

Critical Discourse Analysis of Mayor's Comments in Opposition to Automated Speed Enforcement

Abstract

This is a short summary of a critical discourse analysis from the Mayor's comments on the AMPS motion at the December 2024 budget meeting. This summary critically analyses the discourse of the Mayor who publicly rejects automated speed enforcement (ASE) technology (despite the city's endorsement and commitment to ASE), often referred to as speed cameras. While the comments may be interpreted as being about the motion in front of council (AMPS), multiple statements make evident the overall objective of his comments was about the ASE which has already been endorsed by council ("I haven't supported this in the past and won't support it tonight either" and "There are better ways to do speed enforcement and in my view what you could do through environmental design is in my view the appropriate way to do speed enforcement"). Through examining linguistic choices, framing, and ideological underpinnings, the analysis explores how the Mayor constructs resistance to such enforcement and opposition to council's endorsement of ASE, and distracts council discussion away from discussing the AMPS and the motion at hand. The review also situates the Mayor's discourse in contrast to typical pro-enforcement arguments, highlighting the discursive clash between cost-efficiency, deterrence, and notions of public good. The following analysis draws on the tools and perspectives of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), including attention to lexical selection, discursive strategies, implicit assumptions, and socio-political implications. The analysis also reveals insights into the socio-political reasons that the Mayor focused on the ASE system, and not the AMPS motion as is expected, and the subsequent consequences for the council discussion of the AMPS motion. Finally, this analysis summary provides insights into the ideological resistance to ASE across Ontario and attendant populist political responses.

The Segment Under Analysis

The Mayor stated:

"I um haven't supported this in the past won't support it tonight either I think that um the evidence uh and the the practical reality of this is that we will increase our staff complement and not see the corresponding increase in revenue because if these are set up let's say for example on Bennett Boulevard people are going to divert their traffic patterns to Queen Street or to Trunk Road to avoid the automated speed enforcement not realizing the increased revenue but while all the while realizing the increased cost associated with the automated speed enforcement because there's an additional staff member um to be added to the POA division as a result of this there's also um uh you know if we use Pin Street as an example people will avoid that by using Willow or by using Lake um so I think that uh speed enforcement uh using this type of speed enforcement will not generate the revenue that we want to see but will generate all the cost that's associated with it and I think it's a lot of additional cost for not much monetary gain there are better ways to do uh speed enforcement in my view what they did um what what you could do through environmental design is in my view the appropriate way to uh um do speed enforcement it does take longer to implement throughout the community but it gets you better results overall so uh I don't support this."

Discourse Context and Characterisation

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) requires situating a text within its socio-political and institutional context. Here, the Mayor appears to be debating whether to adopt automated speed enforcement systems (during the budget meeting discussion of the AMPS motion). The setting is formal but dialogic, characteristic of council debates, where members of council are expected to justify positions through appeals to evidence, fiscal responsibility, and wider community interest.

Contextualising this conversation around the zero-levy AMPS motion during the December 2024 budget meeting as the means to implement the council-endorsed ASE system, the Mayor's central claim is that ASE is ineffective and wasteful. This is supported through three recurring themes best described as disinformation:

1. **Economic cost versus revenue imbalance:** The first claim by the Mayor, unsupportable, is that the ASE system requires staffing increases without offsetting financial return, in contradiction to the staff report and evidence from other communities.
2. **Avoidance behaviours by drivers:** The second claim by the Mayor is that drivers will circumvent enforced zones, and this may undermine the financial effectiveness. While some drivers may alter their routes, staff report, existing evidence, and experiences among other communities suggest those represent a minor aberration of drivers, refuting the Mayor's unsupported and largely groundless claim. The point is the ASE system intends to create a safer road user environment in the monitored zone, so avoidance by errant drivers would demonstrate success. However, it is highly unlikely that driver avoidance will affect revenue from the ASE system.
3. **Preference for environmental design:** Physical road design improvements long-term are claimed a preferable alternative for speed control. However, without regard to (how the AMPS provides) funding for those design changes or what immediate and intermediate benefits the ASE system delivers in terms of community safety, the Mayor ignores the value of the AMPS by focusing his arguments on the ASE system and not the benefits of the AMPS itself. This in fact undermines his environmental design claim by raising the question of funding, placing it into a long-term endeavour by neglecting a positive revenue stream to hasten those changes. The mention of environmental design in this context seems to be used as a distraction to divert attention from the AMPS motion in front of council, while neglecting short- and medium-term value of the ASE and AMPS to long-term environmental design as well as road user safety.

These themes attempt to frame ASE as an ill-conceived investment rather than a public safety mechanism during a budget meeting motion for the AMPS to implement ASE already endorsed by council. The Mayor's arguments are irrelevant with respect to the selected AMPS option and motion, and invalid and unsupportable with respect to the ASE system, contradicting evidence and experience. As the chair of the meeting, the Mayor should not have permitted, let alone instigated, this course of irrelevant direction of discussion.

