

Local Railway Items from Ottawa Papers 2006

Tuesday 09/05/2006 Ottawa Citizen Kingston (CN) Brockville

CN reverses decision on whistles

No warnings at night at Brockville crossings

BY GRAHAM HUGHES

Residents of Brockville who have been troubled by the whistles of trains passing through their community will have eight hours of uninterrupted sleep from now on.

CN Rail announced yesterday that its trains will not sound their whistles at five grade crossings in the town between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. daily.

The overnight whistling, which had been dropped about seven years ago, was reinstated last July i, several months after Sabrina Latimer, 12, was hit by a train and killed when walking home from school with Samantha Lefebvre, 12, on Feb. 18,2005.

The unilateral decision reversed an agreement CN reached with the city in 1999 when Transport Canada approved a Brockville-CN application for a whistles exemption under the Railway Safety Act.

The girls stopped at the double-track crossing on Bartholomew Street, one of five in the city. They waited until a train passed then walked into the path of a second train going the other way. Sabrina was killed. Samantha's arm was broken.

The other three grade crossings include those at Oxford, Ormond and Perth streets.

The latest whistle restrictions follow a meeting in Montreal last fall with Hunter Harrison, CN's president and CEO, and Brockville Mayor Ben TeKamp.

Under the policy, the city will keep crossing guards at the Bartholomew, Ormond, Park and Perth street crossings between 7:30 and 9 a.m. and between 2:30 and 4:30 p.m. during the school year

Brockville police will maintain surveillance in the evenings and overnight at the grade crossings, including nearby service roads and will continue to work with railway police to patrol railway lines.

The city will post signs advising of the partial whistle ban at the grade crossings.

The railway and city are seeking Transport Canada funding to modify and/or install gates and warning devices as pedestrian barriers at the four crossings.

Any more fatalities or near misses will result in the overnight whistling being reinstated, the company has warned.

Wednesday 10/05/2006 Ottawa Citizen Ottawa Electric

With pictures of Bruce Dudley and streetcar.

Cars, buses hastened the demise of trusty streetcar

From 1870 to the early 1890's, horse-drawn cars formed the one-line Ottawa transit system.

By 1929, Ottawa's streetcar network served much of the area inside the then-city limits.

The wooden cars ran on rails around Confederation Square, along Wellington. Rideau and Elgin streets and, from 1897 to 1954, to Hull via the Inter-provincial Bridge.

Other lines, including the one to Britannia, didn't open until 1900, the year service was extended east to the Rifle Range, east of Rockclifflife Park.

The southernmost line crossed the Rideau Canal on Bank Street, but looped around several South Ottawa streets,

short of the Rideau River. Another line ran to the Experimental Farm.

On May 2,1959, the last of Ottawa's streetcars made its final run on the Britannia line, bringing an end to almost seven decades of streetcar service.

The history of the service is thoroughly documented in Bill McKeown's book. Ottawa's Streetcars, launched yesterday at OC Transpo headquarters.

Mr. McKeown, a native of Ottawa and resident of Japan since 1964, died there on Oct. 31,2004.

The lifelong railway enthusiast writes of a period of failed plans, successful plans, competitors and backroom deals.

Before the service officially ended, it had become a shadow of its once prosperous self, a victim of the bus, which offered greater route flexibility, and the growth in private cars.

The most extensive abandonment of routes came in 1939 under the influence of the French town planner Jacques Greber, retained by the federal government to give Ottawa the look of a capital city.

Mr. Greber, in his wisdom declared streetcars passe, noting that Paris had torn up about 270 streetcar lines.

"Greber conveniently forgot to add that Paris was, literally, honeycombed with rail transit lines, albeit under the streets in the form of the Metro, where Ottawa had no such alternatives," Mr. McKeown noted dryly.

The book also looks ahead to the promise of light-rail transit, basically using updated streetcars.

While the O-Train's single route runs north-south, with an extension to Barrhaven, experience from earlier days would indicate a need for what many today say is essential, an east-west route.

Ottawa resident Bruce Morgan, a volunteer with the Ottawa Streetcar 696 Restoration, is one of those.

The group has been working to restore a 1917 streetcar that could be a special attraction on any light-rail system by 2008, when they hope to complete their labour of love.

Mr. Morgan said an east to west route would be a dramatic change and improvement for the system.

A north-south route "won't benefit the majority of people of Ottawa at this time," Mr. Morgan said.

He predicts an east/west connection is only matter of time.

"The bottom line is always going to be dollars," said Mr. Morgan, who strongly believes that if Ottawa wants a successful rail-transit system, it needs a dedicated right-of-way, or should run underground, due to traffic congestion.

"I think, despite high costs there will be a tunnel under the city," he said.

The 256-page hardcover book is co-published by Railfare DC Books and the Canadian Railroad Historical Association.

It includes more than 300 photographs, collected by the author, of the city's streetcar history.

Tuesday 01/08/2006 Ottawa Citizen Alexandria Ottawa New

Rail Station Celebrates 40 years

VIA Rail's Ottawa train station celebrated its 40th anniversary yesterday. The station was designed by B. Parkin & Associates and was commissioned by the National Capital Commission. It was built in 1966 and won the Governor General's Massey Medal for Architecture in 1967.

Chunk falls from rail bridge, damages car.

Riverside Drive overpass checked two weeks ago by CN rail crew.

A Riverside Drive railway overpass — a piece of which shattered the windshield of an Ottawa motorist yesterday morning — was inspected two weeks ago, a Canadian National Railway official says.

Rush hour traffic near the train station ground to a halt when a chunk of concrete the size of a loaf of bread fell and damaged the Nissan Pathfinder of Glenn Brimacombe, chief executive officer of the Association of Canadian Academic Healthcare Organizations, who was stopped below the structure. He was not hurt.

But while CN said it has been inspecting and maintaining the overpass for an undisclosed number of years, it would not confirm it owns the bridge.

Yesterday morning, the company said the National Capital Commission owned the bridge, but by last night it had retracted that statement.

"We're reviewing the legal documents surrounding the ownership," said spokesman Mark Hallman.

Mr. Hallman said that the bridge underwent a visual inspection two weeks ago and it was deemed structurally sound for rail traffic.

Yesterday, another inspection also deemed it safe after the company chipped away pieces of loose concrete from the section that fell.

"We're continuing to assess the situation at the moment, but the bridge does not present a safety hazard," said Mr. Hallman, who added that the overpass is used solely by VIA passenger trains and not by trains carrying freight.

Police closed parts of Riverside Drive, near Tremblay Road, for more than five hours following the incident that occurred just before 9 a.m. Shortly thereafter, officials with VIA said they inspected the tracks and did not believe it would affect their service. By 2:45 p.m., all lanes of Riverside Drive were reopened.

The NCC owned the bridge in 1966, the same year Ottawa's train station was moved from downtown to the lot off Tremblay Road.

"Our records show that the land in this area was conveyed to the (former regional municipality of Ottawa-Carleton) in 1972, subject to an easement in perpetuity in favour of the railway," said Lucie Caron, a spokeswoman with the NCC.

Ms. Caron said CN is responsible for the tracks and installations on the land, such as the overpass.

In Ontario, bridges and overpasses must be inspected at least once every two years, according to the 1990 Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act.

In Ottawa, for example, more than 700 city-owned bridges undergo visual inspections and/or structural condition surveys by the Department of Public Works.

In October, just days after a Montreal-area overpass collapsed killing five people, the department at Ottawa City Hall reported to council that it was "confident that our structural assets are being maintained to adequate levels."