

Study required to end whistles

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Residents of east Waterdown near the level railway crossing on Parkside Drive have been waiting for almost eight years for the train whistles to stop blowing.

While a number of measures have been taken to satisfy safety concerns at the crossing, Canadian Pacific Railway recently informed the City of Hamilton that an independent safety assessment is required before the whistle-blowing can end. The study, expected to be complete by the end of March, is being done by road safety engineer Gerry Forbes of Intus Road Safety Engineering in Burlington.

PROPOSAL DENIED

Flamborough councilor Margaret McCarthy, who favours elimination of whistles at the crossing, tried to get the request for whistle-blowing relief fast-tracked but her proposal was denied and the \$7,000 safety audit, at the city's expense, was ordered. When the engineer's report is ready, it will be forwarded to the city and the railway company.

If the report shows that all requirements are met, CP Rail will, on the municipality's behalf, send the results to Transport Canada asking them to evaluate the information to determine if they too are satisfied that all requirements have been achieved.

If so, CP Rail will draft a joint insurance agreement with the City of Hamilton to protect themselves from third party claims. Insurance will be purchased from an outside vendor, with the cost being shared by the city and the railway company.

After receipt of the signed insurance agreement, the railway will issue special instructions eliminating the use of train whistles at the Parkside Drive crossing.

"This action is long overdue," said Karen Major, an east Waterdown resident. There are lights and armbands (wigwags) at the crossing now, as well as a warning sign advising motorists, "Do Not Stop on the Tracks."

Also, this past summer, Opta Minerals (located at the former Barnes Environmental site) relocated its driveway away from the tracks, removing yet another safety concern.

"It's overkill to have these whistles," Major said, referring to the many safety measures already in place.

Major has lived in the area since 1993 and said the frequency of trains using the crossing has



increased. The whistle-blowing is particularly bothersome during the summer when the trains go through the crossing at 1 a.m., 3 a.m. and 5 a.m., she said. "Residents can't sleep with their windows open."

Forbes said there are eight to 10 train crossings at Parkside Drive in a 24-hour period. His safety assessment will look at a number of factors, including traffic control devices on approaches, collision records and approach speeds, he said.

Asked how common it is for level railway crossings to have whistles silenced, he said, "common enough for Transport Canada to put together a set of procedures (to quell the whistles)." Those procedures include notifying area residents and requiring passage of a bylaw.

There will also be a public meeting about the crossing this spring, said Hamilton's acting manager of traffic, engineering and operations, Ed Switenky.

While it is difficult to put a timeline on completion of the process, Major said area residents are prepared to see it through.

"On behalf of the residents, and I know there are many, we're staying on this issue. We've been on it since 1998, and we're not letting it go. It's that important to us."