

Aurora moves to put a damper on train whistles

By Brock Weir

As the province moves towards ramping up GO Train service to Aurora, Aurora is taking preliminary action to make sure they're not ramping up the volume as well.

Council unanimously voted to begin working with Transport Canada on decreasing the sound of whistles as they chug through Aurora. Following last week's vote, municipal staff are tasked with drafting a report on the process put in place by Transport Canada to implement whistle cessation, as well as a budget on how to make it a reality.

Transport Canada outlines an eight step process on how to make it happen. The first is a formal request, followed by a consultation with the railway company ? in this case Metrolinx ? and notifying the public.

Then comes the tricky part with assessing whether or not each at grade crossing meets safety requirements of whistle cessation, negotiations if a municipality like Aurora and Metrolinx disagree about meeting the requirements, making changes to the crossings to meet those requirements, formalizing municipal direction and then monitoring the results.

The potential whistle cessation was brought forward through a notice of motion from Mayor Geoff Dawe. In his notice, he cites the upcoming implementation of Regional Express Rail (RER) on making this a good opportunity to move forward. Expansion plans, he noted, will result in all-day 15 minute service to Aurora, which, in turn, will result in increased noise.

?With the advent of the Regional Express Rail (RER), the increased train volume, with some upcoming changes from Transport Canada with respect to VIA Rail and transport crossings, safety standards being upgraded, I thought it would be an appropriate time for staff to at least start the investigation again as to what may or may not be in the art of the possible in terms of looking at whistling cessation,? said Mayor Dawe. ?They are looking at the whole issue of grade crossing versus grade separated crossings, and how to look at safety standards. Are they current? Are they well-maintained? Are they up to date for current traffic conditions??

While Council approved going forward with the report, Councillor Paul Pirri questioned the Town-wide impact of something that would ?only really benefit a small group of residents.?

?I am still not sold it is needed,? he said. ?I would be happy to consider it. If we were going to put a special levy on the table to pay for these changes, depending on what the price comes in, but at this point in time I won't be in favour of this.?

Although there is no financial implication in drafting a report at this moment, Councillors asked that examples of similar projects from other communities be included in any future report. Markham, for instance, has gone down this route, said Ilmar Simanovskis, Aurora's Director of Infrastructure, and there are some points to be raised.

?There have been some changes and opportunities for improving the process and we definitely want to leverage any experiences other municipalities have experienced,? said Mr. Simanovskis.