

Is Georgetown finally ready for a bus system?

By David Churchill

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Six years ago Mayor Bonnette said he didn't see a bus system on the horizon for Georgetown.

There won't be any public transit coming to Halton Hills soon, Bonnette told this newspaper in 2010.

But things change. Georgetown is growing and the pace of that growth is about to quicken. So this week Mayor Bonnette and council will consider taking the first, small steps towards creating a Halton Hills transit system.

No promises on what's coming if anything but Town councillors will consider spending \$300,000 over the next year to study the feasibility of a transit system. Halton Hills is the only one of four Halton municipalities without a bus system.

The proposal, which will be debated at budget meetings starting this week, calls for the town to hire a consultant to develop a strategy for the provision of transit service.

But councillors are fully aware the lack of public transportation is not currently a huge concern. That was made loud and clear last year when only 35 per cent of Halton Hills residents said they were in favour of the town funding a transit system. That means almost two-thirds of us would be happier if the money was spent elsewhere. The condition of the town's roads and traffic congestion were considered more of a priority when people were questioned as part of the 2015 Citizen Satisfaction Survey.

That opinion is in contrast to a report prepared for council last year in which a number of businesses and community service organizations said that lack of transit was a barrier to business. Social services agencies said lack of transit made it harder for clients to get to necessary appointments.

It's interesting to note that while the ma-

majority of car traffic from Halton Hills heads to Toronto, Mississauga and Brampton, those answering the transit service survey were looking for transportation within Halton. Access from Acton to Georgetown and Georgetown to Milton were listed among the needed transit routes.

So the battle lines are drawn. Those of us with cars and out-of-town jobs want our tax dollars spent on better roads and less traffic congestion. Those of us without cars need transit. It won't be an easy call for the mayor and councillors.

But there's no rush. Nothing is coming soon. If council agrees to go ahead with the transit study, it will still be years before any decision is made and big dollars may be spent.

Make no mistake, it's a big investment. Milton transit figures show that town's investment per person will be about \$32 in 2016. That's more than \$120 for a family of four. Some who think a bus system is a great idea might not think it's so great when faced with the reality of their property tax bill.

For Halton Hills councillors, the plan is to have the necessary facts on hand as the town continues to grow. About 20,000 more people are expected to call Georgetown South home beginning in 2021.

But even if buses are still years away, having a plan in place now is better than not being ready if and when councillors decide somewhere down the road they are prepared to make that kind of financial commitment.

David Churchill is a longtime journalist who writes about family, life in Georgetown and a love of travel. Follow him on Twitter @ChurchillDJ

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