

Local Railway Items from Ottawa Papers - 2017

31/05/2017 CBC News

Smiths Falls

A City of Ottawa study has concluded overpasses or underpasses are needed at five rail crossings, including the site of a fatal crash between a double-decker city bus and a Via Rail passenger train four years ago - but Via and other levels of government will have to help cover the cost.

The study was commissioned last year after the Transportation Safety Board recommended the city once again consider the need for such crossings, in the wake of the fatal Barrhaven crash on Sept. 18, 2013.

The study, published Wednesday in advance of next week's meeting of the city's transportation committee, concludes the rail crossings at Woodroffe Avenue, the Transitway, Fallowfield Road, Merivale Road and Jockvale Road should all be grade separated "due to the existing and anticipated increases in road, Transitway and rail traffic."

Overpasses recommended at Woodroffe, Transitway and Fallowfield

The cost to revamp all five crossings is estimated at \$430 million, meaning the city will need to do the work in phases and will also need help from Via and the federal and provincial governments.

The city looked into grade separation at several level rail crossings more than a decade ago, but high costs, geotechnical issues and other factors led the city to decide against grade separation at those locations.

Overpasses are now recommended for the Woodroffe, Transitway and Fallowfield locations because of previously identified soil and hydrogeological conditions, while underpasses are recommended for Merivale Road and Jockvale Road.

The three overpasses should be the first projects tackled, followed by Merivale Road and then Jockvale Road, the study said.

But because of the number of pedestrians and cyclists at Jockvale, city staff say a multi-use path underpass for the crossing should be built in the near term 'Human lives would've been saved'

Daljit Nirman was a regular passenger on the number 76 bus that was involved in the 2013 crash, though he wasn't on the bus that day. He organized a petition with advocating for an overpass or underpass at the Fallowfield Road railway crossing.

"There should not be any further delays on this," Nirman said. "Human lives would've been saved. Many families would not have gone through that trauma they have gone through."

City staff are recommending the establishment of the Barrhaven Rail Safety Program, which would begin work on environmental assessments for the three potential overpass locations and the multi-use pathway.

Staff are also recommending delegating authority to Mayor Jim Watson, transportation committee chair Keith Egli and local councillor Jan Harder to seek funding from the federal and provincial government and Via for the design and construction phase of the projects.

In a statement Wednesday evening, Via said rail crossings are the responsibility of the body that has authority over the roads and that "the ultimate design and funding of these undertakings remains their decision."

The company said it has participated in funding studies and design activities, and it did provide some funding for the report on separated-grade crossings.

Egli said the staff report puts the city on solid footing to request funding from other levels of government.

"This is not something that we can do on our own," Egli said. "It's just a question of being ready to go when the funding opportunities come up. As you know, many of the funding programs that come at the provincial or federal levels, one of the requirements is you need to be shovel-ready."

04/07/2017 Montreal Gazette

Kingston (CN)

Lancaster

Dorval Teen Killed by VIA Train Only Weeks After Graduating

Lancaster Ontario - Only weeks after graduating from John Rennie High School, Tristan Morrisette-Perkins of Dorval was killed Monday after he was struck by a VIA Rail train while walking on a rail bridge in South Glengarry, about 100 kilometres southeast of Ottawa.

He was with two other teenagers who survived.

A 15-year-old boy was taken to hospital with minor injuries following the incident, which occurred minutes before 20:00 according to reports.

The third teenager at the scene was Tristan's 17-year-old cousin, Bailey Bilney-Morrisette, a member of the Lake St-Louis midjet AAA Lions hockey team.

Bilney-Morrisette was taken to a hospital but appears not to have sustained serious injuries.

VIA Rail Train 669 was en route from Montreal to Toronto.

The railway line reopened at about 22:30.

While the exact circumstances of Monday evening's tragedy remain unclear, Morrisette-Perkins, a talented hockey player who would have turned 17 this month, had apparently been staying at a nearby camping site.

Although school is out for the summer, the death of Morrisette-Perkins prompted John Rennie Principal Cristina Prata to send an email to graduate students and their families on Tuesday afternoon.

The school is offering emotional support to those who need it.

"Today, we received the sad news of the sudden passing of Tristan Morrisette-Perkins.

