

INFORMATION SHEET

“STANDING UP FOR UNIONVILLE”

www.unionvilleratepayers.com

TOPIC: NO HORN ZONE

LAST UPDATE: June 3, 2010

URA CONTACTS:

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BACKGROUND:

This issue stems from the announcement of a Provincial plan called “GO 2020”, established by Metrolinx (which includes GO Transit). 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 was that, if something was not done to reduce the intensity levels of the train horns, our heritage area would become virtually unlivable.

In June 2008, the Town 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.

In parallel with the above, GO Transit has informed us that the Diesel trains in GO Transit’s system are being converted to “2-level horns”. Originally, the trains had manual horns, but these were later replaced with fixed-volume horns, with buttons controlling the pattern being sounded. This latter type of horn may make sense out in the open countryside, but is totally inappropriate for a densely built-up, heritage district. The normal levels of the new 2-level horns are much more bearable, but not all of the trains running on the Stouffville line have been converted yet.

There are four levels of government involved: Federal, Provincial, Regional, and Town - plus Bombardier (who employs the engineers) and CN. It has been a challenge trying to integrate information from all these different levels. Add to this the fact that, for a long time, all queries from residents, including a petition signed by 47 seniors at the Cedarcrest Manor Seniors’ Residence, were met with a standard boiler-plate response effectively stating that “safety concerns always trump noise concerns”.

The announcement of the “GO 2020” strategy, on top of the residents already being unhappy about the current horn levels, led to an upsurge in resident concern in early 2009. Similar concerns have been expressed in other jurisdictions in the province and Canada, and in fact world-wide.

STATUS:

The Whistle Cessation Process is proceeding - at the usual bureaucratic pace. The safety audit and pedestrian study have now been completed. The town will be moving on to the next step of the study, which is to review the specific improvements required at each individual crossing and to review these improvements with all of the major rail stakeholders (i.e. GO, Transport Canada, and CN). Following this step, the list of improvements will be taken to Markham Council for review and discussion. The town has retained Aecom to identify and develop the specific upgrades required at

each crossing, and assist the Town with “negotiations” (sic).

One of the major outstanding issues is that a garage near Eureka may be obstructing sightlines, so a decision has to be made on whether it needs to be moved. In either case, however, the home-owner involved has indicated that he would go along with any steps required.

Completion of the “No Horn Zone” is now expected to be complete by Fall 2011.

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. Since this strategy seems to be in part motivated by a desire to reduce vehicular traffic between the towns on the Stouffville line and downtown, one wonders whether there might not be more environmentally friendly ways of achieving this. Perhaps the Province could show some leadership in this area.

Approximately 2/3 of the trains have now been converted to the 2-level horns, with normal and “emergency” settings, and the rest should be converted by the end of Aug. 2010. Gary McNeil (Managing Director GO Transit) has told us that they have issued Bulletin Reminders to the rail operators to remind them to use the normal setting unless they see an emergency, and are reinforcing training. Train operators will be monitored for compliance.

Overall, most residents are reporting an improvement in noise levels (with occasional surprises!), due to the implementation of 2-level horns. Still, Diesel trains seem rather antiquated by today’s standards, and the long-term strategy should be towards electrification.

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](#).