

Council Q&A – WEEK 6 – What to do about transportation

By **Dan Gray** - April 23, 2022 @ 11:39 am



This is week six of our series highlighting your questions to our Councillors and Mayor in lead up to the end of their term, or in some of the cases, the chances at Fall re-election.

As always, SaultOnline reached out to the community for a question to send to all Councillors as well as Mayor Provenzano on Monday. Each respondent was given until Noon, today, to provide their answer. Our reporter also tracks at the bottom the responses received and not received in terms of answering the constituents' questions.



This weeks questions revolve around transportation in our community –

What is your plan for our roads in Sault Ste. Marie and making transportation more efficient?

Do you support our move to more active transportation?

What will you do to help clear the congestion on Great Northern Road?

Out of Mayor Provenzano and 10 councillors, only three of them responded. Here are their answers.

Ward 2 Councillor Luke Dufour–

My plan for the roads in SSM is to focus on assessment growth so that we can reinvest a portion of that growth into replacing and resurfacing more of the roads that have been neglected by a static municipal budget line. Our roads didn't deteriorate overnight and it is a systemic issue finding a sustainable way to redo more roads every year. The Federal/Provincial governments have provided other sources of funding that have helped SSM do more roads this past term than would have otherwise been possible with our municipal budget and its static level of growth.

Transportation becomes more efficient, the more folks use transit. I will continue support the partnerships that City Transit has made with a variety of organizations to help provide their clients with use of City Transit. We have a good Capital investment plan in our Transit system and I will continue to support it.

Yes, I support Active Transportation plans. Many folks are seeing how streets can serve the needs of all constituents. The Hub Trail network and Downtown Multi Use Paths have grown in popularity. These investments have been well supported by grants and should continue. The Bay St renovation has been a great addition to the Downtown, as has the Northern Ave road diet. Slower road speeds are safer for everyone and do not result in a meaningful reduction in commute times.

Short of building a by-pass for the Trans Canada highway, there is not much anyone can do to clear 'congestion' from Great Northern Road. I use the term congestion loosely because though there are more cars there than anywhere in SSM, it pales when compared to similar arterial roads throughout the Province. Great Northern road does not operate anywhere near its capacity for the vast majority of the time. Building any more roads to 'relieve' traffic at Great Northern is also ineffective, as it will simply increase demand and leave us with the same traffic levels over time. There is more than one way to get around the City, not all roads lead to Great Northern. We should be spending our limited Capital budget fixing the roads we have not trying to clear cars from the Trans Canada highway.

Ward 3 Councillor Matthew Shoemaker –

What is your plan for our roads in Sault Ste. Marie and making transportation more efficient?

As noted in many recent council meetings, the road issue is exacerbated by the weather we have been getting. Very wet autumns and cold winters lead to lots of potholes. There is little we can do about the weather, but we can do more to better maintain the roads annually. Before 2021, our road construction/repair budget had not increased in over 20

years. There was occasionally more funding available through the province or the federal government, but our base road repair budget has been stagnant for a long time. This needs attention and is one of the areas where we can make a difference. That said, if we start increasing our annual budget now and continue to do so for several years in a row, it will still take the better part of a decade for the impact to be felt. We simply can't make up for all those years of under-funding, but we can make sure that we don't make the problem worse by continuing to under-fund the roads for the next generation.

In terms of making traffic more efficient, I think this is an area the city can do a few things very easily. First off, we should remove any unwarranted traffic signals. All these signals do is make vehicles idle and wait when there is no traffic to be seen. Specifically, the light at Dennis Street and Albert Street should be removed, as should the light at Church Street and Queen Street. There are others around town too, but those two are ones that come to mind immediately. Second, we can make existing lights more functional. For example, if Church Street, south of Wellington Street, had 2 way traffic, that would eliminate the need for a light at Pim and Wellington. Also, the opening of Passchendaele Lane will make better use of the existing light at Northern Ave and Pine Street. Finally, I opposed the light being installed at Superior Bakery/Walmart. However, Council as a whole approved the light. Once that was done, I moved to ensure that the light served the most businesses as possible, and ensured that Superior Bakery and the RBC Dominion Securities building next to it had access to that light, and worked to ensure traffic coming out of Walmart was able to turn left there. It was unfathomable to me that we would approve a light at that intersection but not make the best use of it that we possibly could. Finally, we should make traffic signals flash yellow after 11 p.m. to prevent anyone from having to wait at an intersection that nobody else is using when there is no other traffic around. I proposed this in 2016 but it was rejected by Council.

Do you support our move to more active transportation?

Yes I do. In fact, I have been very vocal about my desire to see the Hub Trail extended into the old west end (James Street neighbourhood). I worked, successfully, to have the City make that project the top active-transpiration priority, and am hopeful that with new federal funding, we will see it become a reality in 2023. We also need to work on extending the hub trail into Bay View and Buckley subdivisions as they are left out of our current trail network.

What will you do to help clear the congestion on Great Northern Road?

Re-examine the Sackville extension with a connection to industrial park to alleviate all the traffic on Great Northern between Second and Third Line. I am not sure this is the best fix, but it is the only one I have seen proposed thus far and so I think it warrants another look. I would also like to see more lobbying of the Provincial Government to create a Highway 17

by-pass around the city so that all the truck traffic that was headed north didn't have to drive through our busiest business district.

Ward 5 Councillor Matt Scott-

Efficient transportation is a difficult task to tackle but I believe I have done a good job in the past several years supporting ideas and projects that contribute bettering our roads for all residents. I often lean on the expertise of our engineering department to guide us in a sure direction regarding efficiency and believe the staff in that department to be second to none in the province.

As far as active transportation goes, I do support the move to increase active transportation as I think there are a lot of benefits behind it (physical health, mental health, environmental being three main benefits). I think it's important to recognize unique challenges we face being in Northern Ontario and our approach to active transportation should be collaborative. Bike lanes are important, but we also live in a community where it isn't always feasible to have lanes on both sides of major streets so taking a smart approach to this is in the best interest of the riders as well as the drivers.

I certainly don't think adding lights will help with congestion on Great Northern Road but I'm also hopeful that as our city grows in our northern portion that we will appreciate this problem is not improving. The Sackville Road extension should be a priority project for our city and it is one I will pursue.

Do you have a question you want asked of your councillors in the next 28 weeks leading up to the election?

We will start updating the scorecard on a bi-weekly basis, showing who is answering and who is not answering your questions.

As members of the public declare their intentions, we will ask them the same questions and give them the same opportunities to speak through out site to you, the constituent.

Next week, Ozzie Grandinetti will be the first to have the option to answer all the previous questions to this one.

Let SaultOnline know and our staff will do their best to get answers for not just you, but the community as a whole.

Thank-you for choosing SaultOnline/ONNTV as your source of news in Sault Ste. Marie and the surrounding area.

Dan Gray

A native of Centre Wellington, Ontario, I have worked as a freelance journalist all over the province of Ontario. Most recently I ran a local news page in my hometown of Fergus, Ontario. I look forward to bringing my experience covering breaking news, municipal matters and general interest stories to the team at Superior Media and communities we serve.