Tristan was a proud member of the 2017 graduating class, and we join his family, friends, and the rest of the John Rennie community in grieving his loss.

"John Rennie's doors are open, and administrative and guidance staff remain available should any member of the graduating class or school community require support during this difficult time," Prata wrote.

As news of the death circulated through social media Monday night, members of the West Island's tight-knit hockey community expressed profound sadness at the sudden loss of Morrisette-Perkins, top scorer with the West Island midjet AA Royals this season.

Many offered words of condolence to Tristan's family, his father Jason, mother Julie, and younger sister Allison.

Larry Sherrard, Tristan's minor hockey coach for many years, was shaken by the news.

Sherrard said that he'd heard that Tristan had suffered a lethal head wound from the passing train.

"It's every parent's nightmare," said Sherrard, whose family is close to the Morrisette-Perkins family.

Sherrard said Tristan was loved by his friends and teammates.

"Tristan was a great teammate, his teammates always loved him. He was a super, super, hard-worker. He was one of those guys who could go out there and compete, but he never brought the game home with him. That's what I liked about him. He gave you an honest effort, but didn't sulk or throw fits when the game ended."

Away from the rink, Sherrard described Tristan as a "pretty quiet kid."

"Tristan doesn't talk a lot. I drove him home many times after games and he rarely carried on a conversation."

"It is hard to imagine how something like this could happen to him just weeks after graduation and only a couple of weeks before his 17th birthday," Sherrard said.

"It's just too sad."

Montreal-area teen hit by train on railway bridge

A 16-year-old youth from the Montreal suburb of Dorval was killed Monday night when he was struck by a Via Rail train while he was walking on a rail bridge in South Glengarry, about 100 kilometres southeast of Ottawa. A second boy, 15, of South Glengarry township was taken to hospital with minor injuries after the incident, which occurred minutes before 8 p.m. The third youth, 17, of Montreal was not injured. Investigators are not identifying the victim until the family is notified. The railway line reopened at about 10:30 p.m.

14/07/2017 *Smiths Falls Record News* *Chalk River*

Smiths Falls

End of the line for trailblazing Smiths Falls locomotive engineer

It's the end of the line for long-time, Smiths Falls-area train engineer, Brenda Cummings.

At 56, Cummings has put the brakes on her railroading career as one of the first female locomotive engineers to retire from Canadian Pacific (CP) Railway in North America, an aspect of her career she said is "kind of cool."

Cummings started her trailblazing career in November 1988 as a brakeman (or should we say, brake-woman) with the St. Lawrence and Hudson Division of the CP Railway, something she never thought she would do.

Before life on the rails, Cummings worked in banking for 11 years.

But when she heard the railroad was hiring, she gave it a shot.

"I signed up as a joke," she said.

The joke soon turned into a reality when Cummings was hired on during a time when the railway first started to accept female employees aboard.

In 1988, Cummings was hired as one of five girls in Smiths Falls. But, she explained, those women all moved on to other positions, leaving her the only woman on the trains until 1994, when they hired two more.

"Those were fairly hard years when I was the only one," she said.

In 1990, Cummings qualified as a conductor.

Then in 1996, she was employed by the Ottawa Valley Railway (OVR), when the railway contracted with St. Lawrence and Hudson to operate the track from Smiths Falls to North Bay. There, in that year, she worked as a conductor.

In the late '90s Cummings started the intensive training to become a locomotive engineer - a job that she would do until her retirement in July 2017. And in 1999, Cummings qualified as an engineer for OVR.

To qualify as a locomotive engineer, a person must pass a series of exams and score at least 95 per cent on each test. Cummings' average score overall - 97 per cent.

When she had the option, Cummings went back to CP Railway, where she had to re-qualify under their own training qualifications.

Cummings' ability to become a locomotive engineer and build a career in the industry is thanks in large part to her supportive husband of 38 years, Brent Cummings.

Cummings said she would get calls for work that would take her away from home for sometimes 120 hours per week.

"That's how my husband learned how to use the washing machine," she joked.

In an email to the Record News, CP Railway wished Cummings all the best in her retirement and thank her for her service.

Will investors climb on board commuter rail plan?

An ambitious plan to connect the National Capital Region by a commuter rail system using old or abandoned rail lines has attracted the attention of foreign investors who have agreed to the first step in a feasibility study.

