ontario. And I think unequivocally, the answer to all of those questions is yes. This is about helping families caught up in a just-in-time world who are suffering from family time famine. It's about improving the competitiveness of this Toronto-GTA economy. It'll do that as well. At the same time, it's helped us better assume our responsibilities as global citizens when it comes to addressing climate change. So for me, it's a win-win-win in three areas of great importance to the people of Ontario, so I'm very pleased to participate in this venture with the Prime Minister.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: On va continuer avec Christian Grégoire, Radio-Canada.

JOURNALISTE: Alors une question pour M. Harper d'abord et M. McGuinty ensuite. Ici messieurs. M. Harper, d'abord, c'est la première, c'est la deuxième annonce publique que vous faites avec M. McGuinty. Est-ce que justement cette annonce aujourd'hui n'est pas une façon de gagner la paix? Vos relations n'ont pas toujours été bonnes avec le Premier ministre de l'Ontario. Est-ce qu'aujourd'hui vous voulez gagner la paix? Je pose la même question aussi à M. McGuinty à savoir qu'est-ce qui s'est passé depuis quelques mois avec M. Harper?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Je peux dire juste que nous sommes heureux toujours de faire des annonces avec des provinces, avec des autres paliers de gouvernement quand nous avons des priorités partagés. Et évidemment nous avons des fonds pour l'infrastructure pour le transport en commun. C'est une priorité du gouvernement de l'Ontario, une priorité partagée, une priorité qui sert à les vrais besoins des travailleurs, des

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travailleuses et leurs familles, et je pense que quand les gouvernements peuvent travailler ensemble, ils devraient travailler ensemble, et c'est la raison pour l'annonce aujourd'hui.

DALTON MCGUINITY: Je suis en accord avec le Premier ministre. Il me semble que ce qui m'intéresse, ce sont les intérêts des Ontariens, des Ontariennes. Et ils insistent que j'assume mes responsabilités de bien travailler avec les autres niveaux de gouvernement pour répondre à leurs besoins, et c'est exactement cela qu'on fait ici aujourd'hui.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Continue with Richard Madden, City TV.

REPORTER: Hi Prime Minister. Just a clarification; I'm hoping you can also expand on it. The funding announced today, if it's contingent on the upcoming federal budget. If it is and the budget fails or gets defeated, then what?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well parts, that's partly true. Most of the funding for the transit announcement today is actually based on the previous budget. That has been passed. It's obviously a matter of completing some of the business assessments that have to go into effect, but that money has been allocated, and I don't see an obstacle, with or without the budget, to that, to the transit plans moving ahead. In terms of the Eco-Trust announcement with Ontario, it's very clear the Eco-Trust monies are year-end monies. The budget will have to be passed this year for those monies to be available.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll continue, on va continuer avec Christian Paradis, Radio-Canada...

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RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, then, the opposition will have to explain why they didn't think this was a good plan for the environment and for Canadians. I think it's had universally positive response from all provinces, from the media and from Canadians across the country. These are excellent projects that we can afford and I don't see why the opposition would block those things.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: On va procéder avec Catherine Paradis, Radio-Canada radio.

JOURNALISTE: M. Harper, dites-moi, qu'est-ce que représente l'Ontario en vue des prochaines élections, même si on ne sait pas quand est-ce qu'elles vont avoir lieu. Qu'est-ce que cette province-ci représente pour vous au niveau politique?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Je peux dire juste que tout le monde sait que l'Ontario est la plus grande province, mais en même temps, comme je viens de dire, nous n'avons pas d'élections maintenant. Notre gouvernement n'a pas l'intention de déclencher des élections. Nous voulons gouverner aux intérêts des familles, des contribuables, des travailleurs, des travailleuses. Et nous allons...nous espérons que nous pourrions continuer à le faire. Et c'est notre intention. Je peux dire juste que...je peux juste ajouter que quand j'étais jeune, quand j'étais étudiant et j'employais le transport en commun à Toronto, je n'imaginais pas à cette époque que j'annoncerais à l'avenir une telle annonce.

And I'll just say the same thing. I just was thinking today, I often pinch myself as I say I love the job I have. I can remember all those years I was riding the TTC as a student and as a summer student, worker and young boy, I never imagined I'd be announcing transit projects myself in

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Toronto, but it's a great thing to be able to do and I hope to continue to work on these kinds of projects for the months and years to come.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll continue with Stacy Cotsus, CTV National. Oh, right here.

