

The C.U.G.A.R Initiative

Cleaning Up Graffiti
Along The Railway



PEEL REGIONAL POLICE
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C.U.G.A.R.

Cleaning Up Graffiti Along the Railway

ISSUE

Structures along the rail lines are targeted by graffiti writers because of the high visibility to the public and because these locations are often secluded during parts of the day, to allow their work to take place without intervention by the police or the public. This resulted in a significant, yet largely unknown, amount of damage along the busiest rail line in Canada which, in the absence of effective control mechanisms, developed and rapidly spread through the back door of many City of Mississauga neighbourhoods endangering their well being.

OBJECTIVES

Recognizing an opportunity to deal with this largely ignored and unreported problem, Cst. Tom McKay, a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) specialist with Peel Regional Police in Brampton, Ontario, Canada brought together key stakeholders to assign, analyze and proactively deal with the problem. This resulted in the development of the Cleaning Up Graffiti Along the Railway (CUGAR) Committee which after undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the problem developed a five point program utilizing timely clean-up, design, education, on-going maintenance, and enforcement solutions to remove graffiti from structures seen along the rail line.

RESULTS

To date the project has completely eliminated graffiti from the railway and adjacent structures. It has also reduced trespassing onto railway lands, stopped a cycle of decline that was beginning to accelerate, set new standards for noise attenuation walls and changed the way we view rail line corridors.

Currently, the Committee is planning its second rail line clean-up and in time it is hoped that the project, a joint, collaborative effort of Peel Regional Police, the Mississauga Crime Prevention Association, Canadian National Railway Police Service, Canadian Pacific Railway Police Service, GO Transit and the City of Mississauga will spread to other rail lines both inside and beyond the city.

**Peel Regional Police
Brampton, Ontario, Canada
May, 1999**

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SCANNING

Over the years, the highly visible structures along railway corridors have attracted graffiti vandals. This resulted in a very significant, yet largely unknown, amount of damage to railway and adjacent structures which, in the absence of a coordinated effort by affected property owners, was allowed to build and proliferate, in a largely out-of-control manner.

Despite its obvious nature and massive scale, the problem remained largely ignored and unreported until Constable Tom McKay, a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) specialist with Peel Regional Police in Brampton, Ontario, Canada recognized an opportunity to bring together key stakeholders from the Canadian Pacific Railway Police Service, GO Transit and the City of Mississauga By-Law Enforcement Department in a railway oriented effort to deal with graffiti. This resulted in the development of the Cleaning Up Graffiti Along the Railway (CUGAR) concept and Committee whose members agreed that a coordinated effort was now required to address and reverse a well-established cycle of

decline which was fast reaching the point where community health and stability were not only compromised but at stake.

With the inclusion of volunteers from the City of Mississauga's Planning Department, Canadian National Railway Police Service and the Mississauga Crime Prevention Association, the Committee quickly established that the Region of Peel was home to the first, third and fourth busiest rail lines in Canada. The Committee then conducted an inventory of graffiti along the Canadian National Railway's Lakeshore West line, which, with 90,000 commuters per day is the busiest rail line in Canada,

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ANALYSIS

While not a new phenomena, graffiti became a major problem along rail corridors approximately six years ago when, as a result of a general proliferation, it began to affect large, nearby structures that were beyond the control and influence of railway maintenance programs. Insidious by nature, railway graffiti is especially problematic as it is oriented towards passing commuter trains and away from property owners. As a result the victim seldom removes the graffiti due to either a lack of awareness, in the case of bridge abutments and soundwalls, or lack of concern, in the case of warehouses or backs of billboards. This creates in an extremely favourable environment to the graffiti vandal who, recognizing that their work is highly visible to passing railway commuters and not removed, is encouraged to return to the rail corridor where their targets also frequently includes rolling stock and cargo.

With this very serious and costly dynamic in place, graffiti developed and rapidly spread through the back door of many communities where, in the absence of regular rail line patrols by property standards officers, it was allowed to accumulate. Given the foregoing, efforts to control or deal with the graffiti were extremely limited and sporadic. This ultimately lead to a number of harms to railway safety and operations.

