

401 crash raises concerns about flow of information

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A police debriefing meeting about the deadly multi-vehicle crash on Highway 401 between Grafton and Cobourg on February 1, 2007, failed to take into account two important municipal concerns, say the heads of Cobourg and Alnwick-Haldimand Township.

There was no mention of rerouting Highway 401 traffic from county roads onto more northerly routes like County Road 7 and County Road 35/115, nor about reconstructing the dangerous "s" turns between the two municipalities during the expansion of the highway to six lanes, Cobourg Mayor Peter Delanty complained during a county council meeting last week.

"Those two items were omitted from the report," he said.

The exiting detour routes along County Road 2 and Dale Road were originally established without consultation with the municipalities, they were just imposed, he said, asking Northumberland County to become involved in ensuring this information is put to the transportation ministry.

"And (find out) what is the action plan," Alnwick-Haldimand Mayor Bill Finley urged council.

If you are going to send the transportation ministry information, also request a follow-up meeting with stakeholders to determine what progress is being made toward improvements in such tragedies, he suggested.

On March 7 the OPP held a debriefing about the horrific accident which, according to a report penned by the county's Ken Stubbings, killed two people, injured 11, spilled 57,000 litres of gasoline and involved 32 vehicles (not all damaged).

The OPP suggested a public information officer could better provide accurate information about this kind of tragedy. They found signage and security were lacking. Some tow trucks were engaged in "extra billing" in the circumstances. The OPP didn't notify the railways that detoured vehicles were crossing their railway lines and that the MTO needs to review the detour routes. Just as local municipalities suggested alternatives along 115 and 7, the OPP reinforced the need.

(In the Cobourg area there were long lines of backed-up vehicles, including over the railway tracks on Brook Road and hemming in the fire department along Elgin Street.)

The fire departments found there was poor communication due to a radio "dead zone" and as a result local channel use was congested and the county is asking for more Industry Canada channels to remedy this.

The MTO is currently "conducting a review of the 401 (accident) history with focus on the Northumberland area," Mr. Stubbings's report states.

"Northumberland area of 401 is the worst stretch of 401 with the curves, terrain and lake effects (caused by) the weather."



A multi-vehicle crash on Highway 401 February 1 claimed the lives of two people.

FILE PHOTO