

Review of whistle cessation policies gets initial Council support

A review of policies related to a train whistle cessation program in Aurora has received tentative support from Council.

Sitting at the Committee level last week, Council voted in favour of a motion from Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese that will, if ratified at this month's Council meeting on September 24, see staff report back on "the processes needed to create a bylaw that will result in the cessation of train whistles/horns at all level crossings in Aurora."

As The Auroran reported at the start of the month, the impending increase in GO Train service along the Barrie Line, which will see all-day two-way train service to and from Aurora, spurred Councillor Weese to bring this matter forward.

He told his Council colleagues that this is "about staff revisiting the work that has been previously done" to have a "fulsome discussion" through the lens of safety.

"I have spoken to staff about changes to the process and there are some processes that may have changed with respect to Transport Canada and the safety of the level crossings, and there are about 2,500 units I estimate that are within 400 metres of the train tracks that go all the way from the south end to the north end of the Town," said Councillor Weese.

"The hope with this motion is that we are going to update the information that Council needs to make an informed decision about the train horns and do it in anticipation of the double track construction and the increased traffic along the trains. It's really about staff revisiting the work that has been previously done, asking for the report to come back so that we can have a fulsome discussion about the future of the train, and I also think it's important for us to do this work now because I believe there [are] going to be some decisions being made very soon so that within a couple of years the project may be finished, if you can believe what the Metrolinx people say about finishing their work."

Supporting the motion was Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner who said much of the work has already been done in previous Councils. She thanked Councillor Weese for not letting the issue "fall through the cracks."

"From my estimation, it means that every seven-and-a-half minutes a train will be passing an intersection," she said. "It's going to be unbearable for the people who live close to the railway tracks and for those who say they shouldn't have bought a place there, I mean, who had any idea that we were going to have this kind of train traffic?"

Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson was also in favour of bringing a report back, requesting that the resulting report will address safety issues, including statistics from other municipalities that have gone down a similar cessation route.

"It's always come down to questions about quality of life versus liability, versus safety," said Councillor Thompson, referencing past attempts to get a cessation program in place. "I think those components should be within that report so that Council makes a well-informed decision on what they feel is the best way forward. I know a lot of the work has probably already been done when it comes to liability because it has been in previous reports, so it shouldn't be too onerous a task to [include that] but I would also like to make mention when I looked at reports from other municipalities like Halton Hills and Innisfil, they have made references to studies in the past where there is a whistle ban or whistle cessation and that based on the studies there's a significantly higher rate of accidents.

"I would ask staff to look into the data and perhaps even the Mayor with the Region to see if there are any statistics, any data that shows is there any validity in these claims from these other reports that there is a higher rate of accidents at these crossings that have whistle cessation. I think that's an important factor for all of us to give consideration when we give a final decision."

By Brock Weir