



DELEGATION TO COUNCIL REPRESENTING THE GUELPH HIKING TRAIL CLUB

DATE: MARCH 22ND, 2023

AGENDA ITEM: COUNCIL WORKSHOP FROM DEPT. OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Mayor, Councillors and City Staff,

My name is John Fisher, President of the Guelph Hiking Trail Club.

I think these workshops are excellent and really appreciate the efforts of city staff to explain in more detail the role of the various city departments so that our elected representatives are better equipped to make decisions about the city business.

Many of you know over the last 2 years I have advocated for greater transparency by GJR and a greater role for the corporation to contribute to the public good. I can tell you that we are very appreciative of the efforts GJR has made to work with us and to put in structures that allow the trail user groups to communicate directly with GJR. For example GJR has agreed to meet with the Trail User Groups each year in April before the GJR annual report to council to talk about GJR's "public good" record and plans over the coming year.

However I still feel the way GJR conducts its business is something of a mystery and there is a certain amount of "greenwashing" to justify its activities and avoid the consideration of alternatives. Guelph tends to romanticise about the railway and laud the fact it is one of only 2 municipally owned shortline railways in Canada. Is that a good thing, or has Guelph been slow in getting the memo and being more ambitious in considering alternatives like developing a Guelph Railway that would be the envy of every mid size city in Canada?

So I would just like to propose some alternate questions that should be posed to GJR during the workshop.

Sustaining our Future

We are told every tank car takes 3-4 trucks off the road and associated reductions in greenhouse gases.

- GJR can't claim to be taking trucks off the road by simply counting railcars. The GJR business model is heavily weighted in favour of encouraging transloading locations in Guelph, (PDI, Traxxside, Agcentena) . The more successful GJR is, the more trucks travel through Guelph to transloading stations serviced by GJR.
- GJR's biggest customer's prime business is bulk rail to truck trans loading terminals, encouraging more trucks to Guelph. There are storage silos, warehouse space (Including Hazardous storage) in the east and the west to facilitate that transloading.

- The biggest customer also serves its customers by cleaning tank cars. It operates 3 tanker washing locations in Guelph, 2 in the east and 1 in the west. Do empty rail tankers come to Guelph for cleaning so they can be sent off to other producers for refilling. How is that contamination neutralised?
- Does GJR get the same rate for moving and storing empty rail cars as a full one?
- Is this the kind of business that Green Guelph should be promoting ?
- Has the liability of spillage been appropriately assessed given the 6 major road crossings through the city and the rail lines route adjacent to the river systems. Conditions of the track in some parts of the city are in need of repair. Has the liability been appropriately assessed for those sections? Eg. North of Woodlawn to Bump stop.

Powering our future

GJR mentions that some businesses rely solely on rail for their existence. Not surprising as trans loading is their business.

- Is the rail option for other businesses a nice to have or must have?
- 18 customers, 6 provide the majority of the revenue 1 the most.
- Is that healthy to be so reliant on a single customer.
- How many businesses decide to locate in Guelph without rail access?
- Direct access to two major railways CN and CPR through GJR is a luxury few businesses require. Does GJR get a premium in rate setting for providing that choice? Is it necessary?
- The trans loading business seems to be booming. Do we need to be doing that on GJR property in Guelph? What about out developing it outside of Guelph on GJR property?
Customers like the fact that GJR is owned by the city.
- Of course they do. They know that the city is subject to more influences than profit and subject to pressures not usual in a business to business relationship.

Navigating our Future

GJR wants us to consider the future of passenger rail opportunities between the north West industrial area through to the south east.

- What if we considered a pedestrian/cycling TRAILWAY instead?
- How much tourism revenue would that bring to the city.
- How could the city save in infrastructure projects if they already had an exclusive protected trailway as a prime ATN through the city.
- The existing rail line is used by GJR maybe 20minutes a day. Wouldn't 24 hour useage and access to the RoW be a more productive use of the real estate?
- Why is it important that businesses have direct access to both CN and CP using the GJR ?
- Could GJR function with an east arm and a west arm and give up the diagonal route through the city?

- Consider the improvements to the downtown trail that would be possible without the rail line posing a restrictive barrier.

Financial Implications

GJR helps justify its contribution to Guelph by citing the annual dividend of about \$ 100,00

- The province sets the rate per acre for RoW. GJR paid the city \$6703 for 52 acres in 2021. Puslinch \$7800. For GJR RoW.
- Is GJR sitting on land that could be a better revenue generator than a rail RoW? (e.g.Siding from Alice to York Rd.)
- What does GJR cost the city by being a major factor in so many infrastructure projects in the city.

Conclusion

I am trying to be productive in asking these questions. I just want to point out some alternative points of view that should be considered when we talk about GJR.

Sincerely

John Fisher

President Guelph Hiking Trail Club