

School board says bus stop should never have existed

Parents' bid for a safer intersection leads to suspension of bus route

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Staff Writer

What started as a simple attempt to create a safer crossing for school children has snowballed into a giant safety issue and headache for Acton parents.

A delegation of about six parents were scheduled to meet with a Halton District School Board committee of trustees last night (Thursday) to appeal the pending removal of a longtime bus stop on Churchill Rd.

The parents were shocked earlier this month, when the Halton District School Board learned about the stop and ordered its removal—effectively immediately—but later commuted the order to Dec. 22.

The ball started rolling in October when Acton Councillors Jon Hurst, Mike O'Leary and Clark Somerville responded to parents' complaints about the dangers their children faced daily while crossing Churchill Rd. at Tanners Dr. to get to McKenzie-Smith Bennett School (MSB).

"The reality of the situation is that I think this is an extremely dangerous intersection," said O'Leary at the time.

The trio recommended to Halton Hills council to hire a crossing guard for that location and change the intersection to an all-way stop. To adhere to Town policy, the all-way stop further down the road, at Churchill and Norman Ave. was removed.

But that move prompted complaints from parents and local residents used to crossing at that stop, while drivers unused to the new all-way stop at Tanners Dr. began rolling through the intersection.

The safety of children at both intersections is still imperiled, parents charge. The three councillors hosted a public meeting on the situation at the Acton Arena and Community Centre Wednesday evening before any further changes are considered.

In early December, parent Kim Bishop made the fateful call she will always regret to the Halton District School Board.

Concerned by safety hazards, she requested that the bus stop for the dozen or so children who attend the French Immersion program at Robert Little School be changed to Tanners Dr. at Somerville Rd. The bus, which picked the children up on Churchill Rd. at Tanners Dr., not only forced the children to cross the road, but, impeded the view of both drivers and pedestrians, she said.

She was shocked by the board's response.

The bus was not supposed to stop there at all, she was told, and it would be removed immediately. The children some as young as six years-old, would be asked to walk across a soccer field to board



What started out as a bid by parents to ensure a safe crossing for school children at Churchill Rd. and Tanners Dr. in Acton has become a bureaucratic nightmare. Last week the Halton District School Board said Robert Little School French Immersion students (above) are no longer entitled to be bused to the school—a move parents were fighting before school board trustees last night in Burlington.

Photo by Ted Brown

a bus in front of MSB.

After pleas from parents, councillors, and Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette, which fell on unsympathetic ears at the board staff level, HDSB director Wayne Joudrie stepped in and decreed the busing would continue until the Christmas holidays (Dec. 22), but parents must appeal the original ruling to have the bus stop reinstated, said Bishop.

She and other parents were to plead their case in a time-limited 10-minute presentation to a trio of trustees at the board's head office in Burlington last night (after press deadline). Bishop said Wednesday they intended to focus on the safety hazards involved in having their children walk to MSB before boarding a bus to Robert Little.

Bishop said there are a number of conflicting issues at stake.

First, in her research of the bus stop, she discovered that the school bus company had deviated from the route and was stopping on the wrong side of the road. Had they been stopping at the proper stop (as stated on the school board's website), Bishop said she would never have made that call.

Second, board policy states "transportation may be provided for a period up to one school year if the walking route is deemed to be unusually hazardous by the Transportation Department".

Children, said Bishop, are being asked to walk across an unplowed soccer field or to walk to the Norman Ave. intersection and along that sidewalk to MSB (about 1 km out the children's way)—and now that intersection has no stop sign for crossing children and there is no sidewalk on the west side of Churchill Rd.

Third, the crossing guard installed by the Town works from 8:30-9 a.m. and from 3:30-4 p.m. But in order for the Robert Little students to catch the bus in front

of MSB they have to cross Churchill Rd. before the guard arrives in the morning and after he leaves in the afternoon.

Fourth, drivers are still failing to heed the new stop sign, with many coming to a rolling stop including, as Bishop witnessed earlier this week, two school buses and one Town public works vehicle. One little boy, she said, thinking the stop sign would protect him, ran out onto the road before cars had completely stopped. These incidents are becoming almost daily occurrences the concerned mom said.

Despite their case on the safety hazards, Bishop is not optimistic that the parents will win their case.

The board's transportation policy is definite on Optional Attendance students as these French Immersion students are considered. The policy states no transportation will be arranged for those students who, by choice, attend a school outside their normal school area, unless there is room on an existing bus route. No additional bus stops or route adjustments will be made to accommodate these Optional Attendance students, and bus riding privileges could be withdrawn at any time.

Bishop says the situation may mean she may be forced to pull her six-year-old out of French Immersion and have him attend the "home" school, McKenzie-Smith Bennett.

But in any case, Bishop now just wonders what will happen when her three-year-old is forced to walk through hip-deep snow on the soccer field as she walks with her older brother to MSB or how soon a carefree youngster is hit by careless driver at the intersection that is still a long way from being safe.

(Cynthia Gamble can be reached at cgamble@independentfreepress.com)

Newspaper holiday deadlines

Readers and advertisers should take note that *The Independent & Free Press* will have different publication dates and deadlines next week because of the Christmas holidays.

The following is the upcoming publishing schedule and advertising deadlines:

Tuesday, Dec. 19 edition

Advertising deadline Monday, Dec. 18 at 10 a.m.

Thursday, Dec. 21 edition

Advertising deadline Wednesday, Dec. 20 at 10 a.m.

Tuesday, Dec. 26 edition (Boxing Day)

Advertising deadline Wednesday, Dec. 20 5 p.m.

The Friday, Dec. 29 and Wednesday, Jan. 3 editions will publish as per the regular schedule.

The Independent & Free Press office will close for the holidays on Friday, Dec. 22 at 3 p.m. and will reopen Wednesday, Dec. 27 at 8:30 a.m.

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