

Extend 15-minute peak service to Stouffville, Markham mayor tells GO

BY LISA QUEEN
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From service limitations to the need for road improvements at rail crossings to fears about constant whistle-blowing, York Region councillors are echoing concerns of residents about significant improvements coming to GO train service.

Two months ago at a town hall meeting in Aurora, residents told Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca, also MPP for Vaughan, they welcome the incoming upgrades.

At the same time, they voiced concerns about transforming GO train service into GO regional express rail service, featuring two-way, all-day electrified service with trains every 15 minutes in core areas.

Regional councillors shared similar worries with representatives of Metrolinx, the provincial transportation and transit agency for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, at a committee meeting this month.

While Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti praised improved GO train service, he urged Metrolinx to extend 15-minute peak service beyond what is being proposed, especially to Stouffville.

"We remain one of the fastest growing areas and will continue to be a significant area of growth over the next 25 years," he said.

"There is an incredible amount of traffic that comes down from Stouffville and other communities to the north. I applaud you for bringing RER (express rail) right up to Unionville, that 15-minute service, but if we could extend it to Stouffville, at least during peak hours, that would, I think, relieve a lot of pressure on the traffic and road system. Currently, it's (already) gridlock, it's absolute gridlock."

Newmarket Councillor John Taylor also raised concerns, which he shared with Newmarket council this month.

He is pushing for an increase in peak hour service to the town, because 15-minute service will end in Aurora.

"It'll be 30 minutes or less at peak hours into Newmarket. It was expressed strongly at that meeting that, given we're a designated growth centre, it would only be logical that the same level of service going to Aurora goes to Newmarket," he said.

"They're listening to us. But we're still seeing a significantly increased level of service. Most people see this as a very positive direction."

There are about 170 at-grade crossings throughout the Greater Toronto Area, including 60 in York Region and four in Newmarket.

'IT'S ABSOLUTE GRIDLOCK'

Since ridership is expected to increase from 100,000 to 225,000 daily once the all-day service is introduced, there will be a need for about 60,000 additional parking spaces, Taylor said.

"We need to start to think how it's going to be handled," he said.

A potential future GO station at Mulock Drive will also be explored by Metrolinx, he said.

There are many rail crossings that already need repairs even without additional trains, including on Elgin Mills Road and 19th Avenue, regional transportation committee chair-



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

GO trains at Lincolnville station north of Stouffville.

person and Richmond Hill Councillor Vito Spatafora said.

"I can tell you, the screams we hear on the other end of the phone about people's cars being damaged (are routine)," he said.

Metrolinx is reviewing potential upgrades to at-grade rail crossings, chief planning officer Leslie Woo said.

"The preference, of course, is to eliminate as many at-grade crossings as possible, in particular where there is increased service," she said.

TRAIN WHISTLE COMPLAINTS

"The frequency of the trains having to slow down at grade crossings, of course, is a challenge for us, so we're trying to identify as many transportation efficiencies (as possible)."

Meanwhile, Newmarket resident Bryan Allen told councillors he's dreading the constant train whistles that will create noise pollution and diminish residents' quality of life.

Several communities have put a stop to train whistles, something he'd like to see in York.

But complaining the burden would be on the region and municipalities to bankroll a portion of the research needed to justify stopping the whistles, Allen urged councillors to pressure Metrolinx to pick up the tab.

Scarpitti agreed reducing the impact of train whistles is a major priority for residents.

"It sounds kind of cute, anti-whistling. It's anything but (cute). These are loud, loud horns that would blast you, if you live beside them, out of your bed if you weren't ready for it," he said.

Eliminating train whistles is a safety concern, overseen by Transport Canada, James Purkis, Metrolinx's executive vice-president of GO regional express rail, said.

With the increase in GO train service coming, Metrolinx is reviewing the whistle issue at the same time it ensures the highest standard of safety at rail crossings, he said.

Despite concerns with increased GO train service, Scarpitti praised the provincial government for investing billions of dollars in rapid transit improvements.

—with files from Chris Simon

Green candidate 'not invited'

The Green Party candidate would not be taking part in a Markham-Stouffville pre-election meeting in Ballantrae last night, he said Monday.

Myles O'Brien said in an email to The Sun-Tribune: "... I was not invited and will not be participating ..."

O'Brien was not listed as a registered candidate on Elections Canada's website until Monday afternoon.

The meeting was organized and moderated by former Whitchurch-Stouffville councillor Phil Bannon. Bannon, who ran for mayor last year, did not reply to emails sent to him by The Sun-Tribune this week.

For a report on the meeting, go to yorkregion.com

The Sun-Tribune, Stouffville Chamber of Commerce and Markham Board of Trade are holding a candidates' meeting at EastRidge Evangelical Missionary Church Oct. 5 at 7 p.m.

Other candidates include Paul Calandra (Conservative), Dr. Jane Philpott (Liberal) and Gregory Hines (NDP).

You can fill food bank's empty shelves

BY SANDRA BOLAN
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"The pantry is really getting quite empty," according to Marion Wells, co-ordinator for the Whitchurch-Stouffville Food Bank.

Even the storage unit is "looking pretty sparse."

From now until the end of October, the food bank is making a push for donations. What they get now will last them until Christmas and beyond, according to Wells.

There will be no one-day drop-off happening. Instead, food can be deposited in their traditional locations – Giant Tiger, Metro, NoFrills and the fire hall on Weldon Road.

Food items needed include pasta sauce. "Not the spaghetti. We have the spaghetti coming out of our ying-yang," Wells said.

Peanut butter, granola bars, tetra juice packs, as well as pudding and fruit cups, "items that would be used in lunches," are what is needed, along with mac and cheese, she said.

Despite this being known as the Thanksgiving food drive, typical turkey dinner items are not required.

"Some of these people don't have an oven to roast anything in. ... Their needs are very different from a normal household would require," Wells said, noting most of their clients only have a hot plate or microwave available for cooking.

Along with providing clients with non-perishable food items, food bank staff like to purchase meat, eggs, cheese, margarine and fresh veggies with money people donate.

"Monetary gifts are most acceptable," Wells said.

Contributions over \$10 receive a tax receipt.

To make a financial donation, mail to: 13618 McCowan Road, Stouffville, Ontario, L4A 7X5. Please make cheques payable to the Whitchurch-Stouffville Food Bank.

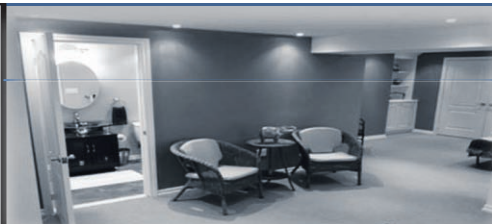
When it comes to finding a new location for the food bank, the search continues.

A report on suitable town-owned locations is expected to go before council next month, according to Wells.

Mayor Justin Altmann wanted the food bank to move into vacant space within the municipal building, but council did not support his idea.

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