

Next: a ring road for Shelburne

FIFTY YEARS AGO, Orangeville had only recently got its long-awaited Highway 10 bypass, and the road's through traffic no longer had to use Broadway and First Street.

It wasn't until much later that the equally long-awaited southern bypass for Highway 9 was built, and then only as a county road, the Mike Harris government having unceremoniously dumped part of Highway 9 onto the property taxpayers of Dufferin and Wellington counties. Thankfully, then-premier Ernie Eves managed to come up with a portion of the cost for the new arterial road that allowed the Town to ban trucks on Broadway and construct an attractive median that helped bring new life to the downtown area.

Unfortunately, the same problem of heavy trucks and high volumes of through traffic ruining the downtown area continues unabated in Shelburne, which now has about the same population Orangeville had when work began on its Highway 10 bypass.

Why is this the case? We see several explanations, the main one being transfer of highway planning in this part of Ontario from the transportation ministry office in Owen Sound to one in London.

Before that happened, the Province built a Highway 24 bypass around Horning's Mills, widened Highway 10/89 between Shelburne and Primrose and began widening 10 north of Orangeville.

Today's the MTO's West Region office in London has no plans for improving Highway 10 anywhere, with the sole exception of a left turn lane at Mono's 20 Sideroad. That office either has no knowledge or couldn't care less concerning the unique need of Dufferin's north-south highways to accommodate the huge weekend traffic volumes created by Greater Toronto Area residents heading north to places like Wasaga and Sauble beaches and the Blue Mountain skiing area.

Assuming that the needed transfer of authority to MTO's Central Region office in Downsview will never happen, it's going to be up to Dufferin County Council to deal with the situation by creating two bypasses/truck routes for Shelburne at a small fraction of the cost of Orangeville's two bypasses.

The Highway 10 bypass/truck route will obviously have to go from the cemetery corner north of town east a little more than a kilometre to Dufferin 124 (formerly Highway 24). It will be roughly half the length of Orangeville's Highway 10 bypass and won't require building over a landfill site.

Similarly, the Highway 89 bypass/truck route will require only about three kilometres of new pavement along Amaranth's 30 Sideroad and Fourth Line ? a tiny fraction of the cost of Orangeville's south bypass with its huge bridge over the Credit River.

As we see it, there should be no need for the county's politicians to delay action on the two bypasses, and every need for Dufferin-Caledon candidates in next June's provincial election to take stands on the issue, ideally winning commitments from their party leaders to at least provide aid through the government's infrastructure fund and ideally cover the whole cost of the long-needed Highway 10 bypass.

A good starting point would be for the outgoing County Council to start the ball rolling by approving purchase of a right-of-way between Melancthon's second and third lines and setting a target date for the 10 bypass's completion.

And we think Dufferin and its neighboring counties of Wellington, Grey and Simcoe should join in pressing the province on the need to relieve their property taxpayers of at least some of the cost of maintaining County 109 between Orangeville and Harriston and County 124 between Shelburne and Collingwood, neither of which are used mainly by traffic generated locally.

One thing for sure is that the Shelburne bypasses and their elimination of trucks on Main and Owen Sound streets would lead to a rebirth of the town's downtown area.