This page was exported from - The Auroran
Export date: Fri Mar 29 7:20:37 2024 / +0000 GMT

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Our shared heritage

By Chris Ballard, MPP
Newmarket-Aurora

Just before Christmas we saw a flurry of announcements from the Minister of Transportation ? many of them affecting us in Aurora and Newmarket.

It has been fun over the holidays to reflect just how far transit has come in our community and how the service has improved over the time since I grew up in King City. I am proud that much of that improvement has been as a result of promises I made to you in 2014. We are getting ever closer to two-way, all day train service that will help enhance our local economy, get more of us out of our cars and off the roads into public transit. Most importantly though, is that the maturing of transit is what is needed for our community.

It used to be that our GO service was comprised of buses up and down Yonge Street ending at the Davis Drive and Yonge corners. CN owned the train tracks and could not allocate time for commuter service. Over the years bus service has evolved and train service has grown. Last month's announcement included an adjustment to bus services that better match increased daily and weekend trains.

What is driving this change and what more is there to look forward to? Growth is the driving force. Aurora has surpassed 56,000 and Newmarket is over 86,000. Without developing alternative transportation opportunities even local commuting would be unmanageable, not to mention moving people south, north, east and west of here.

Central York Region has always been a focus for employers, retail and services. We have been a chosen location for those who work in Toronto but didn't wish or could not afford to live there. Increasingly, residents of this area are stretching out to pursue employment and education. How do we continue to accommodate the desire to live in these vibrant communities?

The most significant commitment is to build the double train tracks that are needed to increase GO service. CN has experienced shifts in the need to move cargo which has freed up track time. However, to fully allow for the frequency and reliability of service that is the key to building ridership, doubletracks had to be built. The progress made on that double tracking is clear to anyone who has had the opportunity to travel the line.

A new station is being built at Highway 404 and Bloomington Road to the Stouffville train line and give local travellersonthe Barrie train line other options. Another new station is planned for Mulock Road which will take pressure off both the Aurora and Newmarket stations in parking and managing the increased number of travellers. Yet another station is planned on the south-west corner of Bloomington Road and Bathurst

What is to come? The increase in train service will challenge local car travel. In recognition of that, plans are being developed to mitigate, when possible, those challenges. The agency responsible for planning the changes, Metrolinx, has hosted one open house locally to begin dialogue on what the community would like to see. Aurora residents have always been concerned about the historic roots of our train station and the area around it and many came out to that open house. I will be holding a community meeting later this month to hear your thoughts.

I am very excited about the increased number of trains ? especially those moving north from Toronto ? because I believe it will bring tourists to our area to experience the phenomenal trails through Shepherd's Bush to the Arboretum and the Oak Ridges Moraine, our farmers' market, retail and cultural offerings. I share the concern that the rail service will impede pedestrian off-road traffic and feel we must plan for new construction that will reflect the heritage we have worked so hard to preserve.

Metrolinx is looking for volunteers to join the community advisory committee that will help guide decisions. If you are interested in joining that committee please email me at CBallard.MPP.co@liberal.ola.org or call my office at 905-750-0019.

Changes are coming to the Ontario Municipal Board. Reform of the OMB has long been an issue locally. I was happy to see the introduction of new legislation to create the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal to replace the OMB. The tribunal will give greater weight to the decisions of local communities and will make planning appeals more accessible through the Local Planning Appeal Support Centre. This will be a new agency providing free information and support for the public.

These are important developments and they build on promises I made to you in 2014. Please come to my New Year's levee at Ray Twinney Community Centre on January 28 from 2 to 4 p.m. for free skating and refreshments. Come share the afternoon with friends and family and let's discuss these issues.

Our shared heritage?

Writing about GO Trains made me reflect on the importance of the railroad to Aurora. The first train rolled into Aurora, then called Machell's Corners, on May 16, 1853. It was a two hour trip to Toronto and the fare was $1. The arrival of rail gave Aurora a certain status, and it wasn't long before major industry followed. Underhill and Sisman Shoe Manufacturer had its own siding and there were warehouses, grain dealers, livestock agents, fuel merchants and two hotels.We do need to get local residents to and from work in Toronto, but I also believe improved GO Train service will bring benefits to the riding, as Toronto businesses look north to expand.

I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my office (905-750-0019) visit my website (www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca) or send me an email (cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org). I look forward to hearing from you.