Moose Consortium envisions building a privately financed rail system with six branch lines stretching to Bristol, Wakefield and Montebello on the Quebec side, and Arnprior, Smiths Falls and Alexandria on the Ontario side. The system would be connected interprovincially by the Prince of Wales Bridge which crosses the Ottawa River at Lemieux Island.

In a letter of intent on July 1, a consortium of investors with ties to China, India, Singapore and elsewhere, agreed to offer "financial resources" and "technical expertise" to move the project forward. But no amount of money will be promised until investors have had a chance to review Moose's ground work, said Mir Ali, president of Consortia N.A., which partnered with LeMine Investment Group on the letter of intent.

The consortium of foreign investors has given itself 120 days to determine whether the project is solid enough to begin a full feasibility study.

"To move forward on a project of this size we need backup information. What's the population? What's the condition of the tracks? What are the agreements with the track owners? There's a whole lot of things that need to be in place," Ali said.

"We are also skeptical. It's a very good project, technically. Connecting all the communities is well and good ... (but) It's a long shot. It won't happen overnight. It has a lot of challenges."

Moose - the name comes from Mobility Ottawa Outaouais: Systems and Enterprises - is the baby of Joseph Potvin, a 58-year-old economist who views the unused rail lines as an untapped resource. In 2011, he sat down with four friends to brainstorm.

"We looked at a map of existing railways and said, 'Here's what we have. What can we come up with?'"

Potvin's vision is for the system "400 kilometres of tracks and 50 stations" to be completely privately funded. Commuter rail increases property values, the theory goes, and a portion of that increased value would be used to finance the railway. It's a modern version of how railways used to be financed, he said, with towns paying the railway company to build a station and provide access. Raising the money privately sidesteps much of the red tape involved in running a railway in the National Capital Region, with its multiple levels of government and jurisdictions.

But the outside-the-box business model has had trouble attracting interest. Ian Lee, a professor at Carleton University's Sprott School of Business, likens it to "snake oil."

"I'm a numbers guy and I look at how many people there are and I can't see the numbers adding up," Lee said.

"It's not that I'm opposed to mass transit, but it's very, very expensive. They say it's going to drive up the property values so much it's going to pay for itself.

No, it's not"

Rail companies typically have enormous capital expenses, Lee said, with around 20 per cent of their revenue going to maintain their tracks and rolling stock.

"We're talking billions of dollars. Not millions, billions," Lee said.

Moose has additional problems with some of its lines: The tracks to Bristol, Que., were removed several years ago while the line north of Wakefield was plagued by the washouts that permanently sidelined Wakefield's steam train.

Nor has Moose made friends with the City of Ottawa after complaining to the Canadian Transportation Agency when the city ripped out tracks at the Ottawa end of the Prince of Wales Bridge during LRT construction. The city isn't about to turn the bridge over to a private company.

"The City includes the rail line over the Prince of Wales bridge within its Transportation Master Plan (TMP) as part of the longterm transit network," said Vivi Chi, the manager of transportation planning, in an email to the Citizen.

"This northerly extension of the Trillium Line to Gatineau will need to be developed at a future date because as per the TMP, the City's current priority is the first two stages of the Confederation Line and the Trillium Line extension to Riverside South. The City has not received a detailed service plan from Moose to review at this point."

And yet, it's the cross-river link that Moose's new investors see as key to the project, said Ali of Consortia N.A.

"It cannot be done unless there is one section that economically makes sense to take it up first," he said. "That is from Gatineau to Bayview. It's also the most expensive one because the Prince of Wales bridge requires \$50 ... \$60 ... \$70 million in capital expenditure."

Despite the obstacles, Potvin remains undaunted. People in the National Capital Region didn't give up on railways, he said. The railways were stripped away in the 1950s-era redesign by urban planner Jacques Gréber. Potvin sees a future commuter who rides into downtown Ottawa from Arnprior, heads up to Wakefield after work for a show at the Black Sheep Inn, then heads home to Arnprior, all by commuter train.

"Rail did not fall out of use," Potvin said. "Rail was taken out of use."

"I'm an economist. It bugs me when I see perfectly valuable resources sitting there unused."