

EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

Bring trains back

This corner was a little more than interested in the proposal by the North Mainline Municipal Alliance to reopen the CN track that runs from London, through Guelph, Rockwood and Acton to Union Station in Toronto, for improved passenger service.

A report commissioned by an alliance of politicians from municipalities along the rail line found improved intercity rail service is feasible at reasonable capital and operating costs. The business case for the proposal would include four peak period trains connecting Breslaw, Guelph and Acton to the existing GO service in Georgetown. One train would extend to Stratford, St. Marys and London.

At a council meeting recently, Mayor Rick Bonnette said the North Mainline Municipal Alliance has been working to improve passenger rail service for two years. He noted Halton Hills Economic Development Officer Bill Anderson is working on a train schedule to eliminate any scheduling difficulties which led to the demise of the GO Transit extension to Guelph in 1992.

The morning train didn't get into Toronto until almost 9 a.m., too late for people who reported for work at 8:30 a.m. Support for the train – the result of an election promise from then Halton MP Otto Jelinek – was promising at the beginning but had begun to trail off when the NDP came to power and cancelled it.

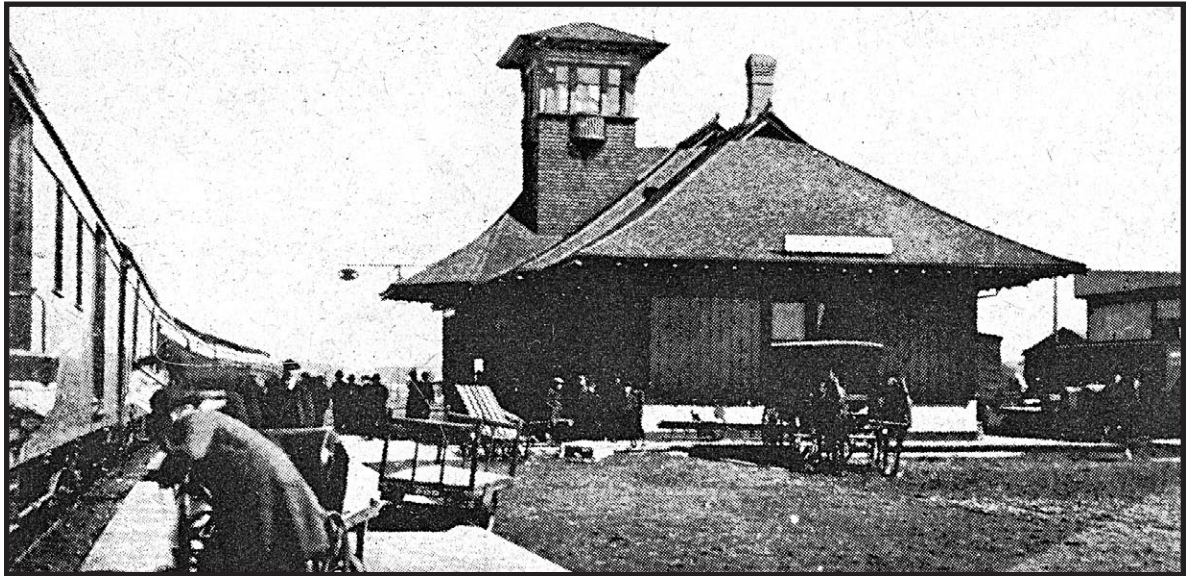
The Alliance wants the federal government to pay for upgrades to the present tracks that lack modern technology, provide a bumpy ride and reduced speeds. Upgrades from Breslaw to Georgetown are estimated at \$19 million. The Alliance also wants the Province to cover estimated \$3.5 million operating costs. It also anticipates revenues between \$5 and \$10 million per year.

It all comes down to approval from the two levels of government but as well as a business case there is also one for the environment, and gridlock along existing highways that's becoming increasingly worse.

Halton MP Garth Turner says that not a day goes by that one of his constituents does not complain to him about traffic jams that were not there eight months ago. Any measures that could take some of the pressures off existing roads, and reduce the stress of motorists, would be welcome. Average commute time in the GTA is now 79 minutes round trip.

Let's face it. Trains are more environmentally friendly than cars and trucks. When Canadian National Railways (CNR) got approval to close stations and, in some instances close entire railway lines back in the late 1960s, they weren't doing the public a service. Their lack of foresight was lamentable.

The proposal by the North Mainline Municipal Alliance for improved rail passenger service not only makes sense but would restore a service that once was not only practical but revenue friendly here.



ACTON STATION: This photo was taken when the Acton railway station hummed with activity. Fourteen trains a day stopped to pick up and unload passengers. The station has gone but if the Railway Alliance succeeds in its project passenger trains may again stop in Acton.

Baseball, long an obsession of mine

This scribbler has been a baseball fan since he played minor ball with Acton teams back in the 1940s in the Halton County League. We never won titles like the senior intermediate nines but we won a few games. Some of the better pitchers were picked up by scouts for American League teams. None made it to the "show" but played minor league baseball in the Junior A and Senior Inter-county, which was pretty good quality then.

My interest in baseball never waned. It was and is especially prevalent during the World Series when the mellow voice of Mel Allan and Gillete commercials dominated the Air Waves. It included attending Toronto Maple Leaf games at the old baseball stadium in Toronto when the team played in the International League against clubs such as the Buffalo Bisons, the Rochester Red Wings, the Newark Bears and Baltimore Orioles.

When the Blue Jays arrived on the baseball scene my allegiance switched to the American League, although as a fan of the old National Brooklyn Dodgers it was considered heresy. When the Jays finally won a world series, and then another, it was baseball heaven. It has been pretty lean pickings since then but I'm still

Coles' Slaw

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a fan. I miss few televised games even when the Jays are on the west coast and games go well after midnight.

As a confirmed baseball nut, I've often wanted to visit the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame in St. Marys, Ontario. Recently, after a visit to Stratford the opportunity arose to visit St. Marys, an incredibly pretty town on the Thames River often called the "Stone Town" after its many stone buildings. It's also home to an immense cement plant, reflecting the stone heritage.

My wife Irma and I found the Baseball Hall of Fame Museum which is located in an older home, jammed with every conceivable vestige of baseball's long and storied history. It is worthy of note that the first baseball game of record occurred in Beachville, Ontario in 1838, a year or two before Abner Doubleday's team played a game in Cooperstown, New York, where the Baseball Hall of Fame is located. Beachville is only a hop

skip and jump down the road from St. Marys but you'll have a hard time finding it on a road map.

Since Irma and I were the only visitors that afternoon, volunteer guide Ken May escorted us through the amazing amount of memorabilia in the museum, only a third of which, he said, was on display. The other two thirds is stored for the opening of a brand new hall and museum to be constructed this year alongside the spanking baseball diamonds.

The amazing thing is that St. Marys is also planning a new \$14 million recreation centre, a project which has some ratepayers up in arms. The hall of fame manager told us most taxpayers face a \$500 increase in taxes if the project which council approved, goes through. Larger homes could see a thousand dollar increase. Now we understand the ratepayers are taking the Town to court.

The population of St. Marys is about 6,200 so you can see the recreation centre is an ambitious project. It makes the \$1.6 million Acton Agricultural building seem like a pittance.

We're not going to get involved with local politics in the Stone Town but we should admire their pluck and initiative. Besides, the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame is worth the visit.



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