

OPINION

PUBLISHER: IAN PROUDFOOT

TELEPHONE: 905-640-2612 • FAX: 905-640-8778
 Email: jmason@yrng.com website: www.yorkregion.com

Editorial

Keeping 407 pledge might be possible

The Liberal government, which has seen its campaign promises drop like flies, is scrambling to keep its word on Hwy. 407.

Liberals had vowed to roll back tolls by as much as 60 per cent and, in December, asked 407 ETR to seek their approval before raising tolls.

407 International Inc. announced last week it was raising tolls during peak hours by 1 cent per kilometre to 13.95 cents Feb. 1, despite the province's claim such a move violates its contract.

Calls for boycotts — whether it be on driving the highway or paying the tolls — abounded.

Yet, the reality is the people have already spoken. Or driven, should we say.

Since the highway was sold, tolls have increased between 30 per cent and 203 per cent, based on the time of day drivers use the highway. Yet more than 320,000 trips on the road are taken on an average workday, up 40 per cent from 1999, when the 99-year deal was struck.

The realities of the market determine what people are willing to pay for something they want, whether it's flat-screen TVs or congestion-free commuting.

And drivers have proven to the 407 owners, despite their squeals of indignation, they'll take the hit. They know driving on a well-paved, uncongested highway is saving them gas and, more importantly for many, time.

So why would the 407 capitulate now?

The owners are offering to revive the deal that would lower tolls and administration and transporter fees, if the province agrees to return to the practice of not renewing the licence plates of drivers who aren't paying their tolls.

Undoubtedly, the 407 owners aren't suddenly motivated to do the right thing.

But they can see hostility by the province to toll hikes and its refusal to force highway users to pay up will surely result in more drivers using the 407 without paying.

As it stands, more than 8,000 drivers owe a total of \$15 million — and little can be done to prevent them from using the road. Ironclad contract aside, the Liberals finally have someone over a barrel.

Despite their desperation to keep another promise from collapsing, they should not strike this deal with the 407, but remember parts of the contract come up for renegotiation after this April.

The Liberals may not be able to stop this toll hike, but if they're patient, this is one promise they just may be able to keep.



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

Double dipping, eight tracks not on agenda for 2004

Things I have learned in 2003 and the early days of the new year:

- The sample trays in the deli section of Sobeys on Main Street are not a buffet line to be savoured or returned to multiple times.

- Double dipping? Don't even think about it. "That's like putting your whole mouth right in the dip! From now on, when you take a chip — just take one dip and end it!" as they said on Seinfeld.

NO SANFORD AND SON

- I will phone ahead, as per the new rules, before placing items at curbside on my Stouffville street's big-item garbage pickup day. Lest my front yard should look eerily like the set of Sanford and Son.

- I will not feign mid-day illness after being at work for three hours, even if Canada is about to play the United States for world junior hockey supremacy and there's not a TV with cable access in sight.

- There's something about fireworks, like the fine New Year's Eve display in Stouffville Memorial Park, that entice us time after time.

- We've seen them on hundreds of occasions at theme parks, Canada Days and televised gazillion dollar millennium blowouts from around the world. But like car accidents, we cannot look away.

- Beta is not about to make a comeback any time soon. One should heartily embrace DVDs and MP3s, wallet fully open, as the manufacturers want us to, and "rebuild the library. KC & The Sunshine Band eight tracks, anyone? Get down tonight."

FLUCTUATING GAS PRICES

- The price of gasoline will fluctuate from York Region community to community and day to day with as much consistency as the Toronto Raptors.

No matter how low the price, it will go lower.

And no matter how careful I am at the self serve, I will spill gasoline on my gloves.

- I should take down my Christmas, er, holiday lights before it is time to put them up again.

Jim Mason is editor of the Stouffville Sun-Tribune.

Letters to the Editor

Fear mongering at work during town election campaign

I would like to thank the residents of Ward 6 in Whitchurch-Stouffville for their support and encouragement shown during my run for council. The experience was well worth the effort.

There were a few election candidates who would have you believe the council-approved growth plan was being rammed through and most residents are against growth.

At the Ballantrae mayoral candidates meeting, an area resident asked for attendee hands to be raised in support of no growth. Less than a dozen in an audience of more than 200 raised their hand in support. So much for resident disapproval.

An article in the Oct. 23 edition of the Toronto Star quoted mayoral candidate Randy Mole as saying our population will "triple" because of development. The planning department determines the population will max at approximately 40,000.

Mr. Mole was also quoted as saying our Main Street is in "chaos." Slow, to very slow, at times it is, but it's far from chaos.

In the Nov. 8 edition of this paper, a letter by Dan Pfaff, who said he was taking on the task of being teen spokesperson, was full of hyperbole and veiled innuendo. For Mr. Pfaff to suggest youth crime results from a lack of policing and teens with nothing to do, is erroneous.

To further suggest massive unchecked development will result in even more serious youth

The Stouffville Sun-Tribune welcomes your letters. All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The Stouffville Sun-Tribune reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space. Write: Letters to the Editor, 34 Civic Ave., P.O. Box 154, Stouffville, L4A 7Z5, e-mail jmason@yrng.com

crime is unbelievable. There is a small percentage of our youth involved in vandalism and other crime; the teens themselves know this to be true.

Their majority do not require adult supervision or intervention to lead full, productive, and responsible lives.

The small percentage who wish to live outside the norm must realize there are laws of social conduct to be obeyed; they know the difference between what is right and what is wrong.

To also suggest the face of our town will be foreign, with endless subdivisions and limited green space and it will be difficult to tell where Markham ends and Stouffville begins shows a misunderstanding of the sensitivity of the Oak Ridges Moraine Act and secondary plan.

If you bought into this fear mongering and misuse of information, then I feel you were done an injustice.

God willing I will run again in 2006. I believe in Stouffville and I know 302 of you believed in me.

RON SNIDER
STOUFFVILLE

Stouffville
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34 Civic Ave., 3rd Floor, Stouffville, Ontario L4A 7Z5

Phone: 905-640-2612 • Fax: 905-640-8778

Classified: 1-800-743-3353 • Distribution: 905-294-8244

Website: www.yorkregion.com • Email: jmason@yrng.com

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