

Councillors tangle over early half load restrictions on rural roads

Ward 3 representative Mike Davis failed to convince his fellow councillors at a recent council meeting that spring half load restrictions need to be placed on town roads now.

Davis attempted to get a motion approved by council that would see the signs posted from now until the end of April. He argued the mild temperatures in January would contribute to the breakup of the roads earlier than the annual spring thaw.

Most roads have been built to handle year-round unrestricted traffic but some older roads and gravel roads were not built to withstand the negative impact caused by heavy truck loads during the spring thaw and the associated rainy season. Therefore, to reduce the impact to the roads, a seasonal reduced load period (referred to as "half load restrictions") is put into

effect on various roads.

Not only did Davis fail to convince both colleagues and staff of his contention, he could not even get a seconder to waive the rules to deal with the matter that evening.

Davis, who presented data from Environment Canada showing 12 days in January with mean temperatures above freezing, said, "How long does it take frost to come out of the roads to the point they are being damaged? I think five and half days (in row) is a problem."

He attributed the warmer weather to global warming.

But Director of Engineering and Public Works, Rick Henry said, "The intention of half load (posting) is when the frost is coming out the ground and the trucks are going to be buried up to their axles if they're running full loads."

While the warm January tem-

peratures may have thawed the top surface frost of the roads, the deeper layers are still frozen, Henry said.

Approaching spring the Engineering and Public Works department monitors the long-range temperatures and the roads.

"Generally coming into March if the temperatures are going to be above freezing, then it's time to post because the frost will start coming out of the ground," the Town engineer said.

Henry said March 1 is a general date—sometimes it's in the middle of the month and sometimes at the end. He added the dates also vary for specific roads.

He added to post half loads now would result in more negative impacts such as twice as much traffic, more greenhouse gas emissions, and financial costs to industry, including

farmers and delivery trucks.

Rural councillors Bryan Lewis, Joan Robson and Clark Somerville also voiced dismay at the motion.

"Town staff does an amazing job of addressing the issues (of rural roads)," said Lewis.

Somerville said it's more likely freezing temperatures will return with a vengeance in February.

In rebuttal, Davis accused the three—Lewis, Robson and Somerville—of being part of a trucking lobby.

"What I see here is a little bit of a trucking lobby; we want to be fully loaded. My side of it, is taxpayers are paying for that ... fully loaded on roads that perhaps can't support it and doing damage to the roads," he said, adding that posting the roads now would save the municipality money.

This notion was contradicted

by Henry, who said it would also cost taxpayers more money in staff time posting, removal and then reposting.

"I appreciate your concern for gravel roads (now)," said Mayor Rick Bonnette, "but I also remember the opportunity (last fall) you had to support putting a million dollars into rural roads so we could have them resurfaced and you voted against it."

Later, Davis's offer to speak to provincial ministers on behalf of the Town of Halton Hills at the Ontario Good Roads Association conference, which he intends to attend at the end of February, was met with stunned silence.

Councillor Clark Somerville then stated, "After hearing what I just heard (in the previous road debate), I do not want Councillor Davis representing me at a conference on roads."

—By Cynthia Gamble, staff writer

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