

## Special Report

## York-Durham Railway officially on right track

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Correspondent

It's official: the Stouffville area now has a new railway. Late last month, the provincial government granted a charter to the York-Durham Heritage Railway, which plans to run trains between Stouffville and Uxbridge.

"We're absolutely thrilled to get the charter," declares railway president Rob Pare. "It's a major step forward in our goal of bringing historic passenger train service to this area." Pare adds that 1995 is the goal for getting the trains running, between Uxbridge and Goodwood at first. Much remains to be done, including negotiating an operating agreement with the province, which now owns the tracks; obtaining and repairing more passenger cars; and training staff to run the trains.

When the York-Durham Railway starts running, it will be the third heritage railway in Ontario. The others are the Port Stanley Terminal Railway, south of London, and the South Simcoe Railway, running between Tottenham and Beeton, south of Barrie.

While the Port Stanley line uses mostly 1950s-vintage diesel locomotives and cars, South Simcoe passengers ride in cars from the 1920s, pulled by a steam engine built in 1883. In fact the engine, built for the Canadian Pacific Railway, starred in the CBC-TV miniseries "The National Dream," about the building of Canada's first transcontinental railway. It was bought from the railway by a Toronto lawyer in 1960 and stored in a shed at Bolton until its debut before the TV cameras in 1973.

Every Sunday, and on holiday Mondays, between Victoria Day and Thanksgiving, South Simcoe trains

leave from the Tottenham station and head north four miles towards the village of Beeton. The route is similar to the Uxbridge-Stouffville line, past peaceful woods and rolling farmland.

The South Simcoe uses a former Canadian National line that originally linked Port Dover on Lake Erie with Barrie on Lake Simcoe and Collingwood on Georgian Bay. Over the years, much of it was abandoned, as highway competition eroded business.

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About eight years ago the Tottenham and District Chamber of Commerce, looking for a way to bring visitors to the area, decided to establish a heritage railway. They bought the track from CN, which was about to tear it up, and contracted with the Ontario Rail Association to provide and run the train. The ORA, a group of railway historians, had

acquired a collection of vintage locomotives and cars and was seeking a place to run them.

Before operations could begin, the long-neglected track had to be repaired, along with a locomotive and passenger coach; a charter and operating authority secured from the province; insurance arranged; crews trained; and a multitude of other details cleared up. Securing approval to run trains was a lengthy process, due to the province's relative inexperience concerning short line railways.

Finally, on June 20, 1992, the first passenger-carrying train left Tottenham, behind a rare, ex-CPR diesel engine. Operation of the steam locomotive had to wait for a few months while approval to run it was

secured. On Labour Day weekend, passengers were greeted by the sight of steam engine number 136, resplendent in gleaming black paint, smoke drifting lazily from its tall stack, coupled to the passenger train. For many passengers, especially the youngsters, it was a thrill to see a steam locomotive for the first time; for the older set, the sight brought back fond memories of going down to the station with dad to watch the great black engines thunder past.

With bell ringing and steam erupting from cylinder cocks, engine 136 proudly pulled out of the station with its load of delighted passengers. Moments later the still country air carried the mournful wail of its whistle as the engineer blew a warning for the road crossings. During 1993, south Simcoe carried about 25,000 passengers. As a result,

Sunday business has boomed for local restaurants, to the delight of owners. It's hoped to increase patronage for the railway in 1994, through senior citizens' bus tours, school trips, and other promotions.

The South Simcoe Railway, like York-Durham, is a volunteer organization, comprised of people dedicated to preserving part of the area's history. Members come from many walks of life. They include a public school principal, a sales manager, a television technician, several stationary engineers, an auto mechanic, a real estate salesman, and an insurance broker. Two are retired CPR locomotive engineers, who have passed on their skills to fellow

members. Locomotives and cars and track are maintained to professional standards, while train crews observe operating rules based on those of the major railways.

As labour and funds permit, South Simcoe is gradually expanding the scope of its operations, beyond Sundays and holidays. As well, trains will soon roll right into Beeton, over a recently-purchased track extension. The Town of New Tecumseth (incorporating Beeton, Tottenham and Alliston), and the Cookstown Chamber of Commerce have also been negotiating with CN to buy additional trackage into Alliston and Cookstown for South Simcoe.

"The South Simcoe people have been quite helpful in sharing their expertise with us," says York-Durham's Pare. He adds that, initially, his railway will use a diesel locomotive, which is expected to arrive soon. "We'd like to acquire a steam locomotive, though."

Heritage railways originated in England in the 1950s. Perhaps they were inspired by the delightful 1953 British movie "The Titfield Thunderbolt," about villagers who start up their own railway when British Rail (Britain's CNR) pulls out. The idea caught on in the States about 1960; one of the first heritage railways was the Strasburg Railroad, in the Pennsylvania Dutch country. Ironically, its first steam engine came from the CN.

Operations like South Simcoe and York-Durham give the public a ride back in time, to the less-hurried, leisurely lifestyle of 40 years ago represented by the friendly branchline passenger train. All going well, area residents will soon be boarding trains at the historic Uxbridge depot.

