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The Cobequid Pass: Another View

In the March/April edition of this magazine, Debert-area community activist Janet Maybee wrote an "Opinion" piece dealing with the privately owned Cobequid Pass toll highway. Here, Wentworth resident Dianne Powell takes exception to a number of the points Ms. Maybee raised in her article.

Dear Editor:

It seems that some issues can never be put to rest. More than two years after the opening of the Cobequid Pass, those who opposed it from 1992 onward seem to prefer to live in the past and continue to whine about the route choice of the four-lane highway instead of looking ahead and being positive about the possibilities for community development.

The same old stories and arguments that were made by most of the opponents who gave presentations in Great Village in 1992 were trotted out once again in Ms. Maybee's article. One particularly irritating argument – the weather conditions that force road closures – was harped on yet again. It seems that the Pass opponents only see the weather on the 45 kilometres of the Pass. They fail to notice that the weather which forces Pass closures invariably also closes the Tantramar Marsh section of the highway, and frequently Route 102 beside Truro.

The most important point of the entire article is tucked inconspicuously into a paragraph, making it almost unnoticeable. That is that "there have been no fatal accidents..." This highway is safer. Safety was the reason behind the construction of the four-lane route. Opponents tend to overlook the fact that there have been no fatal accidents in more than two years compared to 50 fatalities in the last ten years that the TransCanada went through the Wentworth Valley, giving that beautiful area of Nova Scotia the unfortunate label of "Death Valley," which, mercifully, is no longer in use. We should be celebrating, not complaining, and we should thank the good judgement shown by the RCMP in closing roads when conditions are so severe. A few hours wait is a small price to pay for safe travel.

Kathy Redmond echoes the feelings of practically every Wentworth resident – being able to wake up in the morning to hear the birds singing. No more continuous rumble of eighteen-wheelers and all manner of traffic 24 hours a day. Instead, a safe road for local residents, quiet classrooms in the school, and children who can bike or walk to work along the road without fearing for life and limb.

Most people realize that the Irvings do not maintain businesses that are not profitable. The closure of the Lady Wentworth was indeed an economic blow to the community, but it was an inevitable one – even if the opponents' favoured Tatamagouche route had been built. The Glenholme Loop has good signage and the Masstown Market is booming: is there some problem with this? If a Visitor Information Centre is built on land generously donated by a community-minded Eric Jennings – someone who has been involved in the highway discussions from the start – that would appear to be a huge benefit to the entire area – to Glenholme, Great Village, all of western Colchester County, Parrsboro, Wentworth, and the North Shore area. Councillor Gerald Langille makes a point that all the communities on Route 4, and on Route 6 along the North Shore (the Sunrise Trail), have been concerned about – the lack of adequate signage. This is an issue that must be and is being addressed. Perhaps more forceful voices on the Community Liaison Committee during route construction would have resulted in at least some signage for the Wentworth-North Shore area.

It does seem rather unfair that the Westchester Volunteer Fire Department must bear the burden of responding to all the calls on the Pass. Perhaps something could be worked out with the Great Village and Collingwood Departments for sharing responsibilities. But, did the Wentworth Fire Department receive any remuneration

during all the years they attended to accidents and emergencies when Route 104 passed through Wentworth?

Bully for the folks of Tatamagouche – I am sure that in the long run they will find the information highway infinitely superior to the "four lanes of pavement" they were denied. But it is hard to be sympathetic when they complain about having been denied a highway that would have run near Tatamagouche: they only entered the highway debate at the last minute and then fought to have a road that would have been eleven kilometres longer than the Cobequid Pass. It is time now for people to accept that the Cobequid Pass exists. Places like Wentworth can now re-discover the sense of community that had been difficult to maintain while the TransCanada was running right through it.

There is now a concerted effort among North Shore communities to develop our tourism potential. In 1998, the Cumberland Regional Economic Development Association helped fund a Tourism Development Study that examined strengths and possibilities for the communities of Tidnish, Pugwash, Wallace, Malagash, and Wentworth. Very positive and constructive ideas have come from this study, and these communities are working toward significant future development. These places have chosen to accept the challenges of the future and are ambitiously seeking to develop their area in ways that suit both the individual communities and the larger area. A four-lane highway does not figure in these developments. We cannot change the past, but we can influence the future in very positive, constructive ways.

The Cobequid Pass is a fine highway doing exactly what it was intended to – move volumes of traffic efficiently and safely. The communities most affected by the highway are looking forward to, and working positively toward, future development. Let's all do that.

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