

Keep the momentum going?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Is that the sound of momentum building? Just lately, if you lean in and listen, we seem to be hearing more and more about the state of illegal truck yards, ongoing traffic woes and even truck and vehicle driver training school scams. These are all issues significantly impacting driving conditions particularly around Caledon, but also those of our neighbours to the north, south and east of us. Indeed it seems according to a recent CBC marketplace investigation, the entire province is feeling the impact. While it seems to have taken a long, long, time to get here, perhaps we're finally at a tipping point and the momentum for meaningful change is growing?

Momentum looks like this: certain of our elected, local municipal representatives are working hard - both in the forefront and behind the scenes - quietly making things happen when it comes to road safety. It looks like the continued advocacy we've already seen, plus hosting meetings with the kind of people who can actually make key decisions impacting our local roadways. It also looks like elected officials voting in favour at Council meetings, specifically to support recent motions that will help to direct more resources towards the fight against illegal trucking yards by declaring a road safety emergency. The hope is in doing so, our municipal government will begin to see more support from our provincial partners.

Within some of the many small communities that comprise Caledon, momentum also looks like this: the installation of speed bumps to slow traffic down; flashing lights atop certain stop signs in an effort to enhance visibility and safety, and future promises of pedestrian crosswalks or new full sets of traffic lights at dangerous intersections, along with installing advanced green lights at others. These efforts are not going unnoticed and while a fatal collision occurred just this past week at one of these 'enhanced' intersections, it's important we continue to do all we can to prevent them.

Momentum looks like community involvement: including the vocal, well-organized and persistent new community group that decided, after the tragic passing of a young Bolton resident, enough was enough and that advocacy for change needed the cumulative voice of a united community behind it in order to be heard. It seems to be working because momentum also looks like major news outlets picking up (or revisiting) some of the stories of what's going on in our town, putting Caledon squarely in the public eye. Hopefully such actions will draw more attention from those at the provincial level of government who could fast-track the kinds of decision-making that needs to happen now, not over the next 3-5 years, in order to make our roads safer for everyone.

Speaking of the uptick in Caledon's 'newsworthiness,' I'd encourage everyone to take a look at the CBC Marketplace investigations available on YouTube. It's pretty scary stuff and one that requires the immediate attention of our Minister of Transportation Prabmeet Sarkaria. The investigation uncovered truck driver training schools effectively 'selling' licenses, often after far fewer hours of 'mandatory' driver training than is legally required, and in many cases with NO in-class or theoretical instruction, you know, like understanding weight and distribution of loads and the corresponding distances required to safely stop. Some are also apparently 'teaching to the test,' identifying ahead of time which provincial testing locations demand which type of testing (i.e.; specific forms of reversing skills) and then teaching only that version to ensure a passing grade is issued. It further identified, thanks to a whistle-blower, that some employees of the private company overseeing licensing on the province's behalf have been caught taking bribes. The same was shown to be true in a previous expose on passenger vehicle licensing, with driver training schools submitting paperwork 'verifying' a mandatory number of both in-class and in-car training hours had taken place, (allowing for a reduced insurance premium) when in fact they had not.

When questioned by the CBC, and also while appearing on a talk show called 'The Truth Pill,' Minister Sarkaria acknowledged there 'are some bad actors,' out there and that when the legislature opens on October 21 (reminder 'it's been closed for four months!') 'we are going to come with a legislative package' to address concerns. One hopes it's a legislative package that will meaningfully address the trucking and traffic chaos happening now, but I'm not convinced.

As evidence of skepticism, while the Minister specifically mentioned hiring more enforcement officers and the government's building of a \$30 million facility in Thunder Bay to monitor trucks along a key transportation corridor, Lise Vaugeois, MPP for

Thunder Bay-Superior North has pointed out the facility seems to be closed more often than it's open. That's not a good sign.

Some in the trucking industry are advocating for truck driving to be considered a skilled trade, taught through vocational schools and with apprenticeship style mandated hours of on the job training. Indeed, technically speaking, driver training schools fall under the mandate of the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, not the Ministry of Transportation so perhaps there's an opportunity here to regulate the industry differently, with more 'teeth' behind any new legislation.

Reputable truck driver training schools are using tools like driving simulators and a variety of new technologies to train, monitor drivers and enhance road safety and these are good things. But ? and it's a big one ? continued forward momentum means we need more action by our provincial partners to help get rid of these so-called 'bad actors,' because the bad driving and life-altering consequences of accidents caused by these 'actors' is not an act.

With illegal trucking yards (and their resultant increase in truck traffic) springing up all over our community, Caledon residents are at risk every, single, day. Momentum is building, let's make sure it continues.