Harms to rail safety included increased incidence of trespass over and along high speed rail corridors where commuter trains routinely travel 100 km/h and the painting over of federally mandated cargo identification numbers that were required to appear on the sides of box and tanker cars in the event of derailment or fire.

Harms to rail operations occurred when rolling stock had to be placed out of service while awaiting repainting and numbering of the rail cars at an average cost of \$2,000 per side. Demands for railway police and maintenance service also increased as result of damage to a broad range of railway equipment, structures and cargo, including motor vehicles exposed on flat bed rail cars.

While simple in concept, the idea to clean-up graffiti along the railway presented many challenges. This quickly became apparent at our first meeting where a general discussion revealed a number of challenges and complex issues. First and foremost, this is a very active and dangerous environment which does not lend itself to grassroots clean-ups.

Next access to the rail lands are strictly regulated by a myriad of federal and company regulations that, amongst other things, requires permission and supervision to enter the rail lands and, where required, flagmen and the issuance of "go slow" orders to train crews.

The scale of the clean-up was also immense with each of the sound walls measuring between two and three football fields long.

Federal legislation also complicated matters by requiring the clearcutting of vegetation within the corridor in an effort to control the potential for fire. This resulted in the "surprise" removal of a number of good-sized trees from in front of the soundwalls which not only accelerated the spread of graffiti but limited the viability of using landscaping to screen the soundwalls.

Finally ownership of affected structures had to be established. This was particularly challenging in the case of condominium corporations and soundwalls straddling property lines.

With an appreciation of the foregoing, we began to gather the detailed information we would require to complete our analysis. As railway graffiti is seldom reported and is largely based on anecdotal information, we decided to arrange for a tour of the rail line for all Committee members. This proved very helpful in providing Committee members with a working knowledge of the problem and the area.

We next established ownership of all affected structures and either spoke to or corresponded with each property owner or relevant city department. This proved particularly challenging in the case of one soundwall which was jointly owned by 30 residents belonging to a private condominium corporation. In that instance, the Manager of By-Law Enforcement for the City of Mississauga

interviewed each resident and asked them a series of questions pertaining to ownership of the soundwalls, awareness of the graffiti and preference for a clean-up solution. Letters were also sent notifying each of the owners of the date and time of the clean-up.

Local politicians were also contacted for their input and support. During one such exchange, a politician indicated her desire and preference for a mural to be established. This led the Committee to seek advice from the Art Community (including local high school art programs), examine mural and graffiti transformation programs in other communities, engage in a "Call for Artists" poster campaign, include an airbrush artist as a temporary member of the Committee and organize a brain storming session with key members of the arts community and the community services department together. This latter initiative led to the conceptual drawing of an ongoing mural project planned for the second rail line clean-up.

RESPONSE

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The goal of the Committee was to clean-up graffiti along the rail corridor. This resulted in the development of a five point program which utilized timely clean-up, design, education, ongoing maintenance and enforcement solutions.

- **CLEAN-UP**

A range of clean-up alternatives were explored and utilized. This resulted in railway equipment being painted by maintenance staff, concrete soundwalls being soda or sand blasted by graffiti removal contractors and fibreglass soundwalls being chemically stripped and restored by the soundwall manufacturer as a public service. Paint overs using murals were also considered but these failed to develop during the initial clean-up due to the extensive development time required.

Plans for a mural at the Dundas St. overpass are currently scheduled for the clean-up of the next rail line to be completed in the year 2000. This location is particularly vulnerable as it is next to a municipal road that is easily accessed by vandals and is not suitable for landscape interventions.

- **DESIGN**

A number of design interventions were also examined. This included the strategic use of landscaping to limit opportunity and preclude access to the sound wall and surrounding area, the restoration of fence lines and the development of design reference notes (Appendix 1) which detailed the proactive construction of noise attenuation walls, including landscaping, in front of these walls.

