

## Locals win battle in air-rail link

GO agrees to intensive study following public pressure

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Weston residents rallying against the proposed air-rail link scored a major victory last week when GO Transit decided to conduct a thorough environmental assessment (EA) after much public and political pressure.

"Now we have a reasonable amount of time ... to get the study done in a way that will be clear and transparent on the options," said Sullivan, local resident and member of the Weston Community Coalition.

Prior to the May 12 decision by GO board members to reclassify or "bump up" the EA process, the only route considered for the air-rail link from Union Station to Pearson Airport cutting through Weston.

Nearly 2,500 residents attended the April 28 public meeting to voice their concerns at potential street closures as a result of the high traffic expected from the air-rail link.

Transit officials offered a modified plan that would see two new tracks lowered into a trench through the Weston rail corridor keeping one street open.

But most residents weren't satisfied, wanting none of the streets closed and demanding a full individual EA to study alternative route for the airport link possibly along Hwy. 427.

Sullivan also suggested studying other modes of transportation such as a light rail transit system using existing rail corridors to better serve people across the city.

"We just don't need people to go from downtown to the airport," he said.

With added pressure by local politicians from all three levels of government, the GO board voluntarily agreed to bump up the EA process as soon as possible.

"The existing EA is being discontinued," confirmed GO spokesperson Ed Shea, adding the new process would take more time with completion not expected to begin until at least another year.

More consultation with the public and the Ministry of Environment will take place during the "full-blown" EA process.

"It'll add \$1 million to the cost," said Shea, on top of the \$250,000 already spent on the EA that looked into both GO's expansion of the Georgetown line and the air-rail link called Blue 22 to run along the same tracks.

Sullivan repeated that residents have no problem with increased GO Transit service explaining the reason they have asked for a full EA because of the Blue 22 line to be operated by the privately owned company, SNC Lavalin.

With plans to have 140 high-speed diesel trains travel back and forth per day, parents and teachers expressed concern for the safety of children.

MPP Joe Cordiano (York South-Weston) agreed, again stating the need to conduct a full EA to thoroughly examine all the issues pertaining to the air-rail link such as noise levels and possible land expropriation.

"The ARL (air-rail link) is going to expand traffic along the corridor to levels that aren't acceptable to the community," he told The G

While he wouldn't disclose his personal views on the air-rail link project, Cordiano noted the solution would become clearer once the process is under way with all the information available to the public.

He added his office is committed to providing that information for them to make an informed decision on what is best for the Weston community.

Ward 11 Councillor Frances Nunziata (York South-Weston) was more definitive in what she wanted to see come out of the EA process.

"The only thing that's acceptable is a tunnel through Weston and a stop in Weston," she said.

Other community members called for SNC Lavalin to step down as a consultant for the EA process citing conflict of interest.

"We're the ones, the people in Weston, that brought it up," said Nunziata, noting SNC Lavalin has since submitted a letter to the GC indicating its resignation as EA consultant.

Stephan Mehr, manager of transportation projects with SNC Lavalin, responded the company withdrew to eliminate the perceived conflict of interest seen by the public.

"We don't see it that way," said Mehr, adding they are still committed to helping the new EA consultants by providing background information collected over the past months.

"We're still a proponent of the process," he said, waiting to see what other alternative routes for the air-rail link will be provided. "We're an interested party."