

On Track

York Durham Heritage Railway seeking ideas, volunteers

Members of the York Durham Heritage Railway Association received an enthusiastic reception at last Tuesday's meeting of the Uxbridge BIA.

The group, which met with Stouffville's BIA last month, is seeking support from area businesses for a proposed tourist railway, which it plans to run between the two communities. YDHRA vice-president Eric Button presented a video of four tourist railways now operating in the United States.

Despite being located in small communities, often several hours' drive from major centres, said Button, the railways have attracted a large influx of tourists. As a result, downtown areas have been revitalized and local businesses have reaped considerable benefits.

Button also showed footage of the track between Stouffville and Uxbridge, taken when CN was running an excursion train on the

Toronto to Peterborough line in the mid-70s. "This was originally built as a narrow gauge line, and is extremely twisty and hilly, which makes it very scenic," he noted.

"We'll be running between two villages with a hamlet (Goodwood) in between and that's why we think it could be quite unique. It's not just a train ride; the idea is to have other things there for people such as shops, museums and restaurants.

"Families can come and spend a whole day in the area."

"Right now we've got one coach and two cabooses, but we want to obtain a second coach. We plan to restore Uxbridge station back to its original state and use it as a museum." Eventually it is hoped that there will be two trains running between the communities. The last piece of the puzzle is Ontario Municipal Board approval, Button advised.

He cited South Simco as an example of a successful tourist railway. "The first year they ran Sundays only and didn't do any advertising, and they carried between 12,000 and 14,000 people." Last year, the railway attracted between 22,000 and

24,000 riders, many of whom travelled to the area from the United States. YDHRA estimates that it will need to raise between \$250,000 and \$300,000 to cover the full cost of running and maintaining the railway. It is seeking donations of money, as well as

goods or services which can help to reduce expenses. Volunteers are also needed to serve on a fundraising committee and to develop ideas for the railway. For more information, call Eric Button at 640-3530 or Ken Harding at 852-5860.

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