

## Residents voice off against widening plan Wisdom of paving rail cut challenged

By MICHAEL LIGHTSTONE Staff Reporter  
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More than 250 people packed a lecture room at Saint Mary's to discuss the province's plans to pave the CN rail cut that runs through to Halterm. (Eric Wynne / Staff)

The wisdom of the proposed widening of the CN rail cut in Halifax was repeatedly challenged at a packed public meeting Wednesday night.

Residents potentially affected by the proposal are worried the controversial project, which is the subject of a \$288,765 feasibility study to determine the rail cut's suitability as an integrated transportation corridor, will hurt their neighbourhoods and not provide a sustainable plan for shipping port-related goods and people through Halifax.

Dozens of people showed up for the meeting at Saint Mary's University. Many were sitting on the floor, leaning against aisle walls or standing in doorways.

Attendees heard speakers question the government plan to pave the rail cut, which snakes through peninsular Halifax.

Part of the feasibility study will be a cost-benefit analysis. Preliminary estimates peg the cost of the proposed changes to the rail corridor, part of the province's Atlantic Gateway project, at \$80 million.

"We should be against doing anything that has not been thoroughly reviewed," said Andrea Brinton of Communities and Residents for Sustainable Transportation. "We should be for development that makes sense, and then invest wisely."

Ms. Brinton said her group recognizes the importance of the Port of Halifax. But she said taxpayers' dollars shouldn't be dished out on something that might prove not to be viable.

"We recognize . . . that funding is available federally," she said. "Let's use these funds wisely."

The proposed expansion of the rail cut to accommodate trucks moving cargo to and from the Port of Halifax, emergency vehicles and possibly Metro Transit buses is being studied by an independent transportation engineering firm, McCormick Rankin Corp. of Mississauga, Ont.

One speaker at Saint Mary's told the crowd he's a retired CN executive and he examined the rail cut expansion issue in 1993.

"First of all, there's a huge liability issue," he said. "There's a huge problem with (keeping) the corridors clear" in the event of a major accident.

He also said it would be counterproductive for CN to share its property with "their biggest competitor, which is the trucking industry."

Perhaps residents and other concerned citizens should sit down with CN officials to address the rail cut proposal, he said.

New Democrat Leonard Preyra, the MLA for Halifax Citadel, hosted the public meeting and said alternatives to the rail cut plan must be considered. He acknowledged the port is the lifeblood of the local economy but said a sound business case for the integrated transportation scheme hasn't been presented.

Mr. Preyra also commented about residents' concerns that the project might be a fait accompli.

"I don't think a (government) decision has been made," he said.

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