



October 18, 2004

Dear Abbott Drive resident:

I have been speaking recently with several of you about issues related to the Bicentennial Highway.

Last Friday I met with senior officials from the Department of Transportation to discuss the concerns I have heard. The day before, in preparation for our meeting, the two most senior officials in DOT's Central Region personally inspected the area between your backyard fences and the highway. I am confident they fully understand the issues.

My purpose in writing to you now is to let you know what they said, and to seek your comments and suggestions.

1. Flooding

This issue affects the north side of Abbott between Ashdale and Joseph Howe. There is winter flooding from the provincial land underneath the highway columns. DOT's first step will be to examine the "right-of-way plans" to see how the drainage system was constructed, and to see what practical improvements can be made. They don't seem to have kept any records of the frequency or severity of previous flooding. Consequently, I would ask you to contact my office whenever you notice blocked drains or other flooding problems. I will record the information and pass it along to DOT for remedy.

2. Storm Damage to Trees

This issue affects the north side of Abbott between Ashdale and Ralston. The hurricane brought down at least four large trees on the property between the backyards and the highway. DOT says they do not normally replace storm-damaged trees. They are open to the idea of removing the stumps with a backhoe in the spring, but they will not pay for replacement trees. I will continue to work with them on this, but in the meantime, I am offering to at least cost-share, with you the residents, the planting of new trees. We can

receive help from the DOT “tree expert” about what type would be best for the situation. Needless to say, it will take a number of years before any re-planted trees grow to the height of those damaged in the storm.

3. Jake brakes

This is an issue for all of Abbott Drive, and indeed for the whole neighbourhood.

"Jake brakes" are those really noisy engine brakes used by some trucks while travelling on the Bicentennial Highway.

Early last summer, the Department of Transportation undertook a “pilot project” to try to reduce the use of jake brakes on the Bicentennial Highway as it passes your neighbourhood. The project has four parts: (1) collection of noise and speed data, (2) placing of "no engine braking" signs, (3) collection of more noise and speed data, to see if the signs make any difference, and (4) evaluation.

The project is moving along – slowly. Step #1 (collection of noise and speed data) has been completed. Step #2 (placing of signs) is on hold until the BiHi construction work is completed at the end of October. A sign was erected by mistake, and then taken down. Another sign was placed at the end of the on-ramp from Northwest Arm Drive, but DOT acknowledges it is far too small. They are trying to get larger signs.

Although the pilot project is proceeding slowly, remember that this is the first time that the Department of Transportation has tried to restrict the use of engine brakes in zones with a speed limit higher than 50 kph. They are making some mistakes, and learning from them, and that is what a pilot project is for.

As soon as Steps #2 and #3 are completed, and I have the Department's report, I will inform Abbott Drive residents of the results.

It is worth noting that the use of jake brakes on the portion of the highway passing Abbott Drive is in fact illegal, since the speed limit there is 50 kph and the Motor Vehicle Act prohibits the use of jake brakes anywhere the speed limit is 50 kph or less. So if you happen to notice which trucks are (illegally) using their jake brakes, let me know and I will take action. I have already written to one local brewery whose trucks have been identified to me as regular users of engine brakes.

In conclusion, I believe that Department of Transportation officials are taking your concerns seriously. Even the Minister of Transportation is aware of Abbott Drive, because

recently I raised the issue during Question Period in the Legislature! A transcript is attached.

I will continue to provide you with updates as we make progress in addressing these concerns. I am confident that, working together and with some perseverance, we can make things happen.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Steele, MLA
Halifax Fairview