The strategic use of landscaping while integral to the development of new sound walls was not implemented during the Lakeshore West clean-up due to a significant delay in the city's

tendering process that was beyond the control of the Committee.

- **EDUCATION**

A variety of educational initiatives were considered and undertaken. The Railway Police and Mississauga Crime Prevention Association members inform school age children about the program as part of their ongoing efforts to educate students about rail safety and vandalism.

A pamphlet (Appendix 2) and poster (Appendix 3) were developed for distribution to affected property owners, rail commuters and members of the public at information booths. The pamphlets outlined the program and encouraged members of the public to remove graffiti from their property and report rail line based graffiti through specially developed reporting cards (Appendix 4) available at GO transit stations.

An advertisement was taken out in Your Guide magazine (Appendix 5). The magazine is a municipal reference guide that is distributed to every household in the city. In addition, the City of Mississauga requested and published articles in their "Network" (City's employee newsletter) and "Inside Planning" publications (the latter of which is distributed to approximately 350 external organizations) and the Mississauga Crime Prevention Association printed an article in their "News" publication (Appendix 6). A web page (Appendix 7) was also developed and posted on the web sites of all Committee members. Finally, a joint municipal and police press release was prepared and issued the day before the launch.

- **ON-GOING MAINTENANCE**

While ongoing maintenance was principally conceived to deter future acts of graffiti, a major repair to an existing chain link fence was also undertaken to curtail traffic from a public park to pathways running along the rail line adjacent to the soundwalls.

- **ENFORCEMENT**

The aforementioned responses were complemented with a strategic enforcement initiative. This included requesting a blanket trespass letter from the railway and coordinating municipal and railway police service coverage for the next few weeks after the clean-up.

- **IMPLEMENTATION**

As ours was a new group which lacked a city or corporate mandate, a myriad of administrative details was required prior to putting the response in place.

In this regard we:

- approached our respective managers for their initial support to work on the committee;
- raised funds from the committee member organizations and solicited outside organizations;
- prepared a business plan which was distributed to members of Mississauga City Council;
- added a Communications Officer from the City of Mississauga to develop a communications plan which included an improved professional quality pamphlet and poster, web page and coordinated news release;
- investigated graffiti removal contractors and techniques, and
- sought written confirmation from Canadian National Railway that the federally mandated practice of clearcutting railway rights of way would not extend to within three feet of the soundwall thereby resulting in the further exposure of walls or the loss of strategically planted material.

As this was a pilot program requiring a great deal of expertise and a protracted learning curve, the Committee suffered a minor disappointment when it was unable to launch the program in its first year of existence. Undeterred the Committee worked through the second winter and very successfully launched the clean-up of four soundwalls, each measuring over 100 meters in length, on June 15th, 1998, the first day of school vacation.

The clean-up required the issuance of "go slow" orders to train crews and the presence of flagmen and railway police to supervise and ensure the safety of the two teams of graffiti removal contractors, the soundwall manufacturer, railway maintenance crews and members of the media and C.U.G.A.R. Committee. The clean-up was scheduled to be staggered over a four day period at the rate of one soundwall clean-up per day.

Funds for the job were found by accessing the transportation and works department budget for graffiti found on city owned soundwalls. Likewise, funding was provided for pamphlets, posters and advertisement by accessing the city's by-law enforcement printing budget along with monies transferred from the Mississauga CPTED Advisory Committee.

CN rail was also a source of direct and indirect funding by contributing \$2500 towards the clean-up of the private soundwall and cleaning up railway equipment as part of their routine track maintenance budget. Finally offers for assistance were received from two graffiti removal contractors and a few members of the community.

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ASSESSMENT & CONCLUSION

Since the launch of the program on June 15th, 1998, there has been no reoccurrence of graffiti along the Lakeshore West line. While surprising even to Committee members, this extremely positive result has been well received by members of the public, the news media and city council alike.

