

Hammond forced to put breaks on Corridor 11 bus service

Ontario Highway Transportation Board denies temporary operating licence

By Alison Brownlee

All it seemed to take was one dissenting voice.

The Ontario Highway Transport Board has forced Hammond Transportation to stop operating its new bus service between Muskoka and Barrie as of Wednesday, Oct. 17.

"It's due to complaints by an existing carrier," said Greg Hammond of Hammond Transportation.

The bus company had been in talks with the District of Muskoka's transportation committee as well as other

non-profit organizations in the region for more than a year. Hammond said those talks, along with transportation studies, showed a need for increased transportation in the region, so his company applied for a temporary licence to operate a five-day-a-week bus service to colleges and hospitals in Orillia and Barrie.

He said his company is licensed to operate throughout Muskoka and Simcoe County and felt it had the necessary authority to operate the service, which it launched late September.

"Just before it started, we received calls from the Ontario Highway Transport Board saying there were two existing carriers who had concerns about us operating," said Hammond. "The service started, but we felt it was just going to be a few days before we got the temporary authority."

A petition of 577 signatures supporting the new service accompanied the application for the temporary licence, he said.

But Muskokan company did not get the licence. And continuing the service without the licence would mean fines of up to \$5,000.

The company is still applying for a permanent licence, which is a longer process that will take at least a month.

"We're still going forward with the (licence) application. We believe there is a need that is not being met now," said Hammond. "Once we have the required authority we will reinstate the service."

Hammond did not mention who filed the complaint against his company, but the Ontario Highway Transport Board ruling stated the complainant was from the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission. It operates a bus service between Toronto and Northern Ontario.

The board stated in its decision that a temporary licence may be granted if there is evidence indicating an urgent need for a service that no other licensed carrier is providing.

It stated there was not enough evidence to show urgent need for a new service.

It also deemed the petition signatures insufficient evidence that the service was needed because there was no indication that those who signed the petition intended to use it.

Ontario Northland's argument that it already provided sufficient service also played a role in the decision.

However, the board noted its decision regarding the temporary licence could not be used to argue against

the company's application for a permanent licence in future.

Michael Potvin, director of passenger operations for Ontario Northland, said licences are the most valued part of a transportation business and Ontario Northland did not want its scheduled service unduly threatened.

"The (scheduled service) aspect is something that is really what Ontario Northland builds its service base on," said Potvin. "And the territory between North Bay and Toronto is an extremely important area of service to us."

He said Ontario Northland runs four roundtrips between Muskoka and Barrie per day Monday through Thursday and five roundtrips on Friday and Saturday. Often those busses run half-full.

When another transportation company applies for a licence, said Potvin, Ontario Northland evaluates the application to determine whether the licence in question would adversely affect its business.

"If it is going to impact us adversely, we do submit a challenge to it to try to protect our business and the interests of our service," he said.

But the publicly funded agency is competing with private business by opposing the application. However, Potvin commented that Ontario Northland is mandated to provide a public bus service in Northern Ontario and said government-funded transportation plays an important role across the province.

The province announced in March it would sell off Ontario Northland's transportation and communications assets within two years. But Potvin said the decision to submit an objection to Hammond Transportation's licence application had nothing to do with divestment, nor with wanting to make the bus assets look more attractive as a business model to potential buyers in future.

District of Muskoka chair John Klinck said he was shaking his head.

"I'm a little concerned that a Crown corporation could interfere with the private sector's ability to provide competition or choice for consumers," said Klinck.

He said it bothered him that a Muskoka business trying to enhance its service while benefiting the community would be prevented from doing so.

Klinck said the district endorsed the company's new service as a way to increase transportation options in the region in a relatively cost-effective manner.

He was optimistic the licensing would be sorted out.

"I mentioned to somebody last week that I intended to try out (the new bus service) and go down to see one of my boys who is at Georgian College," said Klinck. "I guess I'll have to wait a little longer for that."



PUMPKIN HUNT: Amber and Grayam Harkness hunt for the perfect pumpkin on Oct. 13. PHOTO BY MANDI HARGRAVE

TriMuskoka continues push for full Ironman

By Brent Cooper

The chair of TriMuskoka says his group is not giving up on its hopes of bringing another Ironman event to Huntsville, after learning the community lost its bid to host the 2013 Ironman Canada event.

"Was I disappointed? Definitely, as I know what a great race this would have been for our area from both a financial impact point of view, but also as a community health promotion point of view," said Rich Trenholm.

Trenholm made the comment last Friday, the same day the World Triathlon Corporation officially announced that the Ironman Canada event would be going to Whistler, British Columbia for the next five years.

Penticton, also of British Columbia, had hosted the event for the past 30 years, but opted out of the race series in favour of another triathlon provider.

"Tourism Whistler had originally announced on its webpage last Thursday that it had won the bid for the event, but removed the announcement from the site the same day. The World Triathlon Corporation made the official declaration on Friday.

The Ironman Canada event attracted thousands of athletes and spectators to the British Columbia community during the past three decades.

Huntsville and Kelowna were the other two communities vying for the right to host the Ironman race.

Huntsville already hosts the 5150 and Ironman 70.3 events. Despite losing out on the bid, Trenholm says his advocacy group remains dedicated to bringing another Ironman event to Muskoka, saying they will "continue to work towards that carrot that is still dangling in front of us."

"This is a world class event that our community should host, as we know how to host these events and host them to world class standards. I see this not as the end, but the beginning. We will continue to work towards getting a full Ironman here as it is a natural complement to what we already do so well."

Trenholm said TriMuskoka sees a great opportunity to "complete the picture" with respect to hosting a full Ironman.

"To put it simply, an Ironman is a natural fit for our community and where it is going with respect to sports tourism. This would create a model in which athletes from around the world could come here to graduate from one level to the next, starting with the Ironman 5150 Muskoka, then moving onto the Ironman 70.3 Muskoka, and then eventually tackling the Ironman Muskoka.

"My mind is already churning out ideas for the eventual Ironman Muskoka," he said.

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