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## Council

## Residents proclaim displeasure with Ninth Line report

(From page 1)

criminally as a speed control device will only serve as a nuisance stop for motorists and an unnecessary delay for emergency vehicles," Whitehouse

said. Bangay argued stop signs installed anywhere are a nuisance and criticized the director's lack of research into speed problems or the nearby school. Whitehouse said plac-

ing a crosswalk at Sunset Blvd. is unwarranted because there are sufficient "gaps in the traffic in the morning and afternoon peak periods that will permit a safe crossing for

pedestrians."

Bangay argued the Ninth Line becomes a "mayhem of school buses" when children are walking to school which blocks motorists' vision.

"A stop sign and a crosswalk would force the school bus drivers to check for children crossing the streets," Bangay said. Whitehouse then said a 'no heavy truck' sign on the Ninth Line would re-direct heavy traffic along Main Street or the Tenth Line.

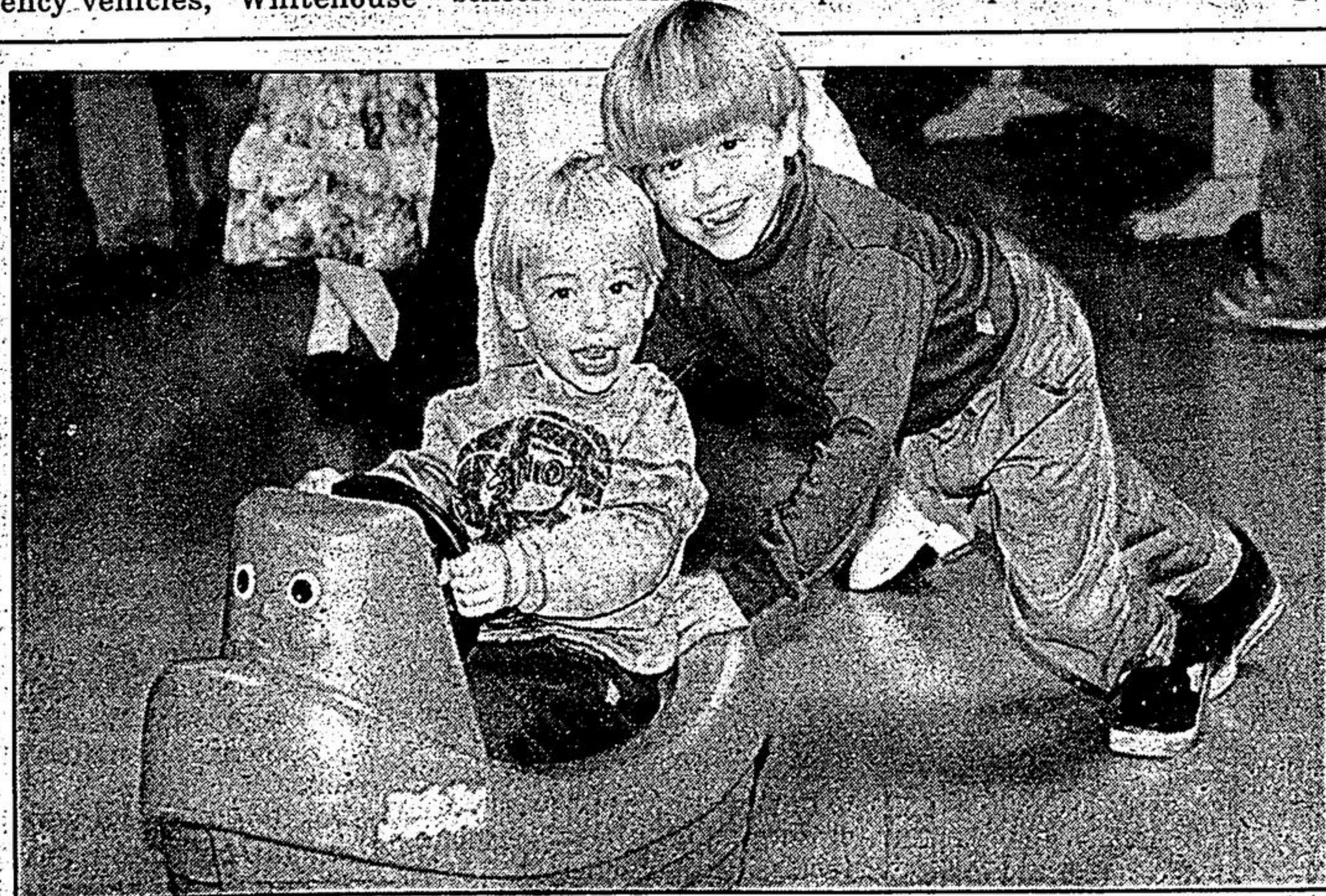
"There is no sufficient data

available to determine the volume of heavy trucks on the Ninth Line and their trip origin and destination.

But Bangay said trucks would likely use Hwy. 48 or Ballantrae Sideroad instead.

Ward 6 councillor Ken Prentice asked that the town consult further with the residents in light of Bangay's displeasure with the report.

Officials agreed to defer the matter until Whitehouse has an opportunity to meet with the residents.



PHOTOCELIA BRONKHURST

## Getting to know you

Whitchurch Stouffville Christmas party was held at Stouffville United Church Sunday. Allan Rees and his brother Colin enjoy the play equipment which helped some of the children get to know each other. The club is open to all new residents of the area.

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