

Windsor has new allies in battle with railways

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Last Updated: Dec 09, 2014 - 8:13 PM EST

Windsor appears to have some new allies in its ongoing battle with the Canadian railways over the transportation of dangerous goods through urban areas.

The newly sworn-in mayors of Toronto and Mississauga are both demanding greater transparency from the railway companies and are proposing the entire elimination of trains hauling dangerous goods from entering their borders.

Windsor remains in a de facto standoff with Canadian Pacific, Canadian National and Essex Terminal Railway on a proposed nondisclosure agreement tied to the release of information surrounding dangerous goods.

“Essentially what we’ve done as a city is we have signed the agreement from the railway association that covers all the legislative requirements that we had to sign and we have given them that,” said Mayor Drew Dilkens, who dealt with the issue as a city councillor.

“What they have asked the city for is something over and above that, over and above the legislative requirements that we did not sign. At this point we’re willing to have dialogue, we’re willing to have conversation with them, to try and sort this out, but they won’t return our phone calls and they’re just saying nope, you don’t get this information unless you sign this form, which is over and above the legislative requirements.”

Windsor deleted the non-disclosure clause and then returned the rest of the documentation required for the release of dangerous railway goods information.

“Clearly we want some of that information, there’s no doubt about it,” said Dilkens, noting the city still has a good idea of what is passing through thanks to neighbouring municipalities.

“We want to be able to prepare appropriately and take appropriate safeguards for our community by preparing our first responders to respond to incidents with dangerous chemicals in the community.”

Toronto Mayor John Tory and Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie are both calling for greater transparency from the railways.

“I am far from satisfied with the transparency that we don’t see today,” Tory said in a recent scrum reported by The Toronto Star.

“I think it’s time to let the sun shine in on this, and it’s not just a matter of some principle of transparency. It’s a matter of people being adequately informed, in a big city like this, of what is travelling through the city, and when and how much.”

Dilkens said it’s good to know Windsor has some new allies on the issue.

“I think it certainly reassures us that we aren’t the only ones out there standing alone,” Dilkens said.

“It just seems to be in a lot of ways patently unfair that we can be stonewalled for this information when we have complied with the law. The more municipalities that come forward and stand firm it’s going to attract more attention from the federal government and the decision-makers at the federal government for sure.”

CP Rail spokesman Jeremy Berry said in an email “CP respects the nature and intent of non-disclosure agreements and confidentiality clauses.

“We continue to work proactively with communities and first responders across our network. We’ve sponsored 40 Ontario firefighters to attend specialized tank car training at special facilities in Pueblo, Calif. An additional 1,000 first responders have been trained at 60 different TransCaer (Transportation Community Awareness and Emergency Response) events held across the province of Ontario in 2014. In the past year, CP has made over 225 emergency preparedness presentations to over 120 communities across our network. These range from an overview to full technical training.”