

Smaller communities needed in Halton's future

By ROB KELLY
The Champion

The gist of "probably the most important study Halton has done in a long time" is that the only way to

create more effective public transit in the region is to change the way communities are designed, says a senior Halton planning official.

Ho Wong, director of policy and research for Halton, unveiled a

\$120,000 consultant's study Wednesday which focussed on making public transit more accessible and efficient so as to wean people away from cars. To really tackle the challenge, Mr. Wong said, Halton must

move away from suburban sprawl into community construction and into something called "nodal" development.

According to Mr. Wong, Halton is fighting the clock with any plans to

make meaningful changes to its public transit. The work to a large extent hinges on the way new highways and neighbourhoods are designed, and, with a consistently growing population, Halton already has major plans in the works on both fronts. Once new road and subdivision projects are approved, they're almost impossible to alter.

Commuter problems

"If we don't take action right now, the options will disappear and we won't have any alternatives," Mr. Wong told Halton's planning and public works committee Wednesday.

If Halton doesn't do something, the commuter problems already visible in other suburban regions like York and Peel will crop up here, Mr. Wong said, with such symptoms as "two or three hour traffic peaks" endured by drivers every working day.

In the nodal concept, compact communities roughly two kilometres in breadth are to be built along key commuter routes. These nodes would incorporate homes, townhouses, apartment complexes and commercial areas. The commuter routes they would straddle would be highways with lanes or corridors dedicated solely to bus transit, or car pooling.

Four nodes

Halton has four "major" node sites in mind at present, Mr. Wong said in his outline. There are two in Oakville, one in Burlington and one in Milton. The Oakville ones are along Highway 5, with one intersecting Highway 25 on what is largely undeveloped land at present, and the other being the uptown core development scheme at Highway 5 and Trafalgar Road.

The third major node would be in Burlington at Upper Middle Road and Appleby Line, in the Bronte Creek Business Park area, and the fourth would be somewhere in urban Milton as redesigned in the ongoing Halton Urban Structure Review planning study.

Since the nodes would be built around public transit, and public transit would, with dedicated highways become far more efficient, the incentive would be there for people to opt for buses instead of clogging the roads with their cars, planners reason.

Although the major nodes would be home or workplace to as many as 30,000 people each, Mr. Wong stressed that they would not be congested enclaves of highrise buildings. As many as 50 per cent of the homes would still be freestanding houses on single lots, he pointed out. The remainder could be a mix of townhouses, row houses and lowrise apartment buildings.

Blending ideas

As an example of how relatively high population densities can be organized to still yield a neighbourhood feeling, Mr. Wong cited Oakville's popular Bronte Harbour, which houses 75 people per acre in mixed use shop-residential buildings.

Councillors approved the report in principle, and asked provincial authorities to examine ways of blending the ideas into their road and municipal planning outlines. But Halton Hills councillor Rick Bonnette said he felt the "small northern communities" such as Acton, had been "somewhat left out," especially in regards to possible transit links with Milton.

Mr. McCleary said regional staff will explore the matter further and report back "before year end."

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