

Safety at stake, says brakeman

Acton man fights to keep cabooses

Herald Staff
"Safety is a caboose," according to Acton's Jim Lepki of Grenore Street. He's a brakeman with Canadian National Railways who is lobbying municipalities within the jurisdiction of his union.

The 31-year-old represents the United Transport Union Local 1130 for health and safety matters. He's put together a booklet of letters and supporting material for town councils and the media searching for support of his union's fight to oppose cabooseless trains.

Initiated by CN, the railways have applied to the Board of Transport for permission to do away with the cabooses. They feel a hot box detector that scans for problems with air brake pressure, can replace the two men who usually man the caboose and make visual inspections.

The railways won't be laying off the staff who man the caboose.

They'll just be moved up to the second engine at the front of the train. The union's problem is over the safety factor. Mr. Lepki says between 60-70 per cent of freight trains carry some sort of dangerous commodity. In the past five years in order to save costs the railways have on average doubled the length of trains. Instead of having two trains, the railroads have just added more engines to pull more cars. The average length of a freight train is 6,800 feet, he said, and can contain as many as 160 cars.

Taking away the caboose would add to the danger of trains and could help to cause another Mississauga train disaster, he says. Visual track inspections are important and he cites the example of the Amtrak washout where a train was derailed.

At CN, the assistant manager of public affairs, Jim Stratton, says the proposal to do away with cabooses has

been going on for about a year.

"We're withholding any comment until the Board of Transport makes its decision," he said. He did, however, say that cabooseless trains are in operation in some parts of the United States and Europe.

Mr. Lepki says that in Europe the trains are very small in comparison to in Canada. Some states in the U.S. won't allow cabooseless trains to cross their boundaries, he says.

Letters of protest have been sent to the Ministry of Transport and the Canadian Transport Commission. Public hearings will be held in a number of communities probably within the coming months.

The town of Halton Hills was given a copy of Mr. Lepki's booklet about cabooseless trains and have asked for their support. The United Transport Union will make a presentation to town council Sept. 24.



Jim Lepki is a member of the United Transport Union who will be making a presentation to town council Sept. 24 in hope of receiving their support against doing away with the caboose. Here he is shown on the back of a caboose on one of his runs from Toronto to Parry Sound. (Photo submitted)

Michel Serre

Meet the principal

By ROBIN BAKEWELL
Herald Staff
Having had parents who were both teachers must have had some effect on Michel Serre who is principal at Ecole Saere-Coeur, Separate School.



MICHEL SERRE

Mr. Serre's mother taught him in Grades 1 and 2 while he was a pupil in Sturgeon Falls. "She had me all day and all night," Mr. Serre said.

At the age of 19, Mr. Serre decided on a career in education and he entered the faculty of education at Laurentian University. After attending teacher's college in Sudbury he began teaching Grades 5 through 8 in Kirkland Lake.

On his decision to enter the teaching field Mr. Serre said, "I have no regrets at all".

A five year involvement with Ecole St. Philippe in Burlington, where he taught Grade 7 and acted as principal, and a two year vice-principalship at St. Marie in Oakville, which he opened, brought him to Ecole Saere-Coeur where he is now in his fifth year as principal.

Having been taught in French during his grade school education, Mr. Serre said he had the surprise of his life upon entering a bilingual high school in Sturgeon Falls and having to take

same library, gymnasium and schoolyard. "I think it's a very positive experience with Holy Cross. I think the students are learning what Canada is all about with two official languages, living and cooperating together," he said.

Mr. Serre would like to become a superintendent for either the school board or the Ministry of Education. He has received his supervisory officer certificate from the Ministry of Education after a continuous process of self study and a year's intensive study.

Mr. Serre and his wife Claire, whom he met while they were both teaching at the same school in Kirkland Lake, have two boys, Eric, 3, and Luc, 1.

His hobbies include golf and flying in which he has logged 250 flying hours.

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What's in a caboose? Aggregate wording worrisome

By ANI PEDEBIAN
Herald Staff

With 30,000 acres of aggregate lands in Halton Hills, town councillors don't want to lose their control over how the natural resource is developed.

Monday night, the town reviewed comments it is forwarding this month to the Provincial Secretary for Resources Development. The comments are based on recommendations made July 31 by the Provincial Secretary regarding the policies and implementation of the Niagara Escarpment Plan.

The town wants a section of the plan which states "implementing bodies 'must comply' with the province's Mineral Aggregate Resources Policy" to be changed to "shall have regard".

Another section on permitted uses, the town would like to see changed from "the following uses are permitted" to "the following uses may be permitted".

Town planner Jan Keith said he was worried by the wording in the policy and urged councillors to adopt the changes.

He said he was concerned that if "must comply" is approved, the province will be able to put whatever policy in place on aggregates without the town's approval.

"We think they're trying to step around the planning act itself, which worries us," Mr. Keith said.

As things stand now, roughly one-third of Halton Hills is under the control of the Niagara Escarpment Commission.

Coun. Mike Armstrong suggested development control remain with the Commission until the

town's zoning bylaw is ready to accept that control.

What's in a caboose? Since trains were built there have been cabooses, and Jim Lepki feels their usefulness isn't yet over. But the railways want to eliminate the caboose because of the cost, he says. The result is delays, and a reduction in productivity, the railways say. Costs include making sure the caboose is sanitary and that equipment is properly maintained. In a caboose there is a small stove area and two desks, along with washroom facilities and a first aid kit. Usually there are two brakemen on a freight train. One is in the caboose and the other is with the engineer, Mr. Lepki says. The conductor, who is responsible for the whole train, sits back in the caboose. A brakeman in the caboose watches the air pressure indicator and tells the engineer if the level is correct. He also helps in organizing the order of the cars so that dangerous chemicals are placed in strategic positions on the train. In the case of a derailment, the tail end crew in the caboose has a list of where the dangerous chemicals are on the train for firefighters. He can also warn residents to move away if an explosion is imminent. In the caboose a brakeman can check for broken wheels, sticking brakes and wheel bearings that can catch on fire. Also at the rear of the train he can inspect the track and 'feel' for washouts. If a train has to stop for an emergency and if a crossing is blocked, a brakeman on a cabooseless train might spend a long time walking back to the end of the train, Mr. Lepki says.

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