

TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE
MINUTES

October 27, 2011

MEMBERS

PRESENT:

Councillor Reg Rankin, Chair
Councillor Jennifer Watts, Vice-Chair
Councillor David Hendsbee
Councillor Darren Fisher
Councillor Debbie Hum
Councillor Jerry Blumenthal
Councillor Jackie Barkhouse
Councillor Bob Harvey

ALSO

PRESENT:

Councillor Barry Dalrymple
Councillor Tim Outhit
Councillor Peter Lund

STAFF:

Mr. Ken Reashor, Director, Transportation & Public Works
Ms. Jennifer Weagle, Legislative Assistant

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The Chair called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. in the Council Chamber, 3rd Floor, City Hall, 1841 Argyle Street, Halifax.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – September 22, 2011

Councillor Watts noted a correction to the September 22 minutes.

MOVED by Councillor Watts, seconded by Councillor Hum, that the September 22, 2011 Transportation Standing Committee minutes be approved as amended. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

3. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS

Additions:

8.1 Information Item #2 – Free Transit Seniors' Day – Councillor Blumenthal

8.2 Active Transportation Functional Plan – 5 year review – Councillor Watts

Councillor Blumenthal advised that he has to leave the meeting early due to another commitment and requested that Item 8.1 be addressed before he has to leave.

MOVED by Councillor Watts, seconded by Councillor Barkhouse, that the order of business be approved, as amended. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

4. CORRESPONDENCE, PETITIONS & PRESENTATIONS

4.1 Correspondence - None

4.2 Petitions - None

4.3 Presentations - None

5. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES - None

6. CONSIDERATION OF DEFERRED BUSINESS – None

7. REPORTS

7.1 STAFF

7.1.1 SmartTrip E-Pass – 2012 Pilot Project

A staff report dated October 3, 2011 was before the Committee.

Mr. David MacIsaac, Transportation Demand Management Supervisor, presented the SmartTrip E-Pass 2012 Pilot Project to the Committee. The Committee held a discussion on the pilot project, with staff responding to questions and concerns.

A suggestion was provided that in the promotion of the program, staff make note of the public transit income tax rebate, as an example of the net benefits of the program.

MOVED by Councillor Watts, seconded by Councillor Hum, that the Transportation Standing Committee recommend to Regional Council approval of a new employer-based annual transit pass fare medium called SmartTrip E-Pass pilot project in the 2012/13 fiscal year, as described in the Budget Implications section of the October 3, 2011 report.

Councillor Hum noted concern with regard to the impact and implications on current transit routes that are already at capacity. Staff clarified that this has been a point of discussion with Metro Transit and was one of the reasons for only 750 E-passes being made available for the pilot project. Staff are hoping to increase new ridership by 10% with this initiative, and are looking to a variety of employers in different locations, so no one route should be heavily impacted.

Staff indicated that they will be studying data collected from the pilot project closely to provide an analysis of the program and its users for future years.

Councillor Watts suggested that it would be beneficial to HRM to participate in the program, to be able to evaluate their own participation from an employer perspective. Councillor Rankin further suggested that, after the pilot project is completed, HRM lead as an example for other employers by offering the program to HRM employees. Staff clarified that due to current budget restraints, and certain complexities of payroll deductions, HRM as an employer was not included in the pilot program. Staff, however, hope to be able to include HRM in future years programs.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

7.2 MATTERS REFERRED FROM REGIONAL COUNCIL

7.2.1 Deputy Mayor Smith – Improvements to Pedestrian Safety – Highway 111

This item was referred to the Transportation Standing Committee from the September 13/11 Regional Council session.

A copy of correspondence from the Mayor to the Honourable Bill Estabrooks, Nova Scotia Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, dated September 22, 2011 was before the Committee.

Staff clarified that a response has not yet been received on this matter. The Committee agreed to hold discussion on this matter pending a response from the Minister.

Councillor Hendsbee suggested that staff approach the Halifax Dartmouth Bridge Commission regarding an opportunity to acquire any surplus materials from the 2014 bridge re-decking. These materials could be used for a pedway system over Highway 111.