Structural Features of the Discourse

Disfluencies and Hesitations

The transcript is filled with hesitations, fillers ("um," "uh"), and repetitions. These features perform two roles: they weaken the performative confidence of the argument, but they also make the discourse

appear more spontaneous and authentic rather than rehearsed. In political speech, such disfluency can strategically humanize the Mayor, but in critical analysis, it signals negotiation of ideas, uncertainty, and a less authoritative stance.

Repetition of Key Lexemes

The repeated use of “cost,” “revenue,” and “enforcement” signals the dominance of an economic rationality. While this approach initially makes sense in terms of the budget meeting, the approach has already been endorsed by council with a projected zero levy impact (as per the motion, the conservative estimates in the staff report, and experiences of other communities). The Mayor framed the issue less around safety or justice, leaning instead on fiscal prudence targeting the ASE system, theory and concept already endorsed by council, not the fiscal prudence of the AMPS. For instance, “not see the corresponding increase in revenue” constructs enforcement as a revenue-generating mechanism, implicitly challenging the pro-safety narrative dominant in ASE advocacy (as noted by other members of council during the discussion). The AMPS motion was for, conservatively, a zero-levy impact, endorsed by council under the ASE. The repetition of these economic lexemes seem to frame his comments as an appropriate budget topic, but are in reality directed at the ASE system and not the AMPS (when framed in context of the AMPS, the Mayor's comments serve to support the AMPS (or alternatively, the POA system), but his statements and vote are against the AMPS, reinforcing this analysis that his comments and intent were that the (AMPS) motion was for the ASE).

Further, as noted in the ideological section below, the use of these lexemes position his comments within a neoliberal, fiscal conservative or austerity framework for the ASE and, in so doing, ignores the valuable role of the AMPS in this very same context. In this manner, his arguments actually contribute to fiscal recklessness through additional taxpayer costs (environmental design, policing, etc), greater road user safety risks and *loss* of revenue for the environmental design that he argues for long-term.

Hypothetical Scenarios

The Mayor relies heavily on hypothetical traffic diversions previously and concurrently refuted by staff and evidence: “if these are set up ... people are going to divert their traffic patterns.” By drawing on examples of local roads (“Bennett Boulevard,” “Queen Street”, “Lake Street, “Willow Avenue”), the Mayor grounds abstract policy debate in concrete geography, making suggestive personal impacts. This serves two purposes: it creates local resonance with citizens familiar with the area; and it anticipates counter-arguments about enforcement coverage. However, as these scenarios are speculative, they introduce uncertainty via disinformation disguised as plausibility for members of council prior to the vote for the AMPS. The (diversion) argument is irrelevant to the AMPS, thus functions to cause confusion and cast doubt among members of council on the forthcoming vote.

Framing of Alternatives

The discourse closes by positioning “environmental design” as superior. The phrase functions as a technical policy alternative, creating contrast between ASE (framed as quick but ineffective) and design measures (framed as slower but “better results overall”). This appeals to long-term, systemic change as a rational stance, but ignores immediate- and short-term safety requirements, and is off-topic from and irrelevant to the AMPS motion at hand. In his comments, the Mayor ignored the motion at hand that was about the zero-levy AMPS—intended to fill the short- to long-term road user safety gap—during a municipal budget meeting. In both cases, these would make an argument in favour of the AMPS. Further, in doing so, his comments completely disregarded the important role of AMPS for funding

longer-term environmental and road design changes. Yet the recorded vote of the Mayor was in opposition to the motion. That can only be explained away if the Mayor's comments were about the ASE, and not the AMPS.

Ideological and Discursive Strategies

Economic Rationalisation

By foregrounding *cost and revenue*, the Mayor sets the criteria for evaluating the ASE system—not the AMPS motion—in purely economic terms. This aligns with neoliberal governance discourses that reduce public policy decisions to questions of fiscal efficiency and austerity. Safety outcomes are backgrounded, treated as secondary or assumed. However, the zero-levy impact AMPS was identified as the best option for the ASE system and had already been endorsed by council specifically to fill that road user safety gap. Accordingly, the economic rationalisation for the ASE system is irrelevant, distracting and serves as disinformation.

Resistance to Technocratic Solutions

Automated enforcement is a technocratic solution—administratively efficient, technology-driven, and ostensibly neutral with the AMPS to serve as a critical backstop for fairness and discretion. In this manner, the AMPS provides the data-informed response that one member of council suggested the ASE did not deliver, and that only the police can deliver. The Mayor conveniently resists the technology-driven/data-informed framing by centring his comments on the ASE system rather than the AMPS motion at hand, instead emphasizing human behavioural adaptability (drivers will divert) and unintended costs (staffing burden). This discourse situates policy in terms of human unpredictability rather than technological neutrality. For a budget meeting around the zero-levy AMPS, his comments serve to distract and divert attention away from the AMPS by use of disinformation that is contrary to staff report and municipal experiences.

