

SAULT STE. MARIE

THE SAULT STAR



Four-laning Highway 17 N essential for outlying communities

This resolution, he said, is focused on the two-lane highway closure issue and the inability for some to access services, health care and others during long periods of closures.

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Highway 17 North was closed 11 times this winter. City council is advocating for a four-laning project. Postmedia

City council is calling on all provincial political parties to prioritize Highway 17 north improvements in their upcoming election platforms.

Mayor Christian Provenzano will draft correspondence to local candidates running in the upcoming election setting out council's position.

It's an opportunity to put candidates and their parties on the hot seat and get official positions on the issue, said Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker.

He told council the motion is directly a result of the number of highway closures that have occurred during the past year, and even more importantly, this past winter. The highway was closed on at least 11 occasions due to inclement weather or collisions, making it impossible on the two-lane highway route for people who live north of the city to travel into Sault Ste. Marie for groceries, health-care needs or other essentials.

That's unacceptable since Sault Ste. Marie is the urban centre for the region, he said.

"We have to be accessible to our surrounding communities in order for people to protect their well-beings and continue on safely. It is crucial the highway not be closed for extended periods of time as it has been this past winter," Shoemaker told council.

Christian added that he's familiar with part of the area north of the city, and last summer there were also several accidents that closed the two-lane highway, making it impossible for people to enter onto the highway or get in or out of their driveways, a problem that needs to be fixed.

The Ontario government has recently announced a plan to direct \$82 billion toward transportation improvements over the next year, and Shoemaker argues not all of that money should be spent in the GTA, as is often the case with provincial transportation dollars.

While this motion does not refer to other modes of transportation that could also be used to travel the route to Batchawana or Wawa, Shoemaker told The Sault Star he supports passenger rail service in the area, as well.

In February, Ward 1 Coun. Paul Christian and Shoemaker moved a motion calling for someone from Sault Ste. Marie to be appointed to the provincial government's new Northern Transportation Task force. That resolution was passed unanimously by council.

The task force was announced as a method to focus on transportation needs and opportunities in the region.

After the taskforce was announced, The Sault Star reported it didn't include anyone from Sault Ste. Marie or the Algoma District.

"That is seriously lacking in Sault Ste. Marie and should be part of an overall transportation discussion," Shoemaker said.

This resolution, he said, is focused on the two-lane highway closure issue and the inability for some to access services, health care and others during long periods of closures.

Improvements have been made to Highway 17 east, with one of the most significant improvements made with the four-laning of the highway from Sault Ste. Marie through to Desbarats more than a decade ago.

“Certainly that’s a good stretch that was double laned (in each direction) and I think we can look at Highway 17 north now and chip away at it and it gets portions double laned in the future,” he said.

Shoemaker would also like to see the return of an environmental assessment that would see a bypass created from the east end of Highway 17, through to Second Line and Black Road.

“That EA process was cancelled under the Liberals and not restarted under the (Progressive) Conservatives and I think we can blame both of them right now, but we need to work on improving our highway connectivity through Sault Ste. Marie,” he said.

Ward 5 Coun. Corey Gardi also recommended that a letter be sent to the federal government, since the Trans-Canada Highway also falls under federal jurisdiction.