

Bus service to be restored at St. Nicholas

By Bill Rea

Students of St. Nicholas Elementary School in Bolton who lost their bus service last year are getting it back.

The Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board Tuesday night voted to restore it.

‘It was a long process,’ Trustee Frank Di Cosala, Caledon’s representative on the board, commented after the vote was taken. ‘We learned to be patient.’

Student Transportation of Peel Region (STOPR) decided last year that students living east of Coleraine Drive would not be eligible for busing. That meant they were forced to cross at the intersection of Coleraine, King Street, Emil Kolb Parkway and Harvest Moon Drive. This intersection is part of the Bolton Arterial Road (BAR), which was designed to get truck traffic out of the village core. That decision did not go over well with parents, Di Cosala and officials of both the Town and Peel Region.

The Town had responded by setting up the Caledon School Traffic Safety Committee (CSTSC), which called for the buses to be restored. But the Governance Committee of STOPR didn’t go along with that, informing the Town that the provisions of crossing guards at the intersection (which Caledon officials put in place last year) provided ‘a viable pedestrian route for student crossing.’ The staff report to trustees stated STOPR began reassessments of the busing eligibility at eight schools in the board, including St. Nicholas, in January 2015. The result was the determination that about 113 students living east of Coleraine no longer qualified for busing. The decision was deferred for a year at the request of the Town to allow for the study of installing guide rails along the east side of Emil Kolb Parkway as a means to enhance safety. Peel officials decided such rails were not warranted.

The Town had sought to delay things another year, but STOPR rejected that, citing examples of similar intersections in Brampton and Mississauga where students were expected to cross in comparable conditions.

The staff report stated the crossing guards were put in place last September, and CSTSC was set up in December.

CSTSC confirmed the guards were warranted, while also requesting the bus service be reinstated.

But staff reported STOPR had concluded providing the guards created a viable route for the students to walk.

CSTSC was not pleased with that conclusions, and Chair Phil Somers spelled that out for trustees Tuesday evening.

He pointed out that site inspections of the intersection have indicated heavy volumes of traffic there. He added traffic experts from the Region had determined vehicles were passing through the intersection well in excess of the posted speed limit of 60 km-h.

Somers also told Di Cosala the crossing guards were put in place last year as a pilot project.

He also stressed the students living east of Coleraine don’t have an alternative route to take to and from school, apart from crossing the intersection. There is also no public transit they can use.

‘We don’t have that option,’ he said.

Somers also pointed out schools have rules about letting students go out for recess if it’s too cold outside, yet these youngsters would be expected to walk to and from school in similar conditions.

He also pointed out the intersection was improved to be a truck route, bypassing the centre of Bolton, and there is enforcement to get trucks to use the route. Somers added the road also serves the industrial lands to the south, and he had learned that more industrial development is expected there.

Somers told Brampton Trustee Anna da Silva the committee has asked Caledon OPP ‘to increase its presence in the area to add to deterrence and enforcement, but he stressed the stretch of road is also part of the bypass of Bolton.

‘Speeds tend to get up in that area,’ he observed.

Superintendent of Planning and Operations Daniel Del Bianco told Mississauga Trustee Esther O’Toole it would cost about \$40,000 per year to restore the bus service.

He also pointed to the conflict STOPR perceived between the committee determining crossing guards are warranted and the request to restore the buses.

Di Cosala urged his colleagues to keep student safety in mind. He added they are not traffic experts, but CSTSC has people who are, and they have concluded safety is a concern.

‘They’ve done their due diligence,’ he said.

Di Cosala also said cost is irrelevant when student safety is concerned.

Da Silva observed STOPR ‘refused to reinstate the buses because Caledon had no traffic safety committee, so the Town formed one, and now STOPR is opposed to buses because the guards are in place.

She said she understood the need for efficiencies, but ‘I believe we need to put children first.’

Mississauga Trustee Luz del Rosario said the board has been through this before, observing if the safety council in Mississauga says

there are unsafe conditions, the board reinstates buses.

?It's very clear to us it's unsafe,? she declared.

Di Cosala later said STOPR?doesn't have the authority to refuse to reinstate the buses.

?It's a board motion,? he said. ?It's direction from trustees.?

Both Di Cosala and Somers expressed gratitude for the support they received from the community, Town and Region on the matter.