

EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

Ease 401 pressures

Sometimes it takes a little longer for information to filter through to bureaucracies, but federal Transport Minister David Collenette acknowledged recently that there are too many trucks on Highway 401. Easing the pressure on the road should be a national priority, he declared.

Anyone in this area who didn't know the former and agree with the latter statement, would obviously be out of touch with reality. It is rapidly becoming a reality on Regional Road 125 (formerly Hwy 25), too, as more trucks thunder through Acton to access Hwy 401.

Mr. Collenette said Ontario's plans to build more roads to ease the congestion – and wants Ottawa's help to do it – are not going to help the problems. More roads only fill up over time, sort of like the Field of Dreams: "build it, they will come."

The transport minister says it would be better to put federal money into public transit, but is not going to ease the pressure created by the flow of goods carried in trucks from Windsor and Niagara to Montreal and vice versa. Free trade and federal policies related to it has resulted in increased truck traffic.

As this corner has been saying since they closed the rail facilities here, we're not making good use of railways to transport commercial goods. An average freight train, for instance, can take 275 big trucks off the roads. Highways may be reaching their limits, but capacity still exists on remaining rail corridors, which also can be extended, to handle growth.



It also makes sense from a fiscal point of view. Railways pay for the costs of their own roadways by financing, building, maintaining and paying taxes on rights-of-way. No public money has to be spent.

The Railway Association of Canada says that diverting 100 million tonnes of freight per-year to the rail system would be the equivalent of three million truck loads, an estimated saving of \$500 million a year in highway maintenance and construction costs, which otherwise would be borne by taxpayers.

Another big plus, of course, would be the lesser impact on the environment. Trains are much more environmentally friendly than hundreds of trucks. When that number is increased to hundreds of thousands, and millions, the impact on air quality obviously would be significant.

Of course we still need roads and trucks to transport goods. Again the obvious solution to pressure on highways and other heavily travelled roads, is more reliance on existing railways. The Railway Association of Canada has 19 members in Ontario already working with truckers using the latest in intermodal techniques to improve the flow of goods and cut back on the use of trucks.

Tip of the hat

Here's a tip of the editorial chapeau to the Acton High School Reunion Committee for their thoughtfulness and interest in the community.

After they had paid all their bills and had an attractive new sign for the school installed, they had a significant amount (\$7,000) left from the proceeds of the 25th school anniversary reunion. The committee decided to share it with four local groups who do much for the community.

The result? Four substantial cheques, totaling \$7,000, went to the Poppy Fund of the Acton Legion, Heritage Acton, Off The Wall Youth Centre, and the Acton Agricultural Society. They were presented to the grateful recipients at a ceremony last week.

Well done, former students.



LIVING LEGACY: Acton's Helen Quinn and granddaughters Natasha Quinn (left) and Rachel Quinn were at the Acton Library on Friday when a 17-book set of Wildlife & Plants of the World was put into circulation. When Mrs. Quinn's husband, Douglas, who was an avid reader and loved the library, died last fall, his family asked that donations in his memory be made to the library, which in turn used the money to purchase the reference books.

— Frances Niblock photo

Wasted energy – more heat, smog

It's interesting that within weeks of Canada agreeing to the terms of the Kyoto Protocol, temperatures soared and the country became gripped in what climatologists describe as the worst national drought in history.

Of course, no one can say with certainty that the heat wave and drought were triggered by, or even exacerbated by global warming. But it is certain that this is the kind of weather that will become more common this century. In a way, the weather served as an exclamation point after the climate talks: Get on with it!

Indeed, some jurisdictions are getting on with it. The City of Toronto has plans to retrofit many of its buildings to make them more energy efficient. Already, Toronto's municipal operations have reduced greenhouse gas emissions by nearly 20 per cent below what they were in 1988. Other cities like Regina and Halifax are also reducing emissions and cutting costs by finding ways to be more energy efficient.

Meanwhile, the federal government has been stalling and our emissions nationally have soared. To meet our Kyoto commitments, Canada must find ways to encourage energy efficiency and renewable energy, and discourage waste

Science Matters

— by David Suzuki



and polluting fossil fuels. Right now, that isn't happening, and we can see the results hanging in the air in major Canadian cities. Southern Ontario has been especially hard hit with record smog. Last year, according to the Ontario Medical Association, about 1,900 premature deaths associated with air pollution occurred in Ontario, along with 47 million minor illness days.

Transportation is the largest single culprit, creating a vicious cycle. By building and driving millions of large, gas-guzzling vehicles, we release vast quantities of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. This causes global warming, which increases the frequency and duration of heat waves. Since sunlight and heat are precursors of smog, the hot weather makes air pollution worse. Then, to combat the heat, we crank up the air conditioning in our vehicles, which increases fuel consumption, which makes smog and global warming

worse yet again.

Meanwhile, at home, the electricity used to power the air conditioner often comes from a fossil fuel-burning power plant, which further increases pollution and global warming. In fact, running all those air conditioners recently helped Ontario residents use a record 25,000 megawatts of power in a single day.

To make matters worse, big cities can be several degrees warmer than surrounding areas because the asphalt and buildings that have replaced green space, hold more heat, creating what is known as the "urban heat island" effect. A recent study in Los Angeles found that if the city planted new trees to cover five per cent of the land and used lighter-coloured materials for its roads and rooftops, overall air-conditioning requirements would drop by 18 per cent.

To cut our personal emissions, reducing the amount we drive and driving a fuel-efficient vehicle are two of the most important steps we can take. Consider this: switching from driving an average car to driving an average SUV for one year will waste more energy than leaving a refrigerator open or six years of a television turned on for 28 years!

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