

Wanted: new detour routes

EDITORIAL

YEARS AGO, when Ontario's Ministry of Transportation (MTO) began looking at the need to widen Highway 10 northward beyond Forks of the Credit Road, Caledon Village residents mounted an unsuccessful campaign for a bypass that would cut through some of the gigantic gravel pits and swing west of the village.

Perhaps relying on traffic counts, the MTO decided all that was needed was a widening of Hurontario Street through the village, with a basic four lanes and a fifth lane at the signalized intersection with Charleston Sideroad.

Well, that option worked fairly well for a few years despite a lot of traffic using the highway instead of Heart Lake Road, which had served as an alternative to getting tied up in the approaches to the village during the morning and evening rush hours.

More recently, the population growth in Orangeville, Shelburne and Mono plus the growing attraction of places like the Blue Mountains and the Bruce Peninsula have led to great increases in the peak traffic levels on No. 10, particularly on holiday weekends.

The MTO has responded two ways ? by installing left turn lights at the crucial Charleston Sideroad junction and lengthening the green-light phase for Highway 10.

However, despite the less-than-ideal weather last weekend, the MTO's ?solution? resulted in northbound traffic Friday afternoon being backed up at least two kilometres, to near the top of Caledon Mountain.

In contrast, the addition of left-turn lights for east-west traffic and programming that allowed adequate time for that traffic to clear meant there was no backup at all on Charleson SR.

Clearly, something needs to be done to ease this congestion on the highway.

In the short run, one option would be to extend the green-light phase for the highway at peak periods to a maximum of about three minutes.

In the long run, the problem will disappear once Highway 410 is extended into the Orangeville area (as the first step toward its extension to the Owen Sound area). However, realistically that won't happen for at least a decade, given the current provincial government's determination to balance its budgets by cutting revenue rather than raising taxes.

In our view, a realistic mid-term option would involve adoption of the 'ETR' concept found farther south ? the designation of alternative routes to be used when the highway is closed following serious crashes.

The problem currently is that the alternate routes past Caledon Village are in no condition to handle heavy traffic.

As we see it, the ideal ETRs would be Escarpment Sideroad, Kennedy Road and Beechgrove Sideroad for northbound traffic and Beechgrove SR, Willoughby Road and Escarpment Sideroad for southbound vehicles.

The problem, of course, is that all those roads are supported by Caledon taxpayers, who shouldn't be expected to foot the cost of paving and maintaining the roadways for use by traffic that would ordinarily be using Highway 10.

In the circumstances, we think the MTO should use the same approach employed in the creation of Airport Road. In that era, the Province acknowledged both the need for a direct route between Toronto and the Collingwood-Wasaga area and the inability of Dufferin, Simcoe and Peel counties to foot the considerable cost of a highway that was primarily for Torontonians.

The tool used in those days was adoption of routes as "development roads" that would be built by the Province and turned over to the counties for maintenance purposes. (The same approach was used for the road between Shelburne and Mount Forest, the only difference being that on completion it was made an extension of Highway 89).

For them to function efficiently, the ETRs should be supplemented by electronic signage used when backups start developing.