

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

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HALIFAX REGIONAL COUNCIL  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE  
MINUTES

October 27, 2009

PRESENT: Mayor Peter Kelly  
Deputy Mayor David Hendsbee  
Councillors: Steve Streach  
Barry Dalrymple  
Lorelei Nicoll  
Gloria McCluskey  
Darren Fisher  
Bill Karsten  
Jackie Barkhouse  
Jim Smith  
Mary Wile  
Jerry Blumenthal  
Dawn M. Sloane  
Sue Uteck  
Jennifer Watts  
Russell Walker  
Debbie Hum  
Linda Mosher  
Stephen D. Adams  
Brad Johns  
Robert P. Harvey  
Tim Outhit  
Reg Rankin  
Peter Lund

STAFF: Mr. Wayne Anstey, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer  
Ms. Mary Ellen Donovan, Municipal Solicitor  
Ms. Sherryll Murphy, Acting Municipal Clerk  
Ms. Shawnee Gregory, Legislative Assistant  
Ms. Chris Newson, Legislative Assistant

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**1. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 9:46 a.m.

Mayor Kelly advised that agenda items 11.2.1: Former Dartmouth City Hall - Museum and 11.1.2: Request for Proposal 09-070 - Leased Office Accommodations on the regular Regional Council agenda were related to item 5: Review of Social Heritage Programs and Services on the Committee of the Whole agenda. He asked Council in what order they wished to deal with these items.

**MOVED BY Councillor McCluskey, seconded by Councillor Karsten, that Halifax Regional Council move Committee of the Whole item 5: Social Heritage Programs and Services to the Regional Council agenda immediately following item 11.2.1: Former Dartmouth City Hall - Museum.**

Several Councillors expressed concern that moving the Committee of the Whole item to the Regional Council agenda would not allow for sufficient debate.

**MOTION DEFEATED.**

**MOVED BY Councillor Karsten, seconded by Councillor McCluskey, that items 11.2.1: Former Dartmouth City Hall - Museum and 11.1.2: Request for Proposal 09-070 - Leased Office Accommodations of the Regional Council agenda be dealt with in Committee of the Whole immediately following item 5: Social Heritage Programs. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

**2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES - NONE**

**3. CUTA PRESENTATION - COUNCILLOR RANKIN**

Councillor Rankin introduced the Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) presentation; noting that Ms. Pat Soanes, General Manager of Metro Transit, had been appointed to their Board of Directors. He stated that an aging population as well as urban growth and mounting congestion were all issues that impacted transit in the area.

Council viewed a video presentation regarding the future of transit.

Deputy Mayor Hendsbee entered the meeting at 10:02 a.m.

**4. METRO TRANSIT FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC OPERATIONS PLAN**

- The Metro Transit Five-Year Strategic Operations Plan dated October 7, 2009 was before Council.

- Appendices B & D of the Metro Transit Five-Year Strategic Operations Plan dated October 7, 2009 was before Council.
- A Power Point presentation was before Council.
- A report dated October 9, 2009 was before Council.
- Correspondence from Mr. Carl Cameron, Ms. Leanne MacMillan, Mr. John Wesley Chisholm, Ms. Carol Dobson, Mr. Peter Lewis, Ms. Megan Leslie MP, Mr. Wendell Wambolt, Mr. Bruce Evans and Pat Shaw was before Council.

Ms. Pat Soanes and Mr. Eddie Robar, Manager of Planning and Development for Metro Transit, made the presentation on the Metro Transit Five-Year Strategic Operations Plan. Highlights were as follows:

- Growth in ridership and service had put HRM at the top of the Tier 2 peer group;
- The cost of transit for HRM residents has increased to \$82.00 annually;
- Transit is the most effective way to achieve targets with no need for a third harbour ferry;
- Security cameras which were installed in buses in June of 2009 have proven effective;
- This plan resets the five year clock at which time the population in HRM will be over 400,000, thus, making it a Tier 1 city;
- Upon consultation it showed that public transit was the most common choice of alternative transportation in HRM;
- All ridership targets in the plan should be met, otherwise, certain routes may need to be restructured;
- Routes 7 Robie and 9 Barrington will have increased service which is why it is not necessary to add a downtown shuttle;
- Urban express routes will be created.

Councillor Barkhouse entered the meeting at 10:29 a.m.

- Metro Transit meets the recommended industry average for spare vehicles;
- There will be a small fare adjustment every two years;
- There will be new fare media including day, week and family passes;
- A 25 cent increase in bridge tolls could bring in \$8,000,000 in revenue;
- Staff will be coming forward periodically with complementary plans.

The meeting recessed at 10:43 a.m.

