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**Information Item No.3**  
**Harbour East-Marine Drive Community Council**  
**November 12, 2015**

**TO:** Chair and Members of Harbour East-Marine Drive Community Council

*Original signed*

**SUBMITTED BY:**

Bruce Zvaniga, Director, Transportation and Public Works

**DATE:** October 22, 2015

**SUBJECT:** Shearwater Flyer Trail – Cole Harbour Parks and Trails Association

**INFORMATION REPORT**

**ORIGIN**

November 13, 2014 Motion of Harbour East-Marine Drive Community Council:

MOVED by Councillor Karsten, seconded by Councillor Nicoll, that Harbour East-Marine Drive Community Council request a staff report with regard to the request from the Cole Harbour Parks and Trails Association for HRM to take over the entire Shearwater Flyer Trail from Bissett Road to 12 Wing Shearwater and also the short section across DND property to Corsair Drive, including a cost analysis to HRM with ongoing maintenance costs. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

**LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

*Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*; sections 79(1)(o) authorizing Council to spend money required by the municipality for public transportation services, 79(1)(ah) authorizing Council to spend money required by the municipality on trails, and 79(1)(av)(v) authorizing Council to spend money required by the municipality for grants or contributions to organizations within the Province including those which are community focused and/or recreation in nature.

**BACKGROUND**

The Shearwater Flyer Trail is a 9km crusher dust gravel surface facility that extends from Corsair Drive at CFB Shearwater to Bissett Road (see map in Appendix 1). The facility is designated for use by pedestrians and bicyclists for the entire corridor and for off-highway motorized vehicles for 8km (the 1 km portion within CFB Shearwater is designated for pedestrians and bicyclists only). The Trail is identified in Halifax's Active Transportation Priorities Plan as part of the regional active transportation network and is part of the regional greenways vision, endorsed in that Plan. At Bissett Road the Trail transitions to the Cole Harbour Salt Marsh Trail. At Corsair Drive the Trail terminates. The Active Transportation Priorities Plan states that HRM will study how to make an active transportation (AT) greenway connection from Corsair Drive to the Dartmouth Harbourfront Greenway which currently terminates at the Woodside Ferry Terminal.

The Shearwater Flyer Trail is part of a former rail corridor (Musquodoboit Rail Line) that was acquired by the Province of Nova Scotia in the early 1990's. This rail line has become the eastern main spine corridor for HRM's active transportation network and extends approximately 66 kms from CFB Shearwater to

Lower Meaghers Grant, via, Lawrencetown, Porters Lake and Musquodoboit Harbour. (Between Porters Lake and East Chezzetcook there is a gap where Highway 107 was built over the former rail corridor. There is a planning study currently underway to determine how to bridge this gap.) There are a number of community groups which manage segments of trail along this corridor.

Most of the Shearwater Flyer Trail is owned by the provincial government except for a small 1 km segment at CFB Shearwater which is owned by the Department of National Defense. The Cole Harbour Parks and Trails Association (CHPTA) currently manages each trail segment under separate agreement. The 8 km provincially-owned segment is managed under the *Crown Lands Act* through a Letter of Authority (LOA) to CHPTA from the Provincial Department of Natural Resources. The second 1 km segment within CFB Shearwater is managed through a licence agreement between DND and CHPTA. CHPTA has managed the entire Trail since 2006.

The Cole Harbour Parks and Trails Association was one of the first community trail organizations to recognize the benefits of the abandoned rail line as an active transportation greenway trail. After developing the Salt Marsh Trail across Cole Harbour Marsh in 2000, CHPTA developed the main spine Active Transportation (AT) Corridor and a system of park trails through the Cole Harbour Heritage Park. The group then expanded their network connectivity to the west to include the 9 km Shearwater Flyer Trail from Bissett Road to CFB Shearwater in 2005-06. The Association currently maintains and manages, in partnership with HRM and the Province, 28 km of active transportation greenways and walking trails. The Shearwater Flyer is the only segment in CHPTA's network that permits motorized use.

