

## Railways won't alter schedules

### Report says city complaints went nowhere

Gordon Kent, Edmonton Journal

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The complaints of irate Edmonton motorists stuck at busy train crossings aren't ringing any bells with Canada's two biggest railway companies.

Staff at Canadian Pacific Railway and CN Rail didn't answer letters from the city last year asking if they could modify operations during rush hour to reduce traffic impact, according to a report Tuesday to the transportation committee.

When city officials later met with representatives of both companies to discuss the issue, "(they) were respectfully instructed that their operation has no direct accountability to municipal governments," the report states.

Coun. Amarjeet Sohi, who hears from residents upset that crossings are blocked, said politicians must become involved because the staff got nowhere.

"You were politely told to mind your own business."

Coun. Ben Henderson was even more blunt, saying railways are a federal matter and people must let their MPs know what's happening.

"It's no point talking to the province, because they will be told to piss off as well, because it's not their jurisdiction."

The rail companies told the city that trains are typically assembled at night and deliveries are done during the day.

They need to keep their operations flexible, and restrictions for four hours during the morning and afternoon commuter rushes could affect schedules and lead to delays, the report says.

The railways argued this might lead customers to move goods by truck instead, putting more vehicles on local roads.

While train yards could be moved outside Edmonton - CN's busiest centre in the West - the city would have to cover the cost, the companies said.

Mayor Don Iveson said he receives complaints from drivers facing long waits at southeast crossings, particularly on 50th Street near the Sherwood Park Freeway.

"For a long time, the railways have been closer to God than anything else in Canada. The federal government has given them wide latitude," he said.

"That made sense in the 19th century and early 20th century, but with major rail operations in busy urban centres I think peaceful coexistence is worth pursuing." However, relief could be in store.

The federal government is developing proposed regulations for level crossings that include dealing with locations repeatedly obstructed by trains, according to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

The federation has been calling for a mechanism to address the safety issues blocked crossings can create.

"The railways enjoy a privileged position," Iveson said.

"They're going to want to protect that. I get that.

"We need to work with the MPs, the government of Canada. We need something consistent across Canada." gkent@edmontonjournal.com