The meeting reconvened at 11:01 a.m.

Councillor Rankin advised that he was not prepared to move the staff recommendation unless further information was provided. The following motion was placed:

**MOVED by Councillor Rankin, seconded by Councillor Streach, that Halifax Regional Council receive the Metro Transit Five - Year Strategic Operations Plan and request staff to bring forward a report relative to the corresponding Operational and Capital Plans and responding to concerns and questions of members of Council regarding the Plan.**

A discussion on the motion ensued with Metro Transit staff responding to questions.

In response to a question from Councillor Johns, Ms. Soanes indicated that extensive public consultation had been done regarding the plan. She advised that the North West Transit Advisory Committee (NWTAC) was not specifically asked for input since they were the only group of their kind in HRM and transit staff deemed it to be inequitable as other areas of HRM would not have this degree of input. Ms. Soanes noted that the NWTAC was provided with some information prior to the report being finalized.

Councillor Blumenthal requested that the transfer policy be further investigated as he believed that it was being abused in some cases. Ms. Soanes indicated that transit staff hoped to introduce fare box technology in the Capital Plan which would help address some transfer issues; noting that fare evasion only accounted for a 2 to 4 % loss in revenue and the fare policy also helped to protect bus operators.

Councillor Walker stated that the Bayers Road Centre should be considered a major transit hub. He also requested an update on the new Lacewood Terminal. Mr. Robar advised that staff had procured a consultant for a study and were currently looking at four potential locations; noting that staff would be doing public consultation during the study.

Councillor Mosher indicated that increasing service to every 15 minutes for routes 20 and 32 was appreciated as well as the new route 22 Armdale, however, she had concerns that service for route 15 was only every 60 minutes. Mr. Robar advised that the number 15 was considered a rural route and, therefore, the population density and ridership did not support increased service.

Mr. Robar advised that the implementation of the potential Spryfield Metro Link was outside of the five year plan; noting that transit staff was focussing on urban express service in that area.

The meeting recessed at 12:00 p.m.

The Committee of the Whole reconvened at 2:03 p.m. with the same Councillors in attendance.

Mr. Mike Labrecque, Director, Transportation and Public Works, explained that the service standards would drive the route choices and that detailed routes would be presented through future annual planning processes.

Councillors Barkhouse and Uteck entered the meeting at 2:06 p.m.

In response to Councillor Dalrymple, Mr. Edward Robar, Manager, Planning and Product Development, Metro Transit, Transportation and Public Works, explained that staff would bring forward an integrated report on the rural transit plan, including all requests of Council, in a few months. The only change to the capital plan previously put forward for 2010/11 would be the incorporation of rural transit.

Councillor Streach entered the meeting at 2:11 p.m.

Councillor Karsten requested the motion be amended by changing the wording from “accept” the report to “accept in principle”. He noted that Council had agreed at the beginning of the year that transit would be one of the five focus areas. The report was consistent with previous information presented and it was now time to move forward.

Ms. Mary Ellen Donovan, Municipal Solicitor, advised that the proposed amendment would be a substantive difference.

Mayor Kelly ruled the amendment out of order.

Councillor McCluskey suggested that consideration be given to where money could be moved in the budget to fulfill the focus group priorities. She proposed that larger Capital Cost Contributions from major developments could be put toward the transportation plan and that the requirement for larger subdivisions to provide a bus shelter be included in development agreements. Modifying the transit fleet to include smaller buses/vans would enable the use of smaller community buses rather than traditional sized buses running with only four or five passengers. She suggested that Councillors could contribute toward bus shelters from their own capital funds.

Councillor Wile noted the reference to light rail transit, page 8 of the report, and commented that rail would provide the needed capacity for higher ridership. She suggested a Committee of all major stakeholders be formed and that they meet quarterly to consider all aspects such as the HRM by Design plans, the issue of a potential third harbour crossing that would involve the Halifax Dartmouth Bridge Commission, the Bedford Fast Ferry and the Atlantic Gateway to ensure there was no duplication of efforts. Councillor Wile expressed concern that no input was requested from the Mainland North area Councillors even though it had the largest growth with a total of 42,000 people in the area. There were currently only two small bus shelters in a district with the second largest number of passengers. She noted a number of service deficiencies such as no service from Lacewood Terminal to the Bridge Terminal.

Councillor Nicoll commented that she was pleased with initiatives such as the Smart Cards and GPS Technology but expressed concern with the lack of preventative maintenance and retraining of drivers. She encouraged Metro Transit to distribute the University Transit Passes (U-Pass) themselves to enable some control. She acknowledged her support for the report as presented.

Councillor Hum entered the meeting at 2:27 p.m.

