

INFORMATION SHEET

“STANDING UP FOR UNIONVILLE”

<http://www.unionvilleratepayers.com>

TOPIC: NO HORN ZONE

LAST UPDATE: Aug. 28, 2012

URA CONTACTS:

Paul Morrison (paul.morrison@rogers.com) - Committee Chair
Philip Blachier, Mona Babin, Neil Banerjee, Reid McAlpine, Peter Miasek - committee members

BACKGROUND:

This issue relates to the announcement of a Provincial plan called “GO 2020”, established by Metrolinx (which includes GO Transit). The Strategic Plan, last updated in March 2009, states that, for the Stouffville line, the plan is to “provide train service up to Mount Joy every 15 minutes during peak periods, with counter-peak service every 30 minutes”. Our concern is that, if something is not done to reduce the intensity levels of the train horns, our heritage area will become virtually unlivable.

In June 2008, the Town (now City) started a process called the “Whistle Cessation Process” with Transport Canada, covering an area from Steeles Ave. up to north of Major Mackenzie. This involves establishing safety gates, flashing lights, and bells at a number of at-grade crossings, and some regrading, plus a safety audit, correcting sightline concerns, and getting insurance concerns taken care of.

Over the last couple of years, the Diesel trains in GO Transit’s system have been converted to 2-level horns: “normal” and “emergency”. The “normal” levels of the new 2-level horns were for a while more bearable than the old unconverted horns, but this year (2012) they *seem* to have become louder again, although GO Transit claims that decibel levels are within the established norms. In addition, there is wide variation in the volume, duration, pitch, timbre, and usage patterns of the horns – and to date GO Transit has not given any explanation as to the reasons.

STATUS:

The Whistle Cessation Process made some progress, but seems to have stalled over the last few years. In Aug. 2012, the City of Markham's Engineering Department (Director Alan Brown) sent the following update to Ward 3 Councillor Don Hamilton:

Staff will be reporting back to DSC [Development Services Committee] in the Fall [2012] on 3 issues: funding strategies, phasing options and information on new alternative technology options. You may recall from our last presentation to DSC in December 2011 that the work needed to bring our rail crossings to the standard required for anti-whistling would cost \$4 million. Although York Region has pledged to refund up to \$1.7 million of the cost (subject to conditions and funding), the City has to up-front the entire \$4 million and apply for a refund from YR upon completion of the work. Even then, we are still on the hook for a minimum of \$2.3 million and possibly more.

After the work has been completed, there is still no guarantee that GO/Transport Canada will

implement the anti-whistling order. GO/Transport Canada needs to review each crossing and can decide not to grant our request. In Mr. MacNeil's [President of GO Transit] own words, anti-whistling at the rail crossing through Unionville would be "difficult to permit" due to safety and operational concerns.

I have heard that if this line goes to a electric technology the whistling requirements can be reduced but I have not verified such with GO Transit or Transport Canada.

This last paragraph refers to a comment that Regional Councillor Jim Jones made re electrification – Gary McNeil has stated that he doesn't think it would make a difference.

It was our understanding that a large part of the above cost was due to the City having to take on additional liability costs. However, Alan Brown's note doesn't mention this.

Here is some further feedback from Gary McNeil, dated Aug. 8, 2012:

GO takes safety seriously and adheres to the regulatory requirements of Transport Canada. Transport Canada dictates the distance from a crossing that a horn has to be activated, and the level of noise that a horn has to transmit and the sequence of activation (2 long blasts, 1 short blast then 1 more long blast until the crossing is fully occupied by the train). Along the corridor, signs indicate when to activate a whistle. They are posted, typically, 1/4 mile from the railway crossing.

This refers to the so-called “14L” pattern – however, this is by no means universally adhered to by train operators as they traverse the Unionville corridor (which is just as well for our nerves). As stated above, no explanation has been forthcoming. A note has been sent to Transport Canada requesting clarification, but no response has yet been received.

In November, 2009, a Metrolinx manager stated at a Town meeting that all-day GO service will not be running north of Unionville GO Station, in deference to residents’ concerns and problems with twinning the tracks. However, the long term strategy apparently remains to provide all-day service by 2020, but GO Transit agrees that there are a large number of details to be worked out. Given the planned increased frequency, there may also be problems of vibration and probably air pollution from the heavy Diesels, in addition to the assault on our ears and nerves.

HOW TO LEARN MORE:

Contact committee members.

See also the web page: http://www.jpaulmorrison.com/misc/Train_Horn_Status.shtml

This web page has a number of useful links, including links to “GO 2020”, various Town bylaws, information about decibel levels and the potential for hearing impairment, activities in other parts of N. America and Europe, impact on quality of life, etc.

URA OFFICIAL POSITION:

URA supports all the various efforts going forward at this time, and is working with the various stakeholders.

In the medium term, we need GO Transit to properly evaluate the impact of their Diesel train expansion plans on the community.

In the long term we support electrification, and will be liaising with various groups in Ontario that support this, including the [Clean Train Coalition](#).