REPORTER: Hi, this question's for the Prime Minister. I'm wondering what you'd like to see the banks do about ATM fees?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, you should really talk to Minister Flaherty about that. I think the Minister has expressed our government's concerns about ATM fees. I can say that like every other Canadian, when I do get them from time to time, they annoy me. The government is, as you know, loathe to interfere in the marketplace. What we want to make sure is that there's competition and the consumers have low-cost or no-cost choices, but I know that our government, the Minister has some concerns. I know he's met with the banks and I know those concerns have been expressed to them. I'm sure they're hearing them from many other circles as well.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll continue with April Lindgrun, CanWest.

REPORTER: A question for the Prime Minister. The veterans have opposed a government plan to give the Victoria Cross to unknown soldiers. I'm just wondering, are you planning to forge ahead with that plan by the government in any case?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: I haven't made a final decision. We've actually had some mixed response from veterans' organizations, not all opposed, but some opposed, some in favour, and the government hasn't taken a final decision on that.

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DIMITRI SOUDAS: Mike Wise, CBC television. Right here.

REPOTER: A question for the Prime Minister. Your plan says this is part of your government's long-term plan for a GTA transit strategy. How does that roll out in the future and how will that mesh with other long-term transportation plans being developed by the Greater Toronto Transit Authority?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, as you know, we've announced some transit projects in the past. This is obviously a whole series of long-term announcements. It meshes well with the province's plan, which goes beyond public transit and into the highways system as well, and you know, all I can say is stay tuned. There's a lot of work to be done to complete the work we've announced today and we obviously know that the needs will continue to increase in the future.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll continue with Lauren McNabb, Global television.

REPOTER: This is for the Prime Minister as well. Last week a nine-year-old Canadian boy in a Texas detention centre put out a personal plea to you for help. What are you doing to answer that call, and are there any plans to help him or not?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, I can simply say to you that whenever Canadians are incarcerated abroad, the government of Canada, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and its consular services, works to establish consular contact with those people and to provide any assistance that can be provided. And that's the course of action that's been undertaken. In this case obviously, you know, the

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government of Canada is not in a position to dictate what happens in other jurisdictions, but we are following the matter closely.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll continue with Jennifer Buchanan, A-Channel.

REPORTER: This question is for the Premier. While today this is a GTA-based announcement, there's still hundreds of thousands of commuters who travel daily from even further north of York region, Simcoe County, along 400 to the city. How do today's transit announcements affect them, and for example, is the subway extension viable for everyone? Parking areas to meet and to use those as well?

DALTON MCGUINITY: Well, you know, this builds on an announcement made at the time of our last budget of a \$1.2 billion Move Ontario plan. So I would argue that what we're doing today is ambitious. It is far ranging. It will speak to some very significant needs on the parts of commuters. Does it finish all the work in one fell swoop? No. There is still more work to be done, and there's more time to do it.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: And we have time for one last question, dernière question, Michel Bolduc, Radio-Canada radio.

JOURNALISTE: M. Harper, qu'est-ce qu'il y a pour les usagers de la ville de Toronto dans l'annonce d'aujourd'hui?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Évidemment comme le Premier ministre de l'Ontario vient de dire, quand on donne des fonds pour n'importe quel projet de transport ou de l'infrastructure, ça aide le transport en général dans la région. Évidemment les effets sont immédiats pour la route précise, mais à cause de la réduction de congestion, les bénéfices seront partout. Et le Premier ministre a, comme partie de ses efforts (inaudible)

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annoncer des annonces pour certaines routes hors du système du transport en commun pour le système des autoroutes aussi, et â va aussi aider des citoyens, des citoyennes de Toronto.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Merci beaucoup, thank you very much everybody. Merci beaucoup. Thank you.

DALTON MCGUINITY: Prime Minister, let me just take the opportunity to offer you my deepest sympathy. I understand that Richard Brennan now finds himself on Parliament Hill. (LAUGHTER) But to make matters even worse, he's assumed responsibility as President of the Press Gallery there.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Yeah.

DALTON MCGUINITY: My deepest sympathies to you, Prime Minister. (LAUGHTER)

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, thank you for the (inaudible). Appreciate that. Great, ok?

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