CHPTA has requested HRM to take over the management and operation of the Shearwater Flyer Trail as they do not have the organizational capacity to maintain this facility. The primary challenge faced by CHPTA is the additional maintenance required for a facility that permits the use of off-highway vehicles. Based on historic maintenance figures, motorized trails require three times the effort to be maintained to a high quality AT Greenway standard that benefits all users compared to facilities that do not permit off-highway vehicles.

Between 2005-2009 HRM contributed \$124,000 to the development of the Shearwater Flyer Trail through contributions to the CHPTA for ditching, parking lot development, surface gravels, amenities, gates and bridge decking.

## **DISCUSSION:**

CHPTA has made the request to Harbour East-Marine Drive Community Council for HRM to take over the entire Shearwater Flyer Trail from Bissett Road to CFB Shearwater and also the short section across DND property to Corsair Drive.

Given the designation of this corridor as a segment in the regional active transportation network in the Active Transportation Priorities Plan, HRM has an interest in the continued operation of this facility as a corridor for walking and bicycling. Furthermore, the AT Priorities Plan identified the development of a facility to connect the Shearwater Flyer Trail to the Dartmouth Waterfront AT Greenway as a significant gap and commits to the development of a functional planning study to identify the preferred alignment and facility-type to make this connection.

There are a number of "next steps" that would need to occur for HRM to fully consider taking over the entire Shearwater Flyer Trail. These include:

- 1) CHPTA would have to formally discontinue its agreements with the provincial government and DND to manage the Shearwater Flyer Trail. It would then be the Province's and DND's (the owners of the facility) responsibility to determine next steps.
- 2) Given the municipal interest in the continued operation of the corridor for active transportation purposes, it is likely that these owners would approach HRM should CHPTA discontinue their agreements with the Province and DND. The provincial government has a ten-step process that they have used to guide decision-making on transferring responsibility for the operation of former

rail corridors to other groups. Whether this process would be used in the case of the Shearwater Flyer Trail, given HRM's interest is not clear at this time. Direct government to government negotiations may be another option.

A key factor in the ongoing operation of the facility would likely be whether it continues to permit the use of motorized vehicles. Currently, HRM has clear policy direction to develop and expand facilities for walking and bicycling (the AT Plan refers to these as "greenways"). The municipality does not own or operate trails that permit off-highway vehicles, however, we do support some maintenance costs on three motorized community trails subject to a condition that at least 50% of costs are covered by other sources (e.g. the Province).

- 3) As per the AT Plan, HRM will develop a functional plan for bridging the 3km gap between Corsair Drive and the Woodside Ferry Terminal. This study will identify the recommended alignment, property implications, potential for use, costs and overall feasibility of developing this connection. Development of this segment would further re-enforce the importance of the Shearwater Flyer Trail as an AT route and would be a factor to consider in potential future decision-making processes on whether or not HRM should take over the Shearwater Flyer Trail.

The above motion requested a cost analysis on the implications of the ongoing maintenance costs should HRM take over the Shearwater Flyer Trail. A review of costs to maintain off-road walking and bicycling trail facilities in the municipality to an appropriate standard over the past five years indicates an estimated cost of about \$900 per kilometer per year. This does not include snow clearing, which only occurs on a portion of the off-road walking and bicycling trail network. Should the municipality pursue taking over the Shearwater Flyer Trail in the future, a more detailed cost estimate would be developed, based on the existing condition of the Trail at that time and a determination on winter maintenance requirements.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications at this time. Should there be a subsequent decision-making process to consider whether or not HRM should take over this facility, there would be a full analysis of any potential financial implications.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

No community engagement was initiated as part of writing this report aside from discussions with CHPTA.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

No environmental implications as this time.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Appendix 1 – Map of Shearwater Flyer Trail

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/index.php> then choose the appropriate Community Council and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

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*Original signed*

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## Appendix 1. Map of Shearwater Flyer Trail and Area

