

Asnorveldt residents struggle with ?blockade?

By Mark Pavilons

The road closure due to the construction of the Dufferin Street Bridge near Asnorveldt has created some concern among local residents.

A blockade was put up Sept. 8 and is in place during the week from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. It affects Dufferin Street (north of the bridge), as well as at the construction limit on King Street.

The reason for these concrete barriers is to "improve safety for all and expedite construction activities."

Local residents are allowed special access, but broader issues remain.

According to Dufferin Street resident Linda Wilson, commuters are the main culprits who are speeding, and using the road as a shortcut.

She stressed there has been no police presence throughout any of this construction nor has the construction occurred on a daily basis. "The construction company itself has made no effort to ensure the safety of its workers by having flag persons at both ends of the easement to ensure drivers go through cautiously," she said.

Wilson and other residents have voiced their opinion that this whole construction area has been poorly planned, badly executed and now a decision that will impact locals, farmers, school buses, Canada Post driver, delivery drivers, utilities including garbage pick up, and emergency vehicles will be severely impacted.

She also said public notice has been lacking.

The construction company could have looked into [construction project management software](#) to help them create a happier, safer, and more efficient working environment for both the construction workers and the local residents.

"What do you think is going to happen when the drivers who think of Dufferin and King as their personal speedway all of sudden cannot go through. What do you think is going to happen once they turn around (if they don't smash into the barrier) and now they are late for whatever destination caused them to speed southward?" she stressed.

Wilson suggested making the road and the easement one way only with flag persons directing traffic. "Why not step up the presence of police in the area?"

Councillor Avia Eek has been lobbying on behalf of residents. She spoke with the consultants and said prohibiting access through the construction zone from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. was not acceptable, given the hours of operation of many of our farms and given that crop protection materials are still required, as this time of year creates many challenges for our farmers with the crops.

Eek said the consultant is going to pass on these concerns to the director of engineering, who has the authority to instruct the contractor to take additional measures as requested by the residents.

Eek did note, however, that if all the current resident needs are met, it would not only prolong the project but add to the cost.

She agreed that Dufferin is a thoroughfare for commuter traffic, making this particular construction zone more dangerous given the volume of traffic.

Eek has requested police presence in the area.

Wilson noted the project managers who made these decisions don't live in the Holland Marsh and cannot possibly understand the impact this closure is going to cause. It is getting close to harvest season and the farmers need to get their produce back to their barns.

"It is not reasonable to ask our farmers to stop harvesting their crops or protecting their crops for any reason. Our farmers have crop insurance, but that is only good if crop protection materials are applied within a reasonable period of time, otherwise there is no coverage," Eek said.

"We, the locals, need to get to work so we can pay King our taxes! Our kids need to get to school, and the list goes on."

The councillor admitted this construction is "very stressful for everyone involved."

"First of all, Dufferin St. is in the Hamlet of Asnorveldt, therefore, it is more densely populated than other areas where bridge reconstruction has occurred, and the only other road leading out of the Holland Marsh at this location is King, which is being realigned to meet the new bridge design."

Dufferin, north of Highway 9, is a commuter bypass.

For these reasons, the road closure was requested for the construction zone for a two-week period commencing Sept. 8. The closure would allow the construction work to continue safely and unimpeded. Dufferin St. will be raised four feet as part of the approach to the new bridge once it is constructed. However, with Dufferin St. inaccessible due to the bridge being out, King St. is the only other road leading out of the Hamlet at the south end. While there are alternate routes that those impacted are able to travel on, given the

construction on Highway #11/Bathurst St., it is unreasonable to expect these residents to add anywhere from 45 minutes to 2.5 hours to their day (one way).

The detour for the construction project is too significant to have off-road non licensed vehicles take the detour, therefore the blockade will be moved to the side for these types of vehicles. This does not include transport truck and trailers, or any other type of vehicle.

The blockade will be moved only between the hours of 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. The blockade will be impassable between the hours of 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. for all vehicles.

The blockade will be removed by 7 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 12. It will once again be erected on Monday, Sept. 15 and be removed on Friday, Sept. 19.

It is advised to all residents that contractor has assured to a timely completion of this project by the end of October 2014 subject to the weather.

Please be advised that there will be on-going road closures like this one periodically throughout the next two months.