

## GO Train expansion could lead to another look at whistle cessation

A final decision on whether Metrolinx will forge ahead with a vehicular underpass at the GO Station on Wellington Street East to allow for all-day two-way train service from Barrie to Toronto is expected this fall ? but the continued work to expand train service could lead to proactive action from Council.

This month, as Council returns from its summer recess, lawmakers could once again explore the possibility of implementing a whistle cessation program for incoming and outgoing trains.

A motion to task municipal staff to report back on the processes needed to put just such a program in place at all level train crossings in Town has been brought forward by Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese.

Previous attempts to put a whistle cessation program in place have been voted down by Council citing liability concerns should anyone be hurt due to the lack of a whistle or a horn, but Metrolinx's plans to increase the number of daily train trips exponentially could be a game-changer.

Earlier reports on the matter should be reviewed by Council to see if there are any ?new policies and procedures? regarding safety from upper levels of government, says Councillor Weese.

?I don't expect that there's much significant change in terms of those protocols, but what has changed significantly is Metrolinx' intent on moving from seven or eight trains a day to almost 70 when you consider they are going to have this increased traffic both north and south on 15-minute intervals,? says the Councillor. ?They have found this stimulates train use, which is a good thing, but the difference is for 2,000 people who are in Ward 1, and again in Ward 2 and beyond, who live a couple of metres from the train tracks. This means that the horns are going to be interrupting their lives by a factor of 10 or more while the problem that we had before was significant enough for people to consider it.

?The circumstances now of having two tracks and increased traffic means there is going to be an even greater impact on residents and I think it's time to revisit it.?

When he was campaigning in Ward 1 in the last municipal election, Councillor Weese said the issue of train whistles was one he heard frequently at the door. Residents said these whistles were ?impactful on their lives and were concerned when the increased number of trains being proposed was going to be increased by a factor of 10.?

In his motion, the Councillor says there are an estimated 2,500 homes and residents living within 200 metres of the train corridor and the expansion plan will ?exacerbate the disruption to residents' quality of life.?

?Other municipalities affected adversely by train whistles/horns have included requisite safety measures at level crossings in their municipalities to ensure the safety of their residents,? he said in his motion. ?Aurora Town Council may pass bylaws to implement train whistle/horn cessation once safety standards have been implemented at each level crossing.?

As Markham has implemented a cessation program with all the previously cited safety and liability issues, he'd like to know if they can do it why Aurora can't.

If Metrolinx decides to proceed with the Wellington Street East underpass, a move which has proved divisive since it was first proposed as part and parcel of the train service expansion, it would remove one level crossing requiring whistles and horns from the equation. But, notes Councillor Weese, that would not change the situation at remaining level crossings at Engelhard Drive, Centre Street, and St. John's Sideroad.

?Whenever there is a level crossing, they are going to have to have train whistles unless we put a bylaw in place that says the level

crossing is safe, we can manage it safely and we accept the liability of any negligence on behalf of the Town," he says. "For instance, if the gate doesn't come down, that's our responsibility. That's where the hitch was, I understand, previously with the Town with seven or eight trains a day, did not want to take the liability of an accident coming back to the Town. It could be devastating and I understand that. When you have such an increase in impact, I think it is important for quality of life for our community that we at least investigate it and come back to it again, and identify whether it is the right thing to do or not.

"[The Barrie train corridor] bifurcates our Town in half, east to west, for vehicular traffic, for active transportation cycling, and pedestrian. It's a big impact in our community and we have to give it the attention it deserves. We value Metrolinx and we value the opportunity for the train and bus and public transportation, and it will come at a cost, but what we need to do is make sure that we're not standing in the way of good public transportation. We also have to be careful about how it's implemented in the community, so the day-to-day activity of people is not impacted negatively.

"If Centre Street and Englehard are going to be improved with safety, gating and all the rest of it ? that comes at an expense that has to go through our Town. If that is going to be a couple of budget cycles, I want to make sure we're getting those capital costs in place in 2025 and 2026 in anticipation of this so it doesn't come up as a large crunch. We also don't know what kind of circumstances and traffic we're going to have to deal with regarding Centre Street and that is part of the next phase for Metrolinx ? to provide a traffic analysis of how traffic can be diverted in the best way to show the least impact and that traffic plan that they're going to come forward with also has to be approved by the Town."

**By Brock Weir**