

# OPINION

## Bridge collapse a wake-up call

Could U.S. disaster happen here?

Infrastructure.

It's a word that just doesn't capture people's attention. However, in the wake of last week's bridge collapse in Minneapolis, it's a word we're likely to hear a lot more and, frankly, we should.

Immediately following the U.S. disaster much airtime and newspaper space was devoted to the "can it happen here?" scenario. Engineers, architects and various other "bridge experts" were called on to voice their opinions on whether bridges, overpasses and other structures here in Ontario are safe. Not surprisingly, opinions were mixed.

For the record, Halton Region has followed a provincially-mandated program since 1997, which requires bridges and large culverts to be inspected every two years. The region is responsible for 76 bridges and 113 culverts which cover 296 kilometres of regional roadway. Individual municipalities are responsible for their own roads.

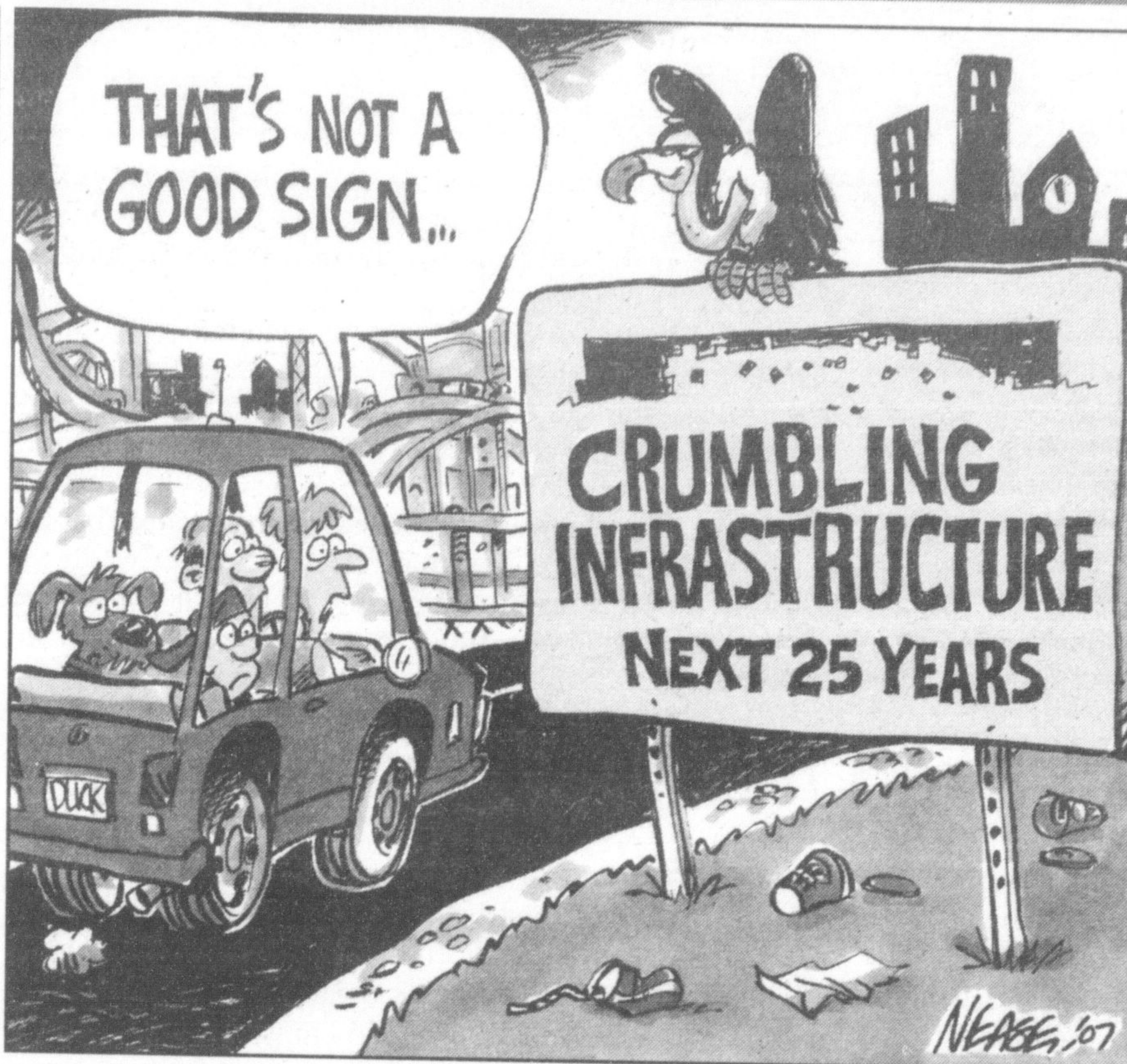
Few bridges collapse for no apparent reason. Yes, there have been some instances, such as the collapse of a bridge in Laval last year that claimed five lives, and a bridge on the New York State Thruway near Amsterdam, New York, that gave way in 1987, killing 10 people, but those instances, like the one in Minneapolis, are not weekly occurrences.

