

Traffic congestion forces families to make sacrifices

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er in Mississauga, also spends a lot of time in her vehicle. So, too, do the couple's two sons, Joshua and Cole, who attend the Peel Region school.

Traffic congestion on highways has forced Hamilton and Halton families to make unbelievable sacrifices.

The phenomenon is far from unknown for those who live or work in Oakville.

Lynne Cocklin, a Burlington resident, accepted a position in north Oakville that required her to drive a very congested stretch of the highway on an almost daily basis.

"It was like being a NASCAR driver because drivers changed lanes without signaling and no matter how much space you left between you and the next car, someone always squeezed between," she said.

In addition to sharing her own experiences, Cocklin said friends who lived in Stoney Creek and worked at the Ford plant in Oakville were forced to move east because they spent the bulk of their free time commuting. They were on the road at 4 a.m., coming home at 7 p.m. "They had no life," she said.

The distance between Dickson Tooley's Waterdown home and office, located off Hwy. 401 at Leslie Road near Hwy. 404, is approximately 80 km. Her morning trek takes a minimum of 55 minutes.

"Coming home, if I'm not on the 401 by 3:15 p.m. I'd better be prepared to spend \$25 for the 407 to get home in under 90 minutes or sit in traffic for two plus hours," she said.

The hours the local mom spends travelling is precious time away from her children. She doesn't get to eat breakfast with them on workdays, nor does she walk them to school. Seldom can she attend or participate in after-school activities without taking a vacation day from work. When she does, it takes away from the family's time off together.

"I am exhausted by the time we finish dinner, making evening activities and family board games problematic," she said.

The Petznicks, too, have limited time for friends, family and activities on weekdays. Molly and the boys arrive home between 6 and 7 p.m. with Cory returning at about 8 p.m.

These make for long, busy weekdays.

"It's hard to get anything done around the house," said Petznick. "We are really limited to weekends in terms of having a life outside of work, school and the kids' sports."

Motorists travelling along area highways, including the Queen Elizabeth Way (QEW) and highways 403 and 401, move at a snail's pace. During rush hour, there are an estimated 250,000 vehicles idling on the QEW through Burlington alone. Traffic is bumper to bumper with a number of vehicles opting to navigate the municipal street network to get to their destination.

The spill-over traffic wreaks havoc on local roads. The corridors that run parallel to the



The Petznick family, including parents Cory and Molly and sons Joshua and Cole, commute to work and school every day. They're up at the crack of dawn and out of the house by 6:30 a.m. in an attempt to beat traffic.

Eric Riehl / Metroland West Media Group (Follow on Twitter @halton_photog)

QEW in Burlington, including Harvester Road to the south and the North Service Road to the north, are jammed during peak hours. When there's a crash or incident on the provincial thoroughfare, traffic congestion on Burlington streets worsens.

"Burlington bears the brunt of that provincial traffic looking for an outlet," said Bruce Zvaniga, the City's director of transportation.

The same goes for Waterdown, where a collision on Hwy. 6 can snarl traffic through the heart of the Victorian village and in Flamborough's settlement areas for hours. Municipal road networks simply weren't designed to accommodate the volume drivers now experience.

"They weren't built to do that," said Zvaniga.

Lots of pressure on Milton roads

Milton roads experience similar pressures.

According to Paul Cripps, Milton's director of engineering services, the biggest traffic issues on the town's roads stem from blockages on Hwy. 401.

"When that happens, all the other roads, the Derrys and the Britannias become overloaded because people are still trying to get over in that direction and the capacity just isn't there for them," he said.

An increase in the number of vehicles per household is partly to blame for traffic congestion, as are Toronto's housing prices, said Darren Scott, a professor at McMaster University and associate director of the school of geography and earth sciences. As young professionals are looking to settle down and purchase homes, they're looking west of the

city, where homes are more affordable.

"There's a lot of people who are moving from Toronto to Hamilton, to Flamborough, to the outlying regions, looking for cheaper houses," said the McMaster researcher, whose work focuses on travel behaviour and transportation studies.

This, however, results in a higher number of commuters that must travel into the 'Big Smoke' and other communities within the Greater Toronto Area. "You see that these commuting links, they are increasing over time," said Scott.

Burlington resident Len Collins, who avoids travelling on the QEW at all costs, believes that many people would prefer to live where they work, but the housing market makes this difficult. As they settle into communities like Milton and Flamborough, they're left facing a daily commute.

"They aren't willing (to commute), they are forced to," he said. "I think they want to be closer to work but economics dictate that."

Halton Regional Chair Gary Carr chalked up some of the issues affecting Halton to a past philosophy that saw development as a first priority and road networks as a second.

"Prior to 2006, what was happening was, we'd had a tremendous amount of growth, but we really weren't putting the roads in place so we are playing catch up now for all those years," he said. "We changed that philosophy... Before they get any approval to build any new development we make sure the roads are put in."

Waterdown is still playing catch up.

In June 2002, the Province approved an offi-

cial plan amendment, which gave developers the go-ahead to build out their projects — 6,500 new housing units, home to more than 15,000 new residents.

Infrastructure to accommodate the future growth of the community and influx of vehicles on local roads wasn't in place at the time. Development of north/south and east/west transportation corridors isn't expected for years.

"What the City had wanted was for the development to be phased to tie in with the building of the new east/west and north/south corridors," said Flamborough Councillor Judi Partridge.

"The OMB (Ontario Municipal Board) ruled against the City and approved the developers to just do full build out."

The current traffic conditions through Waterdown can best be described as "horrendous," said the politician. "I can't think of a better word to describe it."

In Halton, the value of building appropriate road networks has been realized. Carr said Regional spending increased from \$50 million in 2006 to \$289 million in 2013. The Region's investments far exceed Toronto's road budget, which is \$100 million this year.

"In the past, this never happened. They would put the residents in and then years later they would increase the capacity," said Carr.

As neighbouring municipalities grapple with traffic management issues, Dan Cozzi, Oakville's director of engineering and construction, said the town's road system is operating quite well, with no congestion on locally-owned roads.

He acknowledged there are some challenges on some of their arterial roads, but noted only one intersection, located at Speers Road and Cross Avenue, has delay lengths considered by the Town to be intolerable.

The Town, he said, is working to deal with this problem.

Traffic congestion problem complex

The problem of traffic congestion has many dimensions, according to Oakville Chamber of Commerce president John Sawyer. Living long distances away from the workplace is one such aspect.

With the high cost of housing in Oakville, people with jobs in the town have to commute in from places like Hamilton, where more affordable housing is available, he noted.

"Just like 60 per cent of the people who work in Oakville come from outside Oakville, I think around 62 per cent of the local population leaves Oakville everyday to go to work in another community," said Sawyer. "What we have long championed is bringing the jobs to Oakville. Once we have higher density and more jobs here we can get more people off the road and public transit begins to make more sense."