Localism

Place names and references generate a sense of local specificity. This grounds the critique as context-sensitive, implying that what may work in abstract policy (ASE) fails at the local municipal level. This only works by ignoring and distracting from the fact that council has already endorsed the ASE. Localism also invokes community knowledge: the Mayor suggests intimate understanding of traffic flows beyond what external policymakers might account for. This is, again, an approach that only works by ignoring the AMPS and its functions.

Alternative Expertise

By invoking “environmental design,” the Mayor positions himself within a discourse of urban planning and sustainable policy. This serves as counter-expertise against technological enforcement. It reclaims the rational high ground by shifting the debate from *short-term revenue* to *long-term results* all while ignoring the short- and medium-term roles of ASE for safety, and by distracting attention from the AMPS motion at hand. This approach can only be accomplished by disregarding the AMPS that provides funding for such practices as proper road design, safe driver normalisation and cultural/driver resistance to speeding.

Comparison with Pro-Enforcement Discourse *for ASE*

To highlight the discursive clash, it is useful to contrast this anti-ASE discourse with arguments typically given in support of automated speed enforcement.

Theme	Anti-Enforcement Mayor Discourse	Pro-Enforcement Discourse
Primary Justification	Revenue may be weaponised as insufficient; costs may outweigh benefits. Fiscal austerity based on unsupportable opinion, disinformation and distraction.	Public safety: reduction in speeding, fewer collisions, saved lives and resources.
Framing of ASE	Inefficient investment, cost-heavy system producing avoidance narrative through a myopic view of behaviour change and driver psychology – supports populist rhetoric.	Neutral, objective, and consistent enforcement tool free from human bias designed for discretion and fairness and safety when coupled with the AMPS or other administrative process.
View of Drivers	Irrational, adaptive actors who will divert around enforcement zones.	Rational, deterred from speeding by enforcement and the social construction of road user safety.
Temporal Horizon	Short-term costs dominate; long-term solution is environmental design.	Short- and medium-term safety benefits compensate for implementation and administrative costs, and provide funding for long-term environmental design.
Evidence Type	Anecdotal, localized hypotheticals (street diversions), opinion, unsubstantiated.	Statistical, empirical (studies showing reduced collisions, violations) and evidence-based.
Ideology	Fiscal conservatism, austerity-driven, skepticism of enforcement technology, neoliberalist, authoritarian, individualism.	Safety- and public health-oriented, support for fiscally efficient use of technology backstopped by fair administrative processes (AMPS), community values, social reciprocity.

This juxtaposition demonstrates not merely opposition at the policy level, but a fundamental discursive conflict by the Mayor through the use of disinformation and distraction by centring comments on the ASE and not the AMPS. Pro-enforcement advocates rely on *safety-first rationality*, supported through statistical evidence, deterrence logic, fair administrative backstop, and appeals to protection of vulnerable road users. By contrast, the Mayor constructs ASE primarily as a fiscal and logistical burden, centralizing cost-accounting logic that conflicts with empirical evidence and staff report, and speculative behavioural avoidance.

Critical Implications

Reframing Enforcement as Revenue Generation

Perhaps the most significant discursive move is the Mayor's rearticulation of ASE as a revenue policy rather than a safety measure. By doing so, the Mayor undermines its moral legitimacy, despite already

having been endorsed by council and generally viewed as a progressive policy (i.e. not a revenue policy). Framing enforcement tools as “cash grabs” is a common anti-enforcement narrative, resonating with public skepticism toward municipal fines, a populist view, and right-wing ideologies (e.g. inequality, individualism, authoritarianism). This reframing redirects community judgment: instead of seeing ASE as a beneficent technology saving lives, it is framed as bureaucratic opportunism draining funds. Or, more accurately, instead of viewing the AMPS as the most fiscally prudent method of implementing ASE under provincial legislation, the reframing under the ASE is viewed as a “cash-grab” that does not deter speeding. The framing, most importantly, distracts attention away from the AMPS motion. In doing so, and as the first comment about the motion, the Mayor established a narrative for council that distracted from the AMPS motion, and was not refocused by the chair (Mayor). Further, this framing directly aggravates and emboldens the populist belief that laws don't apply to “me”, contributing to the causes of speeding and the inevitable effects – avoidable injuries and deaths.