That said, last week's disaster should serve as a wake-up call to all levels of government that aging infrastructure will — and should — be a front-burner issue in coming years.

Sewer lines, water pipes, overpasses etc. do not last forever. Our harsh climate and various other factors all result in wear and tear on structures that were built decades ago.

While various levels of government pump millions of dollars into infrastructure each year, in many cases it is just to keep up with regular maintenance — not work that would be seen as proactive.

Infrastructure, and its maintenance, is an expensive venture funded mostly by tax dollars. The Minneapolis disaster may, however, be the impetus for many politicians — and residents — to take a second look at local infrastructure and rethink its importance when it comes time to decide how best to spend taxpayers' money.



## Readers Write

E-mail your letters to [miltone@haltonsearch.com](mailto:miltone@haltonsearch.com).

### We need a Halton-wide pesticide bylaw to protect region's children

(The following letter was addressed Halton Regional Chair Gary Carr and members of Regional council, and a copy was filed with the Champion.)

DEAR COUNCILLORS:

I noticed in the Champion recently a report on the growth of the number of young children in Halton, according to the just-released Census figures.

Regionally, there has been a 17 per cent rise in children aged newborn to six years in the past five years. In Milton, there has been a 273 per cent rise in babies under one year, and a 163

per cent rise in newborn to six-year-olds.

These latest statistics caused me to reflect on the priority that should be placed on ensuring the optimal health of Halton's youngest citizens.

Halton has a lot of great things going for it, and as the mother of two young children, I appreciate the local services available to our family and the natural environmental features and green spaces that we are able to enjoy. And I appreciate the recent move of Oakville's

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## Aroundtown

### Accused in drunk driving young enough to know better

By the time many of you read this, an important decision with the potential to affect the safety of this community will have been made.

Barring a remand, a judge will decide today whether a Milton man charged with drinking and driving in the deaths of two Rockwood seniors will be released on bail.

... back to his cushy Ferguson Drive home, where carefree children play outside.

... back to socializing, relaxing and probably drinking.

... back even to driving, in three months time, when his licence suspension is up.

As ridiculous as it sounds to let a person charged numerous times with drunk driving-related offences back out into the community, it happens. Ingram Rahim Bakhsh was released more than once to freedom until his numerous drinking and driving-related

charges see the light of day in court.

Let's hope the right decision is made this time.

One of the things that initially surprised me in this case was the young age of the accused; he's 28.

Sgt. Larry Zimmerman of MADD Halton/Peel confirmed what I thought that drinking and driving is now largely a middle-aged and older issue. Young people have grown up with the message that driving while intoxicated is dangerous and wrong. Middle-aged

folk grew up in a time when drunk driving wasn't shunned and some who did it were even looked upon with amusement.

So far this year, four people have been killed in the Milton area with drinking and driving suspected. And each of the men

charged is young: 31, 28 and 21. Obviously, there's room for more education.

As a reporter, I'm able to highlight some of the horrific consequences of drinking and driving.

A recent letter to the editor by John Pannozzo criticized my initial story on the crash as insensitive, presumably because I made mention of two lifeless bodies inside the crumpled car.

My response to him is simple. Drinking and driving has very ugly consequences — consequences that shouldn't be ignored or swept under the rug simply because this is a "small-town newspaper" and not the "National Inquirer", as Pannozzo wrote.

Because, obviously, there are still some people who just aren't getting the message.



Stephanie Hounsell

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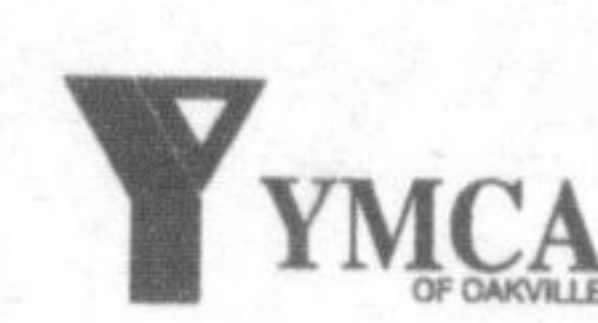
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