



Rail-link protest still chugging

Activist from Weston primes for another fight over train to airport

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TESS KALINOWSKI
TRANSPORTATION REPORTER

On the face of it, Mike Sullivan and his Weston neighbours have already made significant gains in their fight to stop their community from being split apart by a train that's supposed to connect downtown Toronto with the airport.

Transportation planners laughed three years ago when the Weston Community Coalition, chaired by Sullivan, suggested that, at the very least, such a train should stop in their neighbourhood.

"They said it would slow the trains down," recalls Sullivan.

The latest version of the Union Station-to-Pearson train plan, unveiled by Metrolinx last week, includes not just a stop, but a GO station in Weston. The same tracks will facilitate all-day, two-way GO service to Brampton and Georgetown. The proposal also involves tunnelling the track in the most intrusive section under King and Church Sts. (in the Jane St. and Lawrence Ave. area) and connecting nearby John St. over the tracks with a footbridge.

So why is Sullivan, 56, again rallying the neighbours against a proposal that could be reality in five years? Is the labour rep for the Communications, Energy & Paperworkers Union of Canada – a guy who has bargained with media companies like the CBC and *Toronto Star* – just spoiling for a fight?

The question draws a soft chuckle from the father of seven, who has lived on Church St. for 16 years, coached Little League there and ran for federal office.

"If it was just me – I don't live right on the tracks. But it's not. It's the whole community," he says. "I want Peter and his sister to not be harmed by this thing," says Sullivan, nodding toward the proprietors of the Peter Anan Thai Restaurant, where he is sitting.

He stresses that he's not against the air-rail link. But he can't accept the notion of big, noisy diesel engines whooshing through the neighbourhood, metres from schools, homes and churches.

"If you want to make it world-class, it's got to be electric," he says.

Metrolinx envisions 220 trains a day on that corridor, 140 of which will be the airport runs, according to general manager Colleen Bell. The air-rail link will be composed of trains about 52 metres long.

To put it in perspective, 50 trains currently pass through Weston each day, compared with 80 through Mimico, Bell said.

Dan Harris is not a member of the Weston Community Coalition, but he thinks Sullivan, his friend and neighbour, has a point.

"In this day and age, it's hard to understand how you could build such a train and not make it electric," says Harris, a labour arbitrator and lifelong Weston resident. His is among the multi-generation families living in the area, which still charms Sullivan.

"It's like a little slice of Ingersoll stuck in Toronto," he says.

But poverty has moved in as factory jobs moved out with companies like Moffat and CCM.

"There's not been a lot to cheer about," he says.

Sullivan admits to heartbreak over his failed run for the NDP in the last federal election. But the loss of York South-Weston to incumbent Alan Tonks won't stop him from trying again: "Even if I don't win, it raises a lot of healthy democratic issues that wouldn't otherwise come to the surface."

Union colleague Maureen Dawson says Sullivan will be able to build on the experience next time. "People are so happy to do things for him. He really believes in what he's doing," she said.

York South-Weston's MPP, Liberal Laura Albanese, says she fought alongside Sullivan to ensure the air-rail link included a stop and a tunnel and as few closed streets as possible. She thinks the latest proposal is a fair solution.

"I have a great deal of respect for Mike and for the views of the members of the Weston Community Coalition," she says. "He's very focused. He's done a good job. He thinks for his community. He wants more from the project and he's sticking up for that."