7.3 MATTERS REFERRED FROM STANDING COMMITTEES - None

7.4 MATTERS REFERRED FROM MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

7.4.1 Councillor Watts – Commuter Rail Feasibility Analysis

The following information from the February 1, 2011 Committee of the Whole meeting before the Committee:

- Committee of the Whole report dated January 10, 2011
- Committee of the Whole minutes dated February 1, 2011
- Staff presentation dated February 1, 2011

Councillor Watts indicated that, further to the February 1, 2011 Committee of the Whole discussion on this matter, there have been further Council discussions that have arisen from the Road Network Functional Plan (Bayers Road widening) and the Regional Plan 5 year review. She noted that this discussion is timely with the award of the Irving shipyard contract since Irving is a major employer on the peninsula. Councillor Watts reviewed the motion that was passed at the February 1st COW meeting, *“that Halifax Regional Council request staff to continue to study all three options, as set out in the January 10, 2011 Information Report, as potential long term strategies with review being undertaken by the Transportation Standing Committee and with the public and experts involved in this review and further that a report come back to Council.”*

The Committee agreed at this time to allow Councillors Outhit, Dalrymple and Lund to speak on this matter.

Councillor Outhit commented that the Bedford district has two out of three identified growth areas in HRM. Residents want public transportation options – such as a ferry or commuter rail - for the area other than sitting in a bus in traffic on an already congested roadway. Councillor Outhit clarified that commuter rail is different than light rapid transit (LRT). LRT is not a viable option for HRM because the population is not there to support the expense. He noted that commuter rail is scalable as it would use existing rail lines and bridges, although buses are less scalable because lanes would have to be constructed, and one driver/one bus is required to transport only 30 or 40 people. He suggested that staff also continue to consider ferries.

Councillor Fisher arrived at 1:55 p.m.

Discussions ensued on the topic, with it being noted that a study would cost approx. \$250,000. It was also discussed that CN would have to be an active participant in such a study.

MOVED by Councillor Hendsbee, seconded by Councillor Blumenthal, that the Transportation Standing Committee recommend that Regional Council direct staff to engage a consultant to undertake a commuter rail study, engage CN Rail in the study, and identify budget funding of \$250,000 to complete the study.

Councillor Barkhouse left the meeting at 2:10 p.m.

Discussion continued on the motion.

MOVED by Councillor Watts, seconded by Councillor Hum, that this matter be deferred to the next meeting of the Transportation Standing Committee for further discussion. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

Councillor Watts noted that there is a report coming forward from Metro Transit to the next Transportation Standing Committee meeting with Metro Transit's future plans, and it would be beneficial for the Committee to consider this information first.

Councillor Harvey indicated that there are many issues to take into account, such as sharing the rails with other trains, and whether there would be room for commuter rail on the line at peak hours. He indicated that this matter has been discussed many times over the years, and staff should draw on what was learned from previous work.

Mr. Reashor clarified that staff have discussed the issue with CN, and CN has indicated that in order for them to cooperate and share information, they will need to be provided with funds to have the analysis done and to actively work with staff.

Councillor Dalrymple noted concern with the state of the Waverley to Windsor rail line, which is currently only used once a week and is running into disrepair. He is concerned that the tracks will eventually be pulled up. There should be ample space and opportunity to share the lines with other runs. This study is important for deciding whether commuter rail is a viable option for HRM.

Councillor Lund commented that Council needs to explore this opportunity to decide after so many years of discussion if this is a possibility for HRM. He encouraged staff to also consult with the province, other municipalities and major employers such as Irving to explore all options. Councillor Lund commented on the costs of commuter rail vs. the cost of widening roads, park and ride lots, and putting in bus lanes. This opportunity may create efficiencies for the public transit system.

7.4.2 Councillor Blumenthal – Crosswalk & Pedestrian lights at Barrington & Young Street

Mr. Reashor advised that a staff report is being prepared on this matter and will be submitted to Regional Council.

8.1 Information Item #2 – Free Transit Seniors' Day – Councillor Blumenthal

An Information report dated October 7, 2011 was before the Committee.

Councillor Blumenthal commented that seniors worked their whole lives and not all of them can afford a bus fare. He suggested choosing one day a week to provide seniors with free transit rides during off-peak hours (ie. from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and after 6:00 p.m.) Other Canadian cities currently have offered similar practices successfully, such as Ottawa where they now offer free transit rides to seniors 2 or 3 days a week.

