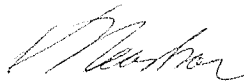


Peninsula Community Council
December 14, 2009

TO: Chair and Members of Peninsula Community Council

SUBMITTED BY:



Ken Reashor, P. Eng., Traffic Authority

DATE: November 18, 2009

SUBJECT: Pedestrian Walk Lights in the Urban Core

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Item 4.1.7 that was raised at the October 5, 2009, meeting of Peninsula Community Council.

BACKGROUND

At Peninsula Community Council's October 5, 2009 meeting, during Public Participation, a resident addressed Community Council with concern about the pedestrian 'walk' lights that require a button to be pushed in order to get the 'walk' signal to cross the street, and questioned whether this could be removed so that it would automatically change with the traffic light. Councillor Watts agreed with the concern and stated that she felt the pedestrian walk buttons may be appropriate for areas in the Municipality further out from the downtown core, where there are fewer pedestrians, but felt that on the Peninsula there should not be pedestrian 'walk' buttons. Community Council agreed to forward this matter to staff with a request for an information report on whether the pedestrian 'walk' buttons could be removed from the Peninsula.

DISCUSSION

Of the roughly 75 signalized locations equipped with pedestrian signal heads on the Halifax Peninsula, there are only 12 which are actuated by push buttons at the present time. Of those, three are located at half signals (Quinpool at Beech and at Harvard, and the right-turn bypass lane from Cunard to North Park), and two have push buttons only for crossing the major street.

The standard for all new and upgraded traffic signal installations throughout HRM has been to install pedestrian push buttons and vehicle detector loops on at least the minor street approaches, and in some cases all approaches. One of the primary reasons for this is to enable the operation of the signals in what is known as actuated control instead of fixed timing plans. This allows for the signals to remain continuously green on the major street when there are no vehicles or pedestrians waiting to enter from the minor streets. Also, because pedestrian signal phases normally need to be longer than vehicular signal phases from the minor approaches, pedestrian signal indications (Walk/Don't Walk) are displayed only when required, resulting in more efficient signal operation, at considerable savings in fuel costs and reductions in air and noise pollution. Another benefit with using actuated control instead of fixed timing plans is that flashing operation is no longer needed when traffic volume is lower late at night, which previously resulted in pedestrian signals being rendered inoperative. Our policy is that new (and existing traffic signals as they are upgraded) will no longer operate in night flashing mode.

Pressing the pushbutton calls up a pedestrian phase, which allows enough time for the pedestrian to cross at average walking pace. Without pushing the button, there may not always be enough time programmed into the vehicular phase for a pedestrian to cross the street. If the button is pressed, the pedestrian phase may begin immediately or will begin at a certain point during the following cycle. Extent of the delay before the pedestrian Walk signal begins will vary, depending on the programming of the phases for that intersection and when the button was pushed within the cycle. Pedestrian delays at some intersections with fixed time signals could actually exceed the length of delay at fully actuated signals with pedestrian push buttons.

Fixed time signal operation is somewhat like an elevator which stops at every floor, regardless of whether anyone gets on or off. Actuated signals, with detectors for vehicles and push buttons for pedestrians, are better able to adjust to actual traffic conditions and provide the maximum amount of right of way and minimum amount of delay to the greatest number of users, thus making optimum use of the shared space of the intersection.

As traffic signals are upgraded, the type of operation will be determined on a case by case basis. In most of the Downtown areas (where both pedestrian and vehicle traffic is heavy and crossing distances are shorter because streets are narrower) it is very unlikely that push buttons will be added.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/cc.html> then choose the appropriate Community Council and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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