

Students to learn about the benefits of municipal transit

By JASON MISNER

Special to The Champion

The Halton District School Board and Burlington Transit have partnered on a unique education program to illustrate the importance of transit and how it can solidify and enhance the economic, environmental and social health of a municipality.

Recognizing that young people are a key to ensuring the future success of transit, beaming board/City transit officials and politicians unveiled Wednesday afternoon the new program called Beyond Tomorrow.

Aimed at grade 7 to 9 geography students, and grade 11 marketing students, the program was lauded as an effective way to get young people to think constructively about how a community is developed, and the role transit has, and should have, in ensuring a municipality is strong and viable.

Burlington Transit first proposed the concept eight months ago, and through consultation with Halton board staff, it meets curriculum requirements of the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Beyond Tomorrow, which will include guest speakers and field trips, will become part of a semester's learning.

Donna Clegg, the City's director of traffic and transit, told the crowd that students would study a number of concepts when it comes to the design and construction of a municipality. Those concepts will include examining land-use patterns and transportation issues.

For example, in the academic portion of grade 9 geography, students focus on air quality, urban sprawl and issues facing the City's ambitious waterfront project.

"Burlington Transit has long been committed to raising the awareness about the value of public transit among various audiences in the community, including the all-important youth sector," she said.

"We recognized the value of creating a program that enables young people to learn about the community, experience their community first hand, and then contribute to the community."

After the meeting, Ms Clegg said the program's cost was basically staff time.

She said it's crucial to get the message out to young people about the benefits of transit, and this program is one step toward doing that.

Gary Sadler, superintendent of education for the Halton public

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DONNA CLEGG

board, told the crowd that the board has been approached by numerous agencies from across Ontario with requests that their program be taught in schools.

He said it's a detailed process to get outside programs taught in schools. A number of elements must be addressed including whether it meets ministry education standards and if it's age-appropriate.

Transit officials, he said, approached the board and they collaboratively worked on establishing the program.

"It's good education for kids in Halton," he said. "I'm confident our kids are going to benefit from it."

The program would appear timely in light of recent gas price increases that many oil analysts suggest could remain high for some time.

Also, federal and provincial governments have recently been earmarking millions of dollars for municipalities to enhance their transit systems, with the goal of getting people out of smog-causing vehicles and into buses.

The rationale is rather than having one or two people in a vehicle driving to work, a few dozen people can travel in a single vehicle — a bus.

Burlington Mayor Rob MacIsaac said that transit just isn't some-

thing that is to benefit Burlington, but all of the GTA.

"(Transit) is an integral part of the community's fabric," he said. After the meeting, Mr. MacIsaac said transit shouldn't be viewed just as a cheaper form of getting around a city, but "as a viable transportation alternative."

"Beyond Tomorrow will help these kids grow into civic-minded citizens."

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