

POLITICS AS USUAL: Hold the salt!

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

We have had a relatively mild winter. Yes, some folks complain about winter regardless of whether it has been a 'real' Canadian winter or not. But, for those who are objective about these kinds of things, and accept that we do live in Canada, there's no denying that we have had an easy time of it this year.

Few days of biting cold, and even fewer episodes of snow?last week's large dumping notwithstanding.

Which brings me to this week's rant: salt use at the GO Station.

There has been little or no snow or ice, so, for the love of Hades, why is the platform literally coated in salt? Why the obsessive need to carpet every square inch of concrete in thick crystals?

I understand there are significant liability concerns, but how many people do you think are going to sue GO Transit that would warrant the excessive application of salt so as to avoid even the smallest potential for ice formation?

When I exited the GO Train at York on Tuesday morning, I was shocked at the state of the platform and walkway. I am not exaggerating when I tell you that there was a layer of salt at least two inches thick carpeting the ground.

It was ridiculous, excessive, and totally unnecessary.

What is the end game here? Remove every speck of ice? Great, but it shouldn't also have the effect of corroding every concrete surface it touches. There's a reason why they have to keep resurfacing the platforms and walkways ? because they damage them every winter with their maintenance processes.

Judicious use of salt is effective and necessary. Injudicious use is destructive and unnecessary ? with environmental impacts as well as structural impacts to buildings and walkways.

As this is a government-run service, I checked to see what their policy is on snow maintenance. I found this lovely document titled, ? GO in the Snow ? your Guide to Winter on Go Transit?. It is a simplistic, glossy, fluffy thing but a few points stuck out.

?Salt helps reduce ice build-up, but it can also cause problems with GO equipment, such as salt collecting in the doorways, causing them to stick.?

No mention of the environmental impacts, just damage to their train doors. To address this terrible problem of sticking doors, they've installed snow melting systems as well as using de-icer instead of salt at ?many? stations.

I guess the Aurora GO didn't get that memo.

Public transit is repeatedly positioned as the most sustainable means of moving people around the region. It is the environmentally friendly way to go, and that is true. Getting folks out of their cars and into a train to commute is the most sensible mode of transportation, economically and environmentally.

But that environmental halo is a wee bit off kilter, in my opinion, by the choices Metrolinx makes in regards to winter maintenance. The winter is almost over, do some analysis now about the use of salt on Metrolinx property.

It shouldn't take too much effort to realize that they've been applying far too much of it, then make a plan to fix it. Use it where's it's needed, and only use as much as is absolutely necessary.

Voila! Problem solved.

Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is ? after all ? Our Town.