

Our misplaced highway

EDITORIAL

HOW COULD IT BE that a route considered so important in the mid-19th Century that it became the settlement road and stagecoach route for parts of Southern Ontario that hadn't yet been surveyed, is today a neglected niche governed by bureaucrats based in far-off London?

We'll likely never know, but hopefully something can be done about it.

Today's Highway 10 follows the route of Hurontario Street and the Toronto-Sydenham Road ? the former as far north as Orangeville and the latter north to Owen Sound.

A historical plaque in Chatsworth advises that the Toronto-Sydenham Road (TSR) had its origin in a decision by the then government of Canada (today's Ontario and Quebec) two decades before Confederation. ?In 1848 the government ordered Charles Rankin, P.L.S., to survey a road from Melancthon Township through the present counties of Grey and Dufferin which would attract settlers and provide a more direct connection between Sydenham (Owen Sound) and Toronto.?

In Melancthon, the TSR was known as the Gravel Road, denoting its importance at a time when all the other area roads were dirt.

In 1920, the road was established as one of the original provincial highways, initially running from Highway 5 at Cooksville to downtown Owen Sound. It was extended south by 1937 to Highway 2 in Port Credit, and that same year became the site of the first interchange in Canada at its junction with the Middle Road, soon re-named the Queen Elizabeth Way.

Its importance was demonstrated in the 1920s and 1930s when concrete was used to pave it northward to its junction with Highway 6 (also known as the Garafraxa Road) in Chatsworth.

Initially, Highway 10 ran through downtown Orangeville, following Broadway and First Street. But 50 years ago, in 1968, in response to pressure from local MPP John Root, a bypass opened along the eastern edge of a town that then had a population of about 6,000. (The population soared from 4,593 in 1961 to 8,074 in the 1971 census.)

Also in the 1960s, the Province began widening Highway 10 to four lanes as far north as Forks of the Credit Road, as well as between Primrose and Shelburne, where the route was then shared with Highways 89 and 24.

Since then, the highway has been widened to five lanes between Highway 410 and Orangeville and four lanes as far north as Camilla. But north of there the roadway is the same two lanes it had 90 years ago, save for a few passing lanes on hills.

Today, Shelburne has a population exceeding Orangeville's in the 1960s but there are apparently no plans for a Highway 10 bypass or four lanes beyond Camilla, and a construction project between Orangeville and Primrose is demonstrating anew how inappropriate it is to have decision-making left to officials based in London who either really know little about the highway's needs or couldn't care less.

That fact is demonstrated daily by the snail's pace of construction work, with no paving having been done for many weeks and the key First Street intersection restricted to two lanes all summer long, even on holiday weekends when no work is being done.

Obviously, the contract with Aecon Construction didn't require maintenance of four lanes at the intersection when no work is in progress, and Aecon's painfully slow progress is in dramatic contrast to the speed with which the same firm repaved Highway 10 between Caledon Village and Orangeville, where the contract was let by the Transportation ministry's Downsview-based Central Region.

Surely Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones ought to urge Transportation Minister John Yakabuski to order transfer of responsibility for all of Highway 10 to MTO's Central Region.