

Markham silences mandatory train whistling at 13 level crossings

Move should appease residents concerned about noise, Mayor Frank Scarpitti says

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Mayor Frank Scarpitti says Markham has taken steps to silence GO train horns at 13 level crossings in the city, a move that should appease concerns of residents about noise. (CBC)

Markham has taken steps to silence GO train horns at 13 level crossings in the city, a move that should appease residents concerned about noise, Mayor Frank Scarpitti said on Monday.

"Markham is now one of the first municipalities in the GTA to silence the GO train horns in our community," Scarpitti told reporters Monday at a news conference held at the Markham Village Train Station Community Centre.

"The stopping of the horns in our community is a bold and extensive undertaking. And by improving the anti-whistling infrastructure and by investing in this significant project, we in the city of Markham have taken pro-active steps before many of the other GTA municipalities."

By making upgrades to the level crossings, under a \$6-million anti-whistling program, the city is effectively stopping the mandatory blowing of 1,600 horns in Markham a day, Scarpitti said. The city, along with Metrolinx and the Regional Municipality of York, is paying the program's cost.

"After one minute after midnight, all of these horns have officially stopped blowing at these crossings. It's a great day for all of us in the city of Markham."

- **'It's just unbearable': Markham residents blow the whistle on noisy GO train horns**

Scarpitti said safety was paramount when the city made the changes.

"Safety was our one number priority," he said. "This is a complex, multi-jurisdictional project where we had to adhere to changes in federal regulations."



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Each level crossing now has either pedestrian warning gates or what are called maze barriers, as well as what are called tactile walking plates, signage and bells.

The pedestrian warning systems let pedestrians, motorists and cyclists know when trains are approaching. The level crossings are located from Steeles Avenue to Major Mackenzie Drive East.

Residents bothered by noise for years

Noisy train horns have been an issue in Markham for years, the mayor acknowledged. In 2008, the city first commissioned a whistle cessation feasibility study. More recently, the city worked with Metrolinx to improve infrastructure at rail crossings to silence the horns.

"Certainly, as time has gone on, we have seen more GO Train service, which we are very happy to welcome to our community and actually we need more, but obviously, as more trains come through, there's more of a nuisance for residents at all times of the day ... It was important to get this done," Scarpitti said.

Under the Canadian Rail Operating Rules, trains have to whistle when they approach any public road crossing. To eliminate mandatory train whistling, Markham said it is following a Metrolinx procedure for what is known as "Train Whistling at Public Grade Crossings" in order to meet Federal Railway Safety Act and Regulation requirements.



Phil Verster, president and CEO of Metrolinx, says: 'We have taken 13 level crossings in the Markham area and removed the need for whistling of train at these by making these level crossings safe in other ways. Safety is not jeopardized.' (CBC)

Phil Verster, president and CEO of Metrolinx, the provincial transportation agency, said at the news conference that Metrolinx has been improving service along the Stouffville corridor and providing all-day GO service to meet the needs of growing communities north of Toronto.

Verster said "more train service means more whistles" and Metrolinx has worked with Markham to reduce the noise.

"We have taken 13 level crossings in the Markham area and removed the need for whistling of train at these by making these level crossings safe in other ways," Verster said. "Safety is not jeopardized."

Trains will still whistle in emergency situations, he said.

"When there is any unsafe condition, the driver has full jurisdiction to use the horn," he added.