

Cayuga bridge work stops as MTO fails to consult

By Donna Durie
Writer

For the second time in just over a month, a number of Haudenosaunee Confederacy Council supporters shut down construction of the Cayuga bridge project. Work came to a stop Thursday morning after HCCC's environmental monitors were refused access to the site and told by the construction company to stay outside the fence. The company and Ministry of Transportation officials claimed the monitors had not undergone safety training to be on the site, but the company and MTO had refused to provide the training.

Hazel Hill, director of the Haudenosaunee Development Institute (the Confederacy's planning department), said members of the HCCC and HDI met with the MTO on Monday, telling them work will not be allowed re-commence until monitors are allowed on the site.

Hill said the monitors were being told by the construction company to stay off the site and stand across the street.

"Our monitors are there to ensure the construction company and MTO are abiding by the environmental standards set by the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Council when it comes to development of our lands."

Hill and the Six Nations Men's Fire were at the site Thursday morning when work came to a stop. They informed construction workers of the MTO's failure to consult with the HCCC. Workers promptly left and two OPP liaison officers arrived to discuss the situation with Hill.

She said work was supposed re-start this past Monday on two conditions: that HDI monitors were to be on the site and that the MTO come back to

the table and "respect our treaty rights and our processes."

But Hill said MTO officials at Monday's meeting were not able to make decisions and have to report back to their superiors.

"The people in attendance were not decision-makers," said Hill. "They're going back to their respective bosses to determine how it wants to proceed. They wanted everyone to go back to work without any guarantees our monitors would be paid. I said 'no.' We're willing to enter an engagement agreement where our monitors will be on-site and we have rights for our monitors."

The HCCC is waiting to hear back from the MTO before work starts again, she said. "It's like putting us at the back of the bus," said Hill. "It's like shoving you to the back and treating you very disrespectfully or patting you on the head and saying, 'you guys stay over there.' That's not acceptable."

She said Haudenosaunee monitors have been praised by corporations on other job sites throughout southern Ontario.

"They do a good job," said Hill. "I think we have a lot to contribute."

She said the project will remain shut down until the MTO deals with the HDI/HCCC "honourably."

The bridge is located on Haudenosaunee tow path

lands and the bed of the Grand River.

It is the second time in a month work has come to a stop on the bridge after the MTO refused to hold discussions with the HDI.

The HDI has been attempting to engage with the MTO for the past seven years on a number of MTO projects, including the Hwy. 407 expansion, which Hill says should be toll-free for Haudenosaunee people.

"The MTO has a number of projects, not just the Cayuga Bridge, that encroach on Haudenosaunee land rights and has refused to meet with us in good faith to discuss the impact of their projects on Haudenosaunee rights and interests."

During a meeting on Oct. 22 with the HDI, the MTO acknowledged the Cayuga Bridge does impact upon Haudenosaunee rights.

The MTO has been aware of Haudenosaunee rights and interests in the tow path lands along the Grand River and the bed of the Grand even as recently as 1985 when Ontario negotiated an agreement with Six Nations to build the Caledonia bypass bridge. It negotiated with the community and agreed to build a bridge in Ohsweken in exchange for use of the tow path lands and bed of the Grand River at Caledonia.

A communications proto-



The Six Nations Mens Fire were on scene at the Cayuga Bridge last week after MTO and the company refused Confederacy monitors access to the site. (Photo by Donna Durie)

col framework between the HCCC and Ontario Minister of Aboriginal Affairs has been in limbo since June. It

was the first in a series of established processes for the Ontario government, as part of the Crown, in

how Ontario and the Haudenosaunee will relate to each other, with its basis in the Two Row Wampum.