

Millroy: Traffic Light Woes

By **Doug Millroy** - July 19, 2022 @ 7:00 am

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Don Barill is recycling a letter he sent to city councillors in October 2017 in which he suggested the Sault could improve its efforts to combat climate change by addressing the mass generation of CO2 emissions from idling motor vehicles.

“With the price of petroleum increased a whopping 48% over last year, and a community of 54% senior residents living on fixed incomes, I believe it is long overdue for our city managers to consider the letter I sent to all of you in 2017,” he now writes.



“A changed approach can help all city drivers financially as well as improve our efforts to control climate change. It is time.”

Barill believes the goal of the city’s traffic department seems to be to slow down traffic, with non-synchronized traffic lights holding up traffic at all times of the day with no change between rush hour and through the night.

He believes flashing lights at certain times of the day and near construction sites, as is the case in some other centres, are the answer.

“Every time local drivers have to stop and wait while the lights change, they are contributing considerable emissions which contribute to climate change for the world, our children and our grandchildren,” he wrote.

“Should you happen to travel in our sister city — Sault Michigan — after 10 PM in the summer months and after 9 PM in the winter months, you will observe that all the major routes have cycled the traffic lights to flashing.”

He has one reply to his latest approach to council.

Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker told Barill he was 100 percent right and that in 2014, when he was running for council, he said he wanted lights to flash yellow at night (like in Soo Michigan).

"Then when I got in, I actually proposed it, and it passed, but the day before it was to be implemented, council reversed its decision," he said in his email to Barill.

"We could be doing so much more to facilitate the movement of traffic but everyone is scared to try something new."

Barill claims the simple change to flashing lights at certain times of the day and better synchronization of traffic lights would reduce the amount of CO2 emission by our motor vehicles considerably.

He lists the lights at Wellington Street East and Churchill Blvd by the Metro Store and at McNabb and Pentagon as examples, questioning whether lights there are needed at all. I think he is on to something and our traffic people, whose decisions have not made many friends in the city, should take a look at it.

They did make some good suggestions a few years back in regard to the elimination of some traffic lights and council accepted all except the one at Goulais Avenue and Wallace Terrace, where the ward councillors won the day.

They shouldn't have. There is not enough traffic there at any time of the day to merit anything more than flashing lights, if even that.

Barill's letter came my way just before I began get interested in what was going to happen to U.S. President Joe Biden's climate policy now that Joe Manchin, a conservative in liberal clothing and a member of Biden's party, had essentially shot it down by saying he wouldn't support it in the Senate, which sees the Democrats and Republicans tied in seats.

The evident death of climate change legislation came after the Supreme Court handed down a decision that sharply limited the Environmental Protection Agency's authority to regulate carbon dioxide emissions from power plants, the nation's second-largest source of greenhouse gases.

And a story in The Washington Post quoted experts as saying that the gutting of those policies now makes it all but impossible for the United States to meet Biden's target of cutting the nation's emissions 50% from 2005 levels by 2030. That is the amount that scientists say the United States must reduce its emissions in order to do its part to avoid the most catastrophic near-term impacts of climate change.

According to the story, vehicles are the nation's largest source of planet-warming pollution and experts say that rapidly ending the use of gasoline-powered cars is crucial to avoiding

the worst impacts of climate change. The president has directed the Environmental Protection Agency and Transportation Department to write a transformative new regulation to rein in tailpipe pollution and accelerate the nation's transition to electric vehicles.

This brought me to the point where I had to acknowledge that I have become a polluter of the environment.

With the start of COVID, my wife Barbara and I, with really nothing to do for entertainment, took to the highways, travelling east, north and every country road we could find three or four times a week.

Our gasoline bill for the month of May was \$640, well above our previous high of \$480. We managed to cut back to \$422 last month.

Now the high price of gasoline has indeed contributed greatly to our high expenditure, but putting on a high volume of kilometers is without a doubt the main culprit.

The travelling has taught us a lot about the area in which we live, finding country roads and massive amounts of farmland we didn't know existed.

Are we willing to give this up, the only entertainment we really have?

It is hard to say. Until the \$640 cost in May we had thought we weren't doing that badly as we spend most of our time on the country roads, traveling between 55 and 65 kilometres an hour. All I can say is that there will be a cutback but I am not about to put a number on it.

After all, speaking for myself, it is not as if at age 90 my entertainment options are endless.

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.