In response to Councillor Nicoll's concerns, Ms. Patricia Soanes, General Manager, Metro Transit, advised that additional resource was included in the budget to purchase CUTA (Canadian Urban Transit Association) Transit Ambassador Modules for the Metro Transit Bus Operator Training Program.

Councillor Watts commented that meeting with the communities to hear their likes/dislikes would have been beneficial. Due to many people being away during the summer months when the public consultations were held, the turnout was not great. She inquired whether the results of the 9000 surveys would be available for public viewing. Councillor Watts noted that there were community groups that should be heard from such as those who worked on HRM by Design, the Capital District Commission, the Regional Plan Advisory Committee and the Parking Strategy.

Councillor Watts expressed concern with a regular fare increase explaining that people should be rewarded for using the bus and suggested that perhaps increases should be directed toward sustaining the road system for cars. Make transit the easiest, best thing for the public to do. In regard to the issue of equity, she noted that those residents who took the bus everyday under hard conditions were providing an amazing contribution toward sustainability. In regard to accessibility issues, she requested the time line for when the review would be before Council as the disabled have been struggling with the system.

In response to Councillor Watts, Ms. Soanes explained that the accessibility plan was brought forward by request of Regional Council. Metro Transit recognized that the accessible capacity had to be augmented. Staff will provide annual expansion recommendations to Council each year, for implementation the following year, based on capital enhancement subject to the five year capital plan approval process.

Deputy Mayor Hendsbee recommended that the previous five year plan be completed in its entirety prior to commencing the next five year plan. He expressed concern with the time lines for the Metro X service and the future site of the Metro Link terminal site for Cherry Brook/Loon Lake area. There was no reference in the report explaining how the Metro X service would work with the existing Porter's Lake Community Transit. Building a terminal in the Cherry Brook area would free capacity at Portland Hills as many residents travel to Cole Harbour/Portland Hills to access the Metro Link.

Deputy Mayor Hendsbee expressed concern with some route adjustments that would severe routes to Auburn High School and Cole Harbour District High resulting in students having to go through a series of transfers to get back to school. He noted that a traffic light extension was needed at the Lake Major intersection as well as alterations to the Porter's Lake Community service. He explained that HRM had limited jurisdiction in regard to some of the taxing opportunities proposed. He suggested that the bridge toll be raised to equal bus fares in order to help pay for bridge improvements, such as the future re-decking of the bridges, noting that the existing tolls were under inflated.

Councillor Streach noted that he represented a very rural area with no bus service and that it was time for modest service for some areas. He explained that he was not in support of his residents paying more until they received some service. Councillor Streach advised that transit service to his area was not expected until 2013/14. He commented that he was in support of user pay but was not in favour of the tax increase as commuters who use their vehicles have been subsidizing the transit service. He inquired why there were no contributions from other levels of government for public transit considering that transit was a social service.

Councillor Smith noted his support for the report and that he was willing to pay more for a better future for his residents. In response to Councillor Smith, Ms. Soanes explained that the capital plan was a five year rolling plan but not the operational plan. In four years time, another five year operations plan would be brought forward for approval.

Councillor Barkhouse expressed concern with the consultative process commenting that community input should have been included along with the survey information and that Councillors should have been contacted for input as well. She noted that there had been a 361% increase in transit for her area of Eastern Passage/Cow Bay but she had not been provided an opportunity to offer comment. She advised that there was no direct bus access to the Cole Harbour area for students in the Eastern Passage/Cow Bay area to attend school functions in Cole Harbour. She also noted the lack of connectivity in accessing facilities for those residents outside the core.

In response to Councillor Barkhouse, Mr. Robar advised that a Steering Committee had been formed with a broad mix of rural/urban/suburban representation of Councillors for the purpose of high level discussion.

Councillor Blumenthal inquired how the proposed Bayers Road corridor would be designed as residents in the area were very concerned.

Councillor Adams noted that Councillors could contact Metro Transit directly with their specific concerns at any time. He explained that he was part of the Steering Committee that was comprised of a cross section of urban/suburban/rural areas for the purpose of a high level overview of transit. He suggested that the provincial contribution to public transit could be that portion of the municipal tax bill now delegated to education and suggested



that the issue be sent to the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities (UNSM) for consideration. Councillor Adams recommended that Council focus on obtaining additional funding from something generated by Metro Transit rather than increasing bridge tolls.

Councillor Harvey commented that there were a number of transit service deficiencies in the Sackville area but the focus of the report, and the debate, was supposed to be more high level in regard to tipping the resource scales in favour of public transit to move people around HRM not vehicles. He explained that it would take political courage to move forward in addressing transit issues.