Media support for this initiative was evident through very positive television and newspaper coverage which included:

- a news feature on a Toronto television station and a segment on a news magazine show produced by the local cable television station, and
- a total of four newspaper articles, two carried by the Toronto Star and two by the Mississauga News (Appendix 8).

Council support was very evident from direct feedback received by Councillors during a City Council meeting that was broadcast live on the cable community channel.

Public support was evident from a survey conducted at the Clarkson West Go station. The survey conducted by Committee members and civilian and non-uniform members of Peel Regional Police Crime Prevention Services was designed with the help of a research analyst and asked four simple questions. The first two questions established awareness of the program. The third and fourth questions asked what is your reaction and do you support removal of graffiti from the railway? Of the 23% of the people who were aware of the program, 87.5% of them reacted favourably, no one reacted unfavourably and 12.5% gave other responses such as "it doesn't bother me", the "art is cute" or "its no big deal". Of the 77% of those people who were

unaware of the program, 73.5% indicated they would support the removal of graffiti, 4.3% were against it and 22.2% wanted further information or failed to give a yes or no answer.

Favourable reactions were also received from outside individuals and agencies who were exposed to the concept through presentations and the distribution of pamphlets. This included:

- the organizers and attendees of the 3rd annual International CPTED Association conference held in Washington D.C., including one British Transport Police officer who travelled from his home country just to attend the session,
- former Chief of Police Robert Lunney, who as a consultant with the Police Executive Research Forum, sent Cst. McKay an e-mail congratulating him and the Committee on the development of a "model" program, and
- a number of state co-ordinators for Operation Lifesaver at that program's summit in St. Louis.

These results and reactions together with a lack of displacement of new graffiti into the neighbouring communities and the enthusiastic support of railway management has provided a clear indication that the program is a success.

Our success notwithstanding, weather delays were experienced during the actual implementation of the plan, and the Committee was hampered by a general lack of funding which, along with the bureaucratic delay in the landscape tendering process, severely limited the Committee's ability to introduce landscape solutions. While still an issue, the general lack of funding is currently being addressed through direct contributions from other members of the Committee and grant applications to government and private industry/environmental groups. Monies may also be available for landscaping from the city of Mississauga's streetscape budget. This results from an important shift in the way we view railway right-of-ways. Right-of-ways are now seen as important view corridors of the city instead of run-down utility corridors where negligence is tolerated.

Building on our success, the Committee has now streamlined the management of the problem by developing a simple action plan form in conjunction with the next rail line clean up.

CONCLUSION

At its most basic level, the CUGAR initiative achieved its goal of cleaning up graffiti along the railway. On a much more significant scale, it: stopped a cycle of decline that was beginning to accelerate, helped reduce the number of trespassers coming onto the rail line, provided for the continuous monitoring of the rail line as it is now shared by transit users and rail way maintenance staff who collectively monitor all structures and not just those on railway lands, and changed the way we built these soundwalls and viewed these corridors. Future clean-up efforts will build upon this success and explore partnerships with other related or complementary initiatives.

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AGENCY & OFFICER INFORMATION

This initiative was developed at the Constable level at the discretion of the CPTED officer for Peel Regional Police. It has since been supported by neighbouring policing units at the divisional level as well as management staff and or Boards of Directors at all participating agencies.

The public agency staff and police officers involved in this project are routinely involved in CPTED/problem oriented policing initiatives. As such none of these individuals received additional problem oriented policing training or incentives as a result of this project.

The primary resource used in the management of the problem was the skill sets and experience of the Committee members and the production of meeting minutes. In those situations where the Committee lacked a specific expertise, members from the art community and communications were added and information on graffiti transformation programs was assembled and disseminated to group members.

Problem analysis revealed a number of significant issues pertaining to railway regulation, ownership of affected structures, funding and timing of landscape and mural solutions. Funding remains a major issue as the program currently lacks an ongoing source of direct funds. Until such time as these funds are secured, the program must rely on indirect funding from existing City budgets and the contribution of personnel from member Agencies.

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