MOVED by Councillor Blumenthal, seconded by Councillor Fisher, that the Transportation Standing Committee recommend that Regional Council direct staff to initiate a Free Transit Day for Seniors on Tuesdays during off peak hours.

Councillor Watts assumed the Chair, and Councillor Rankin took his seat in Council.

Councillor Rankin commented that seniors are already supported through tax exemption and tax deferrals, and noted that not all seniors are low income. He noted that Council cannot be seen as discriminatory to other groups. Councillor Rankin commented that the staff report indicates this policy could lead to a \$300,000 loss in revenue. He suggested that the policy should be passed on inability to pay, irrespective of age.

Members suggested alternate options such as looking at providing assistance to people with a low income, rather than just to seniors, or providing passes to low income seniors specifically.

Councillor Hum commented that implications on the transit budget, routes and services need to be considered.

Councillor Blumenthal left the meeting at 3:06 p.m.

MOTION DEFEATED.

7.5 ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

7.5.1 Update from Councillor Watts (verbal)

Councillor Watts updated that the Committee discussed concerns with bike access to the Macdonald Bridge with staff, but the Bridge Commission were unable to attend that meeting. The Committee and staff will continue discussion on these issues, and

possibilities for improvements with the upcoming 2014 bridge redecking with the Bridge Commission in the new year.

The Committee also received a presentation from Bicycle Nova Scotia, regarding the blue route, a connection of bicycle routes.

The Halifax Cycling Coalition have been working on compiling information for cyclists such as regulations of items needed on bikes (lights, bells, etc.), rules of the road and safety information (hand signals, lessons, etc.).

The Committee has been involved in supporting the Making Tracks – Active and Safe Routes to School program, and is looking at how HRM can support the program.

Trails staff released the second edition of the Get Out...Check it Out information package on trails in HRM. They are also looking into the issue of the use of electric bikes on trails. Changes to legislation on electric bikes would require amendments to the provincial *Motor Vehicle Act*.

Councillor Watts indicated that a motion was made at the Active Transportation Advisory Committee meeting last week, to bring forward to the Transportation Standing Committee, relating to the earlier discussion held on Commuter Rail options.

MOVED by Councillor Watts, seconded by Councillor Hendsbee, that the Transportation Standing Committee request that Regional Council direct staff to explore the active transportation opportunities, benefits and potential for acquisition presented by the discontinuance of the rail line between HRM and Windsor.

Councillor Harvey indicated that there are potential opportunities for road transportation improvements tied to this rail line, including realigning Windgate Drive where it meets with Beaverbank Road.

Mr. Reashor indicated that staff would explore opportunities for all possible purposes for the line.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

7.6 ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

7.6.1 Update from Councillor Blumenthal (verbal) - None

8. ADDED ITEMS

8.1 Information Item #2 – Free Transit Seniors' Day – Councillor Blumenthal

This item was addressed earlier in the meeting. See page 7.

8.2 Active Transportation Functional Plan – 5 year review

Councillor Watts indicated that the Active Transportation Functional Plan 5 year review was endorsed by the Active Transportation Advisory Committee last week.

Mr. Reashor added that there is currently an issue with staff capacity, and that the Committee would be approving this in principle based on staffing considerations.

MOVED by Councillor Watts, seconded by Councillor Hendsbee, that the Transportation Standing Committee consider approving the initiation of a 5 year Planning Review of the Active Transportation’s Functional Plan, which is to be overseen and implemented by the Active Transportation Advisory Committee as outlined in the draft Terms of Reference dated September 2011.

Councillor Rankin requested, with the agreement of the mover and seconder, that the words “and implemented” be removed from the motion, as it will be staff implementing the plan, not the Advisory Committee.

The amended motion, as follows, was voted on at this time:

MOVED by Councillor Watts, seconded by Councillor Hendsbee, that the Transportation Standing Committee consider approving the initiation of a 5 year Planning Review of the Active Transportation’s Functional Plan, which is to be overseen by the Active Transportation Advisory Committee as outlined in the draft Terms of Reference dated September 2011. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

9. NEXT MEETING – November 24, 2011

The next Transportation Standing Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, November 24, 2011.

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:24 p.m.

Jennifer Weagle
Legislative Assistant

INFORMATION ITEMS

1. Highway 107 Update (information report)
2. Free Transit Seniors Day (information report)