

GO Train Whistle Mitigation on Markham's Stouffville GO Line:
(a) Cessation, and
(b) Noise Reduction

Presentation to Development Services Committee

Unionville Ratepayers Association

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Context

- All-day two-way frequent GO Train service is a key component of Markham's future transportation plans.
 - York Region Transportation Master Plan
 - Draft Markham Official Plan (Section 7.1.2)
 - Metrolinx "The Next Wave", November 2012
- Currently about 30,000 people live within 500* meters of the 13 km Stouffville corridor in Markham, growing to about 50,000 by 2031 due to numerous nearby intensification projects.
- 11 urban level crossings in Markham require whistles

	Regional	City	Total
Ward 8	1	1	2
Ward 3	2.5	2	4.5
Ward 4	1.5	1.5	3
Ward 5	1	1.5	2.5

- If left unmitigated, GO Train whistle will become an increasing problem resulting in mounting public resentment.
 - Depreciated quality of life
 - Health impacts resulting from sleep deprivation
 - Vandalism
 - Property value diminution - real estate opinion - Appendix 1
 - Potential for reduction in property tax assessment

* Paper by J. Redden (American Public Works Assn. 2005) shows a 110 db horn (equivalent to loudness of a chainsaw) reduces to 80 db (equivalent to the loudness of a shout) in 500 m

(a) Whistle Cessation

- Whistle requirements at level crossings are set in Canadian Railway Operating Rules.
- Transport Canada has a process to eliminate whistles “that has been successfully used by many municipalities”. (Letter from Minister of Transport to URA, Nov. 17, 2009) Markham initiated this process in 2008.
- Toronto portion of corridor is whistle free – grandfathered.
- Old Unionville particularly problematic – 3 closely spaced crossings means an almost continuous horn
- December 11, 2012 Staff Report to DSC:
 - Safety assessment studies completed in 2009-2010 to identify risk mitigation. Essentially would require pedestrian gates, signage, markings. Cost about \$350K/crossing
 - York Region reaffirmed its pledge to reimburse costs for regional roads after successful whistle cessation.
 - Several municipalities have deferred their cessation programs due to cost, risk, municipal liability concerns, and would not be 100% whistle-free.
 - Elimination of whistles would have to wait until ALL crossing upgrades are completed and inspected by GO and TC. Partial anti-whistling orders no longer being considered. Must be all-or-nothing within a municipality. (NOTE –HARD TO BELIEVE!)
 - Even if all work is done, “no guarantee” that TC and GO will grant anti-whistling order (!!!)

(a) Whistle Cessation (cont'd)

- August 2012 – email from GO indicates that “through Unionville, the track curvature and (three) road crossings make safe operation of railway crossings without whistling difficult to permit.”
- Other municipalities are investing in “quiet zones”
 - Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit spending \$12 million, funded from taxpayer dollars.
 - Vancouver, Washington working towards “Local Improvement District” financing, essentially a graduated levy on all residents within 250 meters of the rail line
- November, 2012 – Metrolinx announced that two-way all-day GO service to Mt. Joy is part of “The Next Wave” of transit projects
 - Environmental Assessment study to commence 2013. Should definitely include whistle cessation, as road crossing upgrades will be needed anyways.

Requested Next Steps

- Confirm with Transport Canada and GO if whistle cessation must be “all crossings or none”
- Confirm with TC and GO if conditional pre-approval of work is possible
- Verify timing of GO EA study and prepare input
- Work with us to scope feasibility of “Local Improvement Districts” or other funding approaches
- Keep us in the loop. Periodic status update meetings with us.

(b) Noise Reduction

- Following extensive citizen lobbying in 2009, GO installed two level horns on all of their locos and cab cars on the Stouffville line
 - Stage 1 - Low level (normal) – 96 db at 30 meter forward arc
 - Stage 2 - High level (emergency) – 110 db at 30 meter forward arc
- Adjacent residents appear to feel that the Stage 1 horns are “not too bad”. Would likely be tolerant if Stage 2 was only used on rare occasions.
- However, perception from everyone is that Stage 2 is more than necessary or that Stage 1 is defective
- In addition to loudness, public also concerned with length and tone/chord of the whistle.
 - GO has recently changed all locos and 14/53 cab cars to have a softer Stage 1 and a more dissonant Stage 2. Balance of cab car conversion will take one year
- In response to numerous complaints, GO conducted a clandestine noise evaluation in Unionville on the first train down in the morning for 3 days in July – all levels were within TC guidelines (102 dB @ 25 ft. 98 db @ 100 ft. from crossing).
- Public perception continues that train operators frequently disregard the feelings of neighbouring residents in spite of instructions from Bombardier to be considerate of residents

(b) Noise Reduction – Conclusions and Requested Next Steps

- Whistle cessation may be years away – want interim solution
- Also, some crossings may never be permitted for whistle cessation (eg old Unionville).
 - Diligent application of the Stage I (low level) horn may suffice.
 - A noise barrier (wall) could be installed if necessary to augment protection for adjacent residents. Such a wall is being installed in Weston (Georgetown GO line).
 - First step should be to conduct a proper noise monitoring program, to increase residents' trust that this solution will work. Measure noise level, duration, tone at several locations over a period of at least 30 days. Involve the local community and GO Transit in the design of the program.

Requested Next Steps

- We urge council to approve funds and engineering resources for this noise monitoring program. Funding source – from the \$366K currently in Engineering Capital Accounts earmarked for anti-whistling.

Appendix 1

- Letter from Skot Wilson, Century 21 Real Estate, Markham ON November 6, 2012, confirming impact on home sales and prices from continued and expanded use of whistles on the GO Train route.
 - “Homeowners have increasingly had to lower prices by thousands of dollars to attract interest”