

No change to busing in Caledon East for one more year

By Bill Rea

A group of Caledon East parents got a reprieve from losing their school bus service, but only for one year.

The Peel District School Board Tuesday night approved a modified version of the motion put forth by local Trustee Stan Cameron. Parents have expressed concern because Student Transportation of Peel Region (STOPR), the consortium that decides busing eligibility for Peel's two school boards, has announced that busing to Caledon East Public School will be cancelled for students living north of Larry Street and east of Airport Road.

Cameron's motion noted the "considerable anxiety" of parents over their kids having to walk up the hill along Airport Road to get to school, and called for an exception to the policy by keeping the bus in place.

But Brampton Trustee Beryl Ford put forth an amendment to keep the service in place for one year to give the Town of Caledon, Peel Region, the school and community work to implement safety measures. And fellow Brampton Trustee Steve Kavanagh proposed an amendment to the amendment, which was carried, calling for guarantees that the other parties would work for a solution within a year.

Cameron recalled a delegation to the board made four weeks before by Adam Martin-Robbins, who pushed the case that it's dangerous for children to be walking the sidewalks of Airport Road.

Cameron pointed out the road has been approved by the Ministry of Transportation as a haul route for heavy trucks carrying aggregate, adding the stretch of road running through the village sees more than 10,000 vehicles per day, with the peak hours being from 6 to 9 a.m. and 3 to 6 p.m., or the hours in which kids would be walking to and from school.

He also pointed out Caledon OPP has designated the stretch of road as one of its "hot spots," in terms of speed and accidents.

As well, Cameron pointed to the tragic deaths of two young girls on the road over the last couple of years.

"It is clearly a fearful community," he said.

There are problems with sightlines coming out of driveways on the hill because of retaining walls.

"This isn't safe for children those drivers can't possibly see," he observed.

Other problems he cited include the fact there's only one set of traffic lights in Caledon East (at the intersection of Old Church Road), which Cameron pointed out is some distance from the school. That intersection is a confusing one too, because it's at the access to the LCBO parking lot.

Cameron said there has been talk of the Town providing a crossing guard, but said the public works department had issued an email stating that would happen if the bus service was stopped. He said that mean STOPR was ready to cancel the bus without anything changing.

This reduction in service will impact 49 children from 36 families, Cameron said, adding he's heard some of these families are not willing to let their kids walk along the sidewalks on Airport Road. There has been talk of transferring students to St. Cornelius Elementary School, which is part of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board. Caledon East is a small school that can't afford to lose enrolment over something like this, he argued.

"It is not safe," he declared. "I would not allow my child to walk along Airport Road from Larry Street to Hilltop."

He also said youngsters living on the east side of the road are not going to walk 600 metres north to Old Church to cross at the lights, and then walk 600 metres south again. They are more likely to run across the road.

The items Cameron said he wants to see include flashing signs, both north and south of the school, telling motorists to reduce speed (he said such signs are in place around Herb Campbell, Palgrave and Macville Public Schools); having the area declared a community safety zone; signs that more clearly state that Larry and Marion Streets, along with Hilltop Drive are 40 km-h zones; efforts to look into safety programs, such as The Walking School Bus program; a pedestrian walkway across Airport Road at the Caledon Trailway.

Ford said she was in the area Monday, walking along Airport Road in the rain.

"I've never experienced what I experienced yesterday," she said, commenting on the number of heavy trucks going up and down the hill just feet from the sidewalk and ignoring the speed limit. She added she can't imagine kids walking along that route without safety measures in place, commenting that if the bus stopped before they're implemented, the board will regret it.

Kavanagh explained his proposal, commenting he didn't want Town officials coming back after a year and saying they couldn't resolve things.

Mississauga Trustee Sue Lawton said there are dangerous roads all over. If this area is exceptional, she said responsibility lies with Caledon council. She added if exceptions to busing policy is to be made in one area, there are others where they should be made too.

Mississauga Trustee Rick Williams agreed.

“Where is the fairness to all the other communities in the Region of Peel?” he asked.

“It’s a step in the right direction,” Martin-Robbins commented after trustees had dealt with the issue. He said he wasn’t completely sure the measures Cameron was calling for will solve all the issues, adding a long-term solution might be to ban trucks from the road.

“I haven’t had that discussion,” he said. “We’ll see if that’s achievable.”