

Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper
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EDITORIAL

Political will could help solve region's road woes

York Region's transportation problems are no secret.

Hwy. 404 is stopped from Stouffville Road south almost every morning rush hour. Main roads are so busy, it's almost impossible to merge from subdivision access roads without a stop light. And neighbourhood streets are invaded by commuters trying to avoid traffic jams.

It isn't hard to figure out why.

For the past 15 years, councils have been approving new subdivisions with an eye only to their impact on the immediate area. Little consideration has been given to the cumulative effect of traffic further down the road.

For example, an estimated 73 per cent of working Georgina residents commute outside their town.

As those drivers head south, they are joined by commuters from East Gwillimbury, Newmarket, Aurora, Whitchurch-Stouffville, Richmond Hill and, by the time they get to Markham, they're all at a stand still.

Regional roads haven't been upgraded to accommodate these drivers. As their communities were growing, York Region councillors were scrimping on road maintenance and construction to keep taxes down.

Between 1994 and 1997, the region's roads budget dropped from \$46.4 million to \$45.1 million. In fact, taxpayer contributions to road maintenance dropped by half — a trend that was balanced by soaring lot levy contributions.

Officials estimate the region could save more than \$200 million on road construction by creating a region-wide transit system.

But the region's attempts to integrate all of the local bus systems have been thwarted by political turf disputes.

Right now, only about 7 per cent of York Region residents rely on public transit. The region hopes to increase that to 33 per cent by 2021.

Although the region's goal of setting up a seamless region-wide transit system by Jan. 1, 2000 seems unlikely, individual municipalities are to be congratulated for taking the initiative.

But public transit alone can't solve the problem. York Region has the highest per-capita car ownership in the Greater Toronto Area — 2.2 cars per household. It's unrealistic to think people will leave them in the driveway and ride the bus.

The reality is people will continue to drive. So road improvements must be a priority, despite the high cost. According to transportation commissioner Kees Schipper, the region needs to spend \$46 million a year on roads for the next 25 years.

One practical suggestion for coping with that cost was raised by Markham Councillor Ralph Aselin — a long-term reserve fund designated specifically for roadwork.

But it's not enough to throw money at the traffic problem. Road systems have to be designed to flow smoothly.

The average York Region subdivision is a tangle of winding collector roads that play havoc with any attempt to create an efficient transit system.

A grid pattern of straight roads may not be as easy to sell for developers, but it is much more efficient.

Perhaps the least expensive way to keep traffic flowing on the region's roads is a little thing called political willpower.

It means saying no to residents who demand a stop light at every intersection and reduced speed limits on major roads. It means saying no to businesses that want on-street parking on main streets.

OPINION



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Here's solution to end mail box bashing

Re: Front page article *Weekend crime spree* (Oct. 20) regarding mailbox bashers.

I have a solution for those residents living on Bethesda Road who are being victimized by these mailbox bashers.

Buy one more mailbox and a bag of concrete mix. Fill the box with concrete and mount it on a pole in front of the real box.

When the next idiot hits that box with his baseball bat, he will receive quite a surprise.

I did this in a small town in Quebec and it soon ended the mail box bashing. A guard box for a mail box.

J. A. LEE
STOUFFVILLE

People abusing ERs

The editorial *Emergency room help needed now*, (Oct. 20) nearly made me sick enough to visit the local emergency room.

First of all, how many hospital ERs has *The Stouffville Tribune* visited in the last month? I'll bet I've been in more in the past week than the average person in a lifetime.

There are combinations of factors that contribute to ER overcrowding, admittedly government funds, or lack of them, is one.

Your article did indirectly mention one, but you failed to elaborate on it.

If "ERs were established to save people's lives," then why do people continually seek ER assistance for ear, tooth and toe aches?

Also on the money issue, don't forget the federal government (I believe they are Liberals) stopped transfer payments to the provinces. Where's (Ontario Premier) Mike (Harris) to get the money now?

For the past 25 years I've been in ERs every single day of my working life, personally to witness ER overcrowding. Back before the Tories were in charge, those other two parties were in power.

Why was something not done then? In future editorials, would you please investigate the situation in its entirety, and if you are already doing that, then report it so.

L. WILLIAM KEEPING
STOUFFVILLE

Businesses helping kids

The Stouffville Parent Child Resource Centre wishes to thank the following Stouffville businesses for their support of our program and for caring about the children of Stouffville: A&P IGA, Weston Produce, and No Frills in Markham.

Their donations of apple juice, cookies, tea and cleaning supplies help to enhance our program, which supports parents, grandparents, nannies and caregivers with preschool children.

Our goal is to promote positive adult/child interactions and to reduce the stress and isolation often associated with caring for young children via playgroups and workshops.

We are located at St. James Presbyterian Church. We can be reached at 471-1620.

CHERYL NEAVE
STOUFFVILLE PARENT CHILD RESOURCE CENTRE



Doug Devine

Tories slam door on families needing housing

The nightly news clips seemed pretty damning.

A very stern-faced Al Leach, Ontario's Minister of Housing, was describing the financial mess surrounding what he called Ontario's non-profit housing "boondoggle."

Leach says Ontario spent more than \$9 billion in the late 1980s building about 1,200 non-profit housing projects — buildings that now have a total value of just \$4 billion.

"Somewhere along the line, there was \$5 billion spent more than what the projects were worth," Leach said.

He blamed the overspending on naive volunteer project leaders, blatant gouging by builders, designers and consultants, and out-and-out fraud by some board members.

This latest example of our governments being taken to the cleaners would almost be funny if it wasn't for the fact Leach and his Tory colleagues are using it to justify their decision to cancel all non-profit housing.

Never mind that most of the missing \$5 billion appears to be in the hands of dishonest builders and developers — the very people the Tories now suggest will be eagerly providing rental housing for low and middle-income families.

Never mind that Ontario and Canada have a long history of being swindled on public building projects.

Never mind that thousands of ordinary Ontario residents are also stuck with homes or property they bought in the late 1980s that isn't worth anywhere near what they paid.

Never mind that the fraud was limited to a handful of co-ops while the other 1,195 projects are being run smoothly and honestly — mostly by volunteers.

And never mind that those projects provide decent and affordable housing to tens of thousands of families.

None of that matters to Leach and the boys in their desperate attempt to demonize social housing.

My own experience with social housing is limited to a 40-unit co-op townhouse project I helped build in Newmarket in the late 1980s.

Maybe the province got its money's worth on our co-op. Maybe it didn't.

But I know there are 40 families enjoying safe, clean and affordable housing that wouldn't have been built otherwise — families that are productive members of the community working hard to make ends meet.

Just like the rest of us.

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