



October 2016 Report

A MUCH NEEDED WAKE-UP CALL

The August derailment of a CP Rail freight train on our doorstep is a wake-up call. It underscores the urgent need for improvements to the way Canada regulates rail safety. Unlike the train in Lac Mégantic that killed 47 residents and decimated a 1 km radius of the town, we were fortunate that the accident, at Dupont and Howland, wasn't more serious and only a small amount of diesel fuel was spilled.

But we may not be so lucky next time.

That's why Rail Safety First has been working to advocate for safe, transparent and accountable rail in our community.

The CP Rail line that goes through the heart of Toronto has quietly become a pipeline on wheels. From only 500 car loads in 2009 to an estimated 340,000 in 2015, oil train traffic in Canada has increased by a whopping 67,000%. In addition, dozens of other dangerous goods, including chlorine, sulphuric acid, gasoline and anhydrous ammonia, are regularly carried along this corridor.

WHAT IS BEING DONE?

The volunteers at Rail Safety First – your neighbours -- have been working to do something about that. They have established strong connections with politicians and officials at all levels of government and they are often called on for comment by the news media.

One tangible example of the progress that has been made was a town hall meeting last May, moderated by Councillor Josh Matlow, at which Transport Minister Marc Garneau answered questions from area residents. The meeting, organized by MPs Chrystia Freeland and Carolyn Bennett, also drew other MPs – Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister), Arif Virani and Kate Young (Parliamentary secretary to the Transport Minister) – along with Mayor John Tory.

Mr. Garneau told the gathering that rail safety was his “top priority”.

WHAT ARE WE ASKING FOR?

Our task now is to hold him to that pledge. We continue to push for short-term and long-term measures.

- In the short term, we want to see a reduction in speed and length for trains carrying dangerous goods. We want the old, out-dated DOT-111 tank cars currently in use to be phased out well before the current 2025 deadline. These cars were designed to carry vegetable oil, not crude oil.
- In the longer term, we are pushing to relocate the CP Rail line to a less populated area north of the city and to separate freight and commuter traffic. This has been recommended a number of times – mostly recently in a review of Canada's Transportation Act by former federal Cabinet minister David Emerson.

Until fairly recently, relocation was not on anyone's agenda but the August derailment in our neighbourhood has focused attention on this possibility at all levels of government. We have sensed in our meetings that there is a desire to explore the idea and we have heard recently that Metrolinx, the regional rail authority, is aiming for relocation by 2024.

Rail Safety First will continue to press the Transport Minister and the staff at Transport Canada for tangible steps that will make residents in Rathnelly and all along the CP Rail line safer in their homes. We are urging that the official Transportation Safety Board report on the recent derailment be done quickly and that this report look not just at the causes of the accident but also investigate CP's role in notifying the city and the subsequent deployment of first responders.

IT IS TIME TO TAKE ACTION!

We believe that the time for consultation and town halls is over and that the time for concrete measures has come.

The best way for concerned residents to take action is to express your concern to your MP and to Transportation Minister Marc Garneau. Hearing from voters on this important topic will compel our representatives to continue working towards making meaningful changes to the Rail Safety Act.

A personal letter to your Member of Parliament can be a very effective tool for change. An original letter can be more effective than a form letter so please consider using your own words. Or there are letters included in this package should you wish to make your voice heard.

If you wish further information on the issue or want to help, please look at our newly relaunched website, www.railsafetyfirst.com, or email info@railsafetyfirst.com.

From all of us at Rail Safety First we thank you in advance for your support!