


# Millroy: It was a mistake plain and simple

By **Doug Millroy** - November 17, 2018

# dougMILLROY

In writing my column in this city over the past 43 years, I always have attempted to avoid referring to anyone as being stupid.

However, I have had no problem pointing out that something that a person, group, organization, government or one of its arms has done is stupid, sometimes really stupid.

<b>RAAM</b> Rapid Access Addiction Medicine Clinic	<b>What is the RAAM Clinic?</b> The RAAM clinic is a Rapid Access Addictions Medicine Clinic for people looking for help with their addictions. <b>Please call for an appointment</b> <b>705-759-3434 Ext. 7200</b> <small>A collaborative initiative of North East LHIN funded organizations.</small>	
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A case in point: The city's public works and traffic department's disfiguring of the intersection of Albert and East Streets.

I wrote about this extensively and members of the public cried out as well after realizing the traffic travesty that had been foisted upon us, the department seeming to have thrown common sense to the curb.

To refresh your memory:

For 40 or 50 years previous, traffic in the left lane coming off Albert Street turned north on East Street where there was an easy split that allowed it to go either east or west on Wellington Street.

Traffic in the right lane could easily turn south on East Street or turn left to carry on up East Street to Wellington Street East.

Two lanes of traffic moving from Albert Street, up east to Wellington, with easy split-offs to to Wellington east and west and also East Street – what could be simpler?

Well, it turned out simple was the word that shortly was to be involved.

The line painters from Guelph ignored the lines that had been in place and painted new ones, resulting in a totally different configuration.

The left lane on Albert Street was turned into a lane that took traffic up east street only to Wellington West. The right lane allowed traffic to turn right onto East Street but also to carry on to Wellington East.

The lane on East Street previously used by right-lane traffic coming off Albert Street now became a dedicated lane for traffic heading north on East Street, although the yield sign remained in place.

It was a mistake plain and simple by the line painters and one that I believe traffic management in most municipalities would have simply told the line painters, "Fix it."

But not in Sault Ste. Marie.

Actually, although I had written earlier about the screw-up at the intersection that occurred in 2015, I didn't find out about how it came about until June the following year.

My attempts to get the rationale for the change from Andy Starzomski, manager of traffic and communications, had proved futile.

But eventually, as I wrote in a column on June 18, 2016, the discussion moved up a couple of notches.

First Susan Hamilton-Beach, deputy commissioner of Public Works and Transit (PWT), replied to me, and then Commissioner Larry Girardi, who objected to my referring to the new line configuration as a screw-up, waded in.

Hamilton-Beach supplied the information as to how the "screw-up" occurred.

"The change occurred as our line-painting contractor in 2015 painted the lines as he best understood the area should work," she said in an email. "Through the course of PWT review, the contractor was given the opportunity to provide his rationale behind this alignment. Staff agreed with the explanation provided.

"As questions were raised by the public and other Staff, it was decided to get an expert opinion on how it is best painted."

She said the traffic engineering firm CIMA was asked to review all historical paint drawings and the 2015 drawing and provide PWT with their recommendation as to the best lane configuration for the area. After a review by its team, the conclusion was to keep the current new configuration.

Girardi said:

"The contractor that was hired to paint lines is very proficient in putting lines down and understanding traffic flow and they identified what they considered to be a non-conformance with the original line painting and they proceeded to correct it.

"Long story short we have confirmation from a traffic engineer that what was painted is correct and if an accident was to happen the traffic engineer is who we rely on when we are in the court of law.

"Mr. Millroy, please understand that it was not our intention to create confusion or cause grief to the users. This is a change and it is sometimes difficult to make change happen. In this case we are obligated to take the advice of our experts and protect the city from liability.

I found it hard to believe that the traffic people in this city would pay a consultant from outside the city to review how lanes should be laid down at one of our intersections.

I thought Garardi's liability argument was specious.

And I also found it hard to believe that so-called traffic experts would go along with the new configuration. However, forced to go the Freedom of Information route to get information that any city department should be willing to supply, I found out CIMA was working with information that could only be described as faulty because of what it didn't contain.

Cut off at about the entrance to the medical clinic on East Street, the drawings provided CIMA show only the intersection of Albert and East Streets. To present a proper picture of the movement of traffic in the area, it was necessary to include the intersection of East and Wellington Streets. That would have shown CIMA how the two lanes of traffic from Albert Street previously flowed smoothly up East Street to connect with both eastbound and westbound traffic on Wellington Street.

From the material the city provided, anyone who didn't know the area would assume under the configuration presented by the city that the two lanes from Albert, along with the one carrying traffic from East Street, would be heading directly north for some distance.

So CIMA, in its ignorance, even went so far as to suggest removing the yield sign on East Street as it approaches the traffic coming from Albert which, of course, would only lead to disaster. Obviously realizing this, PWT has ignored the recommendation. The yield sign remains.

I am bringing up this problem intersection again now in the hope that the new council will step up and do something about it. The previous council didn't seem to have the will to go up against a city department, even when the mistake that had been made was so obvious.

I don't expect any help from Mayor Christian Provenzano. When I had a discussion with him about it in September 2016, he admitted "it was easier before; that's the way we did it for 40 years."

And he said the first time his wife came home from work after the lines had been changed she said she didn't know what they did but that it didn't make any sense.

However, he said that while he would not direct the lines be changed back to the way they were, he would be surprised if something didn't come from council asking for an explanation about how it all came to pass.

Casting modesty aside, I thought I had pretty well done that.

Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker, who travelled the route daily, described it as "crazy" and said he thought "it was way more dangerous the way the lines currently are than the way they were."

However, he said while he supported putting the lines back to the way they were, from the feedback he had gotten from his colleagues he believed it would be futile to bring forward such a motion.

I regret now not having brought this up prior to the city election. It would have been nice to know what the candidates thought about the situation.

Now, safely ensconced in their seats in council chambers, they might be like their predecessors in not wanting to rock the boat.

### **Doug Millroy**

After 61 years in the news business, 41 of them associated with The Sault Star as editor, Doug continues to share his passion for writing as a columnist since retirement.