

C'ville residents blast council say train noise gets ever worse

By BRAD REAUME
The Champion

At least one Campbellville resident says he won't pay his property taxes because of problems with trains.

A group of angry residents filed out of Monday's meeting of town council unsatisfied with the municipal position on increased use of the CPR rail line near Campbellville Junction. Several said they were considering legal action against the town.

Chris Steenhof told town council Monday night that he will withhold his 1996 property taxes because of council inaction on increased train traffic, concerns with the safety of the once virtually abandoned line and inadequate warning signals.

"It's a terribly dangerous situation," said Mr. Steenhof, who warned of the possibility of a serious accident with a train carrying volatile chemicals. "If there was a collision with a train carrying sulfuric acid half of Campbellville would be destroyed."

He said the line was built in 1911 and in several places is dangerously substandard, though he did admit work has been done to improve it in the last few years.

May launch legal action

Mr. Steenhof said he had a claim for \$47,000 in damages to his home recently denied by municipal officials, so he is investigating launching legal action.

"My place was a heaven on earth before this, now it's a hell-hole," he said, adding the town should get an injunction to stop the trains until an investigation is conducted

which addresses the type and volume of traffic and the safety of the line. "We can't sell the place but I'd do anything to get rid of it."

Area resident Beverly Campbell said the issue should be taken up by the federal government because most of the trains originate in the United States.

"Would Americans allow Canadian trains to rumble through one of their towns and disrupt people's lives?" she asked.

"American companies don't seem to have to comply with the same environmental conditions that Canadian have to," she said, calling for the town to force an investigation.

Cite big traffic increase

Other residents were primarily concerned with what they see as a vast increase in rail and road traffic in the area. Several said they had trouble sleeping at night. In the last few years, they say, traffic has increased from three trains a day to as many as 15. According to Mr. Steenhof heavy rail traffic is being diverted there to skirt Toronto.

"They have converted a spur line into a main line," said Jane Monroe of McNiven Road. "You can feel the ground rumbling even a half mile away."

Keith Rasmussen said he moved to the area five years ago to get away from the noise of trains and heavy traffic but over the last three or four years it has increased five times and horns sound at every hour, day and night.

"My nerves are frayed from the whistling," said Mr. Rasmussen. "I have also smelled chlorine in the

air after a train passed. I thought there might be a serious leak."

Three street crossings in the area are not equipped with full warning lights and bells because traffic counts in the past have not justified the \$300,000 expense. Such safety measures at crossings are the minimum requirements to have trains cease warning whistles as they approach. Residents are adamant that local vehicle traffic is easily higher than the volume required to have the lights and bells installed.

Feds pay most of the tab

Transport Canada pays 80 per cent of the cost of lights with the local municipality picking up 12.5 per cent and the railway the remaining 7.5. In addition, local municipalities pay several thousand dollars in insurance costs when there is no whistling.

"Transport Canada still thinks there are three trains a day averaging 30 miles per hour using the line," said Mr. Steenhof, who added he often remains in Toronto through the night because of difficulty sleeping in Campbellville. "The problems are the fault of this council."

Council agreed to have staff meet with Transport Canada officials to arrange for upgraded crossings, which would mean whistling could cease. Councillor Gerry Brooks suggested shunting of trains, which blocks a local crossing, be addressed in that meeting along with traffic, especially during the horse racing season at Mohawk Raceway, and precautions for chemical loads.

The town sent a similar request for a review some time ago. According to a report by John Matthews, Milton's director of public works, a request for lights and bells should be based on safety concerns due to limited federal funds. These request have taken as long as two years to be addressed.

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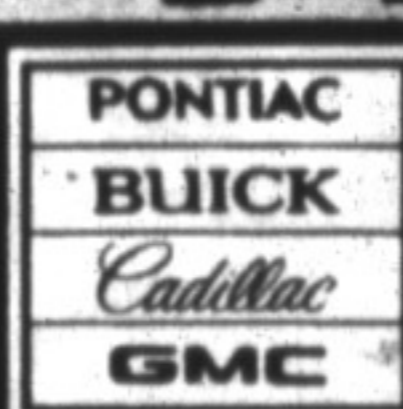
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