

BROCK'S BANTER: Just out of reach

By Brock Weir

This past Sunday was just like any other day to cap the weekend. There was a bit of time to play catch-up on a few work-related matters, a couple of things to do around the house, and a couple of errands to run. This time, however, there was a slight time crunch as I raced to get everything done by the mid-afternoon to get catch the GO Train down to the city for a friend's birthday party. With an early alarm, I set to work and completed just about everything I needed to do in record time and, most importantly, just enough time to catch the GO Train in a fifteen minute window.

Upon arrival, however, this window narrowed considerably as things rapidly went sideways.

First, neither of the on-platform ticket machines would read my Debit or Visa cards and then, when I lined up inside the station for a ticket, the woman in front of me thought it would be a wonderful idea, with just two minutes before departure to pay for her connecting ticket to Hamilton with a Ziploc full of nickels and dimes which the clerk, of course, had to spend considerable time counting.

Ticket in hand after the indoor machines took a liking to my plastic, it was time to settle in for a 50 minute uneventful train ride. For the most part, it lived up to dull, boring expectations as we pulled into Toronto. As Union Station came into view, I began to look forward to the next step in the journey and began to pack up my book and unpack my scarf and gloves.

Then?.nothing.

Partway into Union Station, the train simply stopped.

?We're waiting for a signal,? said the friendly voice on the loudspeaker.

10 minutes later, one assumed that signal still hadn't come and the winter gear was back in the bag and the book in hand.

The voice then came back?this time with a slight edge.

Mechanical failure, a fault literally 90 metres from the train platform.

As the wait hit the 20 minute mark, people began to chatter. It was ridiculous, they agreed, that GO Transit couldn't send a signal to the station telling them to hold trains as the rest of us made the quick walk to the platform along the track but that was, of course, too complicated a procedure.

By the 45 minute mark, we were told the next step would be for another train to back up and hook itself onto our train to drag us the rest of the way (I assumed this is what one would call a ?tug train,? actually a ?rescue train) and, after a further 15 minutes, CRASH!

The rescue train made its arrival known as it thudded right into the vehicle and jostling the rest of us in the process and we slogged slowly the rest of the way into the platform.

Big deal, you might think. Commuters go through this all the time. And, you know what? You're right, but as I sat on the train watching the comings and goings of train travellers going about their business just a few metres away, I began to think about things that are just out of reach.

You might know the end goal, the end destination, and the means to actually get to that point, but there is something holding you back. In my particular case, it was the mechanical failure so tantalizingly close to the platform, but there are, quite simply too many instances that can be cited.

Take, for example, the perennial goal of what is usually called ?downtown revitalization? in Aurora.

We all know what it is, and I am sure the majority of people in this Town agree with the goal. After all, a thriving business and cultural community, no matter where it is in Aurora, benefits us all.

We have seen it born to fruition in so many communities in Ontario, hitting particularly close to home in Newmarket with their wildly successful revitalization process.

Newmarket has carved out a niche and identity for its downtown core. They have active members of their community working together, and independently and, in some cases, with a degree of autonomy to get the job done, and they are much the better for it.

Restaurants are thriving, shops seem to be doing very well, offering products and services that could never be described as run-of-the mill, and services are increasingly finding that Downtown Newmarket is a great place to reach their target markets.

Meanwhile, in Aurora, the Downtown Revitalization Train keeps getting stuck as it attempts to chug out of the station.

As soon as it moves forward a few meters, it comes to a dead halt when the conductor of this particular train decides he needs to re-check the tickets of everyone who has already been checked and re-checked. A few more metres away from the platform, the train comes to a halt again, this time as one of the business class passengers, those with sway over the whole process, go to the head of the

train with a new idea for a more efficient route.

Chug. Chug. Screech.

Too many efficient routes have been suggested. It is time to grind to a halt and study them for a cohesive trip.

That done; chug, chug.

One of these exalted passengers is concerned the train is moving too fast and pulls the emergency brake to speak to the conductor and check the passenger tickets once again to make sure there aren't any stragglers.

Then it is back to checking the maps, streamlining the trip, and consolidating the milk run into one smooth ride.

We're stuck and Aurora is still waiting for the rescue train.

The Cultural Precinct Plan might be a step in the right direction, but it is only the first stop.

Last week, Council members spent a lengthy debate discussing whether or not a motion from Councillor Abel to bring together all the different plans for the Downtown Core into one streamlined plan was redundant or not considering all the other balls in the air.

Was his suggestion redundant? Sure, but so have so many other steps in this long, arduous process. What's one more? Bringing everything together into a cohesive plan might be something to grease the wheels ? and the track ? to get us out of railway purgatory.

It might not, but every little bit helps.

Meanwhile, as these plans coagulate into whatever the next iteration might be, it might be wise to consider whether 'Downtown Revitalization' is as Mayor Dawe suggests of the term 'Cultural Precinct' something of a misnomer.

As we have been sitting on this train, our downtown destination has, despite the Town's best efforts, shifted to Bayview Avenue. If one starts with a brand, identity, and identified gaps to fill in the Yonge and Wellington corridors, maybe this will become a much smoother ride.