Denial of Safety Efficacy

By emphasizing only speculative and unsupportable costs and driver avoidance, the Mayor leaves safety outcomes unaddressed. Silence here is discursively significant: it erases from debate the central rationale for ASE. This opens space to cast doubt and create confusion among members of council and the public. Such strategic silences permit fiscal prudence to dominate. In CDA, what is *not said* is as revealing as what is articulated. And what is not said is almost anything about safety in his comments. Also not said are all the benefits of the AMPS (by centring comments on the ASE), such as funding to support environmental design from the AMPS, and diversion from community safety zones as a safety success in itself for the ASE. What is also not said are questions around the logic of the diversion argument: such as “Why a speed enforcement technology would cause diversion as a behaviour change, but not slowing as a behaviour change?” or equally, “Where will the revenue for those environmental changes come from if not the AMPS?” This latter would have critiqued the logic of taxpayer costs the Mayor centred his entire argument upon. By raising hypothetical and unsupportable questions about, and casting doubt onto, the ASE in this context, the Mayor's comments silence all the benefits of the AMPS, leaving free-rein for the disinformation and distraction to ground the council discussion and create an emotional and defensive response from other members of council in support of the AMPS motion by redirecting their comments to the ASE system.

Strategic Use of Alternatives

Reference to “environmental design” permits the Mayor to distance himself from accusations of being “soft on safety” only by neglecting the AMPS motion and the fact that ASE system is designed for short- to medium-term enforcement while providing—through the AMPS—crucial revenue for that very environmental redesign. Discursively, this is a tactical maneuver: opposing ASE does not equate to opposing safety itself, but rather signals commitment to a different method. However, by emphasizing the long-term implementation timeline, the Mayor tacitly accepts short- and medium-term risks in exchange for future systemic improvement—an ideological trade-off often rejected by pro-enforcement advocates—and thereby undermines his own argument for the ASE supported by AMPS for that short- to medium-term enforcement for reducing those risks in exchange for future systemic improvement through the revenue generation of the AMPS. It also permits the Mayor to argue in favour of taxpayer costs against the ASE, while in effect raising taxpayer costs for – and opposition to – that environmental design as a secondary opportunity to appeal to populist rhetoric and further delay or avoid taking action for road user safety. Again, as previously noted above, the Mayor is undermining his own argument against the AMPS yet voted against the motion. This can only be done by centring

his comments on the ASE and disregarding and diverting the council conversation away from the AMPS motion.

Power, Policy, and Public Reception

Discourse analysis must consider how such arguments interact with systems of power. Policymakers invoking fiscal responsibility often speak to both taxpayers and political peers. This discourse appeals particularly to fiscal conservatives, business interests, and those skeptical of government overreach. Meanwhile, pro-enforcement discourses resonate with health advocates, traffic safety organizations, and communities directly affected by road collisions.

The clash is not merely about evidence but about values: cost efficiency versus safety, short-term versus long-term, technocracy versus local knowledge. These competing value systems demonstrate how policy debates extend beyond facts into domains of ideology.

Concealed within the Mayors comments are deep polarising debates that centre around power asymmetries and policy choices, most evident when “what is not said” surfaces, allowing the Mayor to make his arguments without critique or challenge during the discussion, thereby advancing populism alongside disinformation. One can only speculate at the reasons for doing so.

Importantly, none of these are trade-offs: they are covered under the ASE system supported by the AMPS, which torpedoed the Mayor's entire argument and raises fundamental questions around why he was creating a false narrative through disinformation and distraction by not focusing his comments on the AMPS motion at hand.

Conclusion

The analysed discourse constructs opposition to automated speed enforcement through a rhetorical framework centered on disinformation, including fiscal inefficiency and localized diversion scenarios, complemented with the promotion of infrastructural alternatives. It silences considerations of safety efficacy, reframes ASE as primarily a revenue tool, distracts attention away from the AMPS motion and the immediate benefits of the ASE system and AMPS purpose, and positions environmental design as the rational long-term solution only by ignoring short- and medium-term solutions that the ASE system through the AMPS could deliver.

The key fact is that this analysis illustrates that the Mayor's comments were substantially about the ASE and not the AMPS motion in front of council. As the chair, that should never have happened.

In contrast, pro-enforcement discourse typically foregrounds safety, empirical data, and technological neutrality. The discursive clash exposes fundamentally different evaluative lenses: one guided by fiscal conservatism and skepticism of bureaucracy ultimately undermining municipal authority while normalising speeding, appealing to populist views and opening the door to authoritarianism; the other guided by public health, social responsibility, community wellbeing, rationality, facts, science, evidence and reason, fairness and justice, and deterrence logic.

A critical discourse analysis shows that debates around policies like ASE are not adjudicated purely on evidence but through competing discursive constructions that reflect deeper ideological divides. Recognizing these discursive dynamics can clarify why such issues persistently split public opinion and create polarisation, and why stakeholders often talk past one another rather than engaging within a shared evaluative framework. Refocusing the conversation and his comments on the AMPS would have avoided all those problems.