Councillor Walker explained that in Whistler, British Columbia, buses were free and were paid for through a hotel room charge, of 10% to 12%, and parking fees; two options that could be considered for HRM. He advised that the Federal government does provide funding for public transit based on ridership and that in Nova Scotia, HRM receives the bulk of that funding. Councillor Walker noted that the province of Nova Scotia has no money but could be approached for transit funding in the future.

Councillor Sloane expressed concern with the lack of progress with the Downtown Shuttle that was first mentioned in 2003 for which additional funds, from CRESPOOL, were provided in 2007. She noted that a downtown shuttle was also approved as part of the HRM by Design plan. She inquired whether there was an internal benchmark to track progress noting that it was important to know what had been planned/achieved in order to move forward. Having people using free transit downtown would enable them to leave their cars home and would provide mobility in the urban centre. Councillor Sloane asked how the \$1.3 million that had been allocated to support the downtown shuttle would be utilized.

In response to Councillor Sloane, Ms. Soanes explained that the modifications to Route 1/Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) would connect the region through the Dartmouth Bridge terminal and the Mumford Road Terminal with modifications to the Route 20 that would provide service to the hospitals, universities and terminals including the ferry terminal. These services would replace the Downtown Shuttle which lacked the connectivity required.

Councillor Lund cautioned Council and staff to be careful in renegeing on promises made in regard to the Downtown Shuttle. He commented that he wanted the bigger picture in regard to park and rides and Metro X rural transit services, specifically in regard to the amendment he suggested at the June meeting in regard to Margeson Drive and Hammonds Plains Road. He inquired when, or if, the municipal transit/transportation plans would be integrated with the provincial transportation strategy. Councillor Lund advised that residents in the rural areas would like to drive to a park and ride to access transit. He noted that a transit tax was approved recently for those persons residing within walking distance to transit but no increase to that service was being provided. He would like to give those residents the message that there would be improvements. He suggested that

peak service be extended to 7:00 p.m. for those who work at the hospitals as they are being dissuaded from using the system as it takes them too long to return home at the end of the work day. He inquired when the costing options would be brought before Council.

In response to Councillor Lund, Mr. Labrecque advised that part one of a two part report for the 2010/11 fiscal framework would be brought to Council no later than January 12<sup>th</sup>.

Councillor Hum expressed concern with possible downloading from the province as they have no money available to contribute and have just announced that they were unable to sign a multi-year funding agreement for the central library. She commented that the Mainland North Councillors should have been contacted for input during the consultation period. The Metro Link service was critical for the Mainland North area as people have gone from a dependency on cars to wanting public transit in just five years. Small neighbourhood buses going to a central station would be a great service. She requested that Metro Transit consult with the area Councillors in regard to the Lacewood Terminal. Councillor Hum advised that she would like to see the province and or the Halifax Regional School Board take some responsibility for transporting students. She agreed with the need for flexibility in the peak hour service as many people do not work the traditional 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. hours.

In response to Councillor McCluskey, Mr. Robar advised that the modified Route 1/BRT transit service would not commence until year two or three of the Metro Transit Five Year Strategic Operations Plan as the current priority was to address the number of people being left behind.

Councillor McCluskey suggested a charge for parking at the park and rides.

In regard to social equity, Councillor Watts inquired whether the proposed flat rate for seniors was a new trend or were similar differentials being used in other areas. She noted that the last fare increase was a huge hardship for many who have limited or low incomes and rely on the bus for work, social services and for getting around. The transit service should be made as accessible as possible. She requested an update on the Joint Strategic Transportation Group referenced in the Regional Plan and whether or not the Committee would be staff driven or a mix of Council and public representation. She also noted the lack of information on the Peninsula Transit Corridor in the report commenting that there was a lack of integration in regard to implications for the Peninsula. Councillor Watts noted that the report did not provide much information on environmental initiatives in regard to greening Metro Transit services as much as possible by including more buses with bike racks and no idling of buses.

In response to Councillor Watts, Ms. Soanes advised that a report would be coming forward within a month in regard to the state of the road network. She noted that efforts have been made to green transit service including the burning of bio-diesel fuel and encouraging the anti-idling policy for buses.

Mr. Wayne Anstey, Deputy Chief Administrative Office, explained that staff have not reached the stage for a detailed look at the composition for the proposed Joint Strategic Transportation Group. Currently, the matter has been under discussion with municipal and provincial staff as well as other stakeholders in regard to developing some interest.

Committee of the Whole recessed at 3:44 p.m.

**5. REVIEW OF SOCIAL HERITAGE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

Due to time constraints, this matter was deferred to the next Committee of the Whole session.

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:44 p.m.

Sherryl Murphy  
Acting Municipal Clerk