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Item No. 9.3.2

**Transportation Standing Committee
September 24, 2015**

TO: Chair and Members of the Transportation Standing Committee

Original Signed

SUBMITTED BY:

Ms. Patricia Gates, Chair, HRM Accessibility Advisory Committee

DATE: September 15, 2015

SUBJECT: Recommended Priority Areas for Snow Clearing - 2015/16 Winter Season

ORIGIN

Motion approved at the September 10, 2015 Accessibility Advisory Committee special meeting.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The main responsibility of the Accessibility Advisory Committee, as set out in its Terms of Reference, is to advise Halifax Regional Council, through the Transportation Standing Committee, on the impact of Municipal policies, programs and services on persons with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Transportation Standing Committee recommend to Regional Council the following four areas for priority snow clearing for the 2015/16 winter season, in no particular order:

1. Sidewalks
2. Curb cuts
3. Bus stops, including access to the street
4. Signaled crosswalk activation buttons

And that consideration be given to aligning snow clearing standards for sidewalks and bus stops to be the same standard as the street they serve.

BACKGROUND

On August 4, 2015, staff presented the Winter Operations 2014/2015 – Strategic Direction Recommendations to Committee of the Whole. An outcome from that meeting was a motion which included direction to staff to:

2. *Improve Sidewalk clearing by:*
 - a. *Working within existing approved contracts and resources, direct staff to return to Regional Council in **November** 2015 with options to improve sidewalk service outcomes, including service coordination, street intersections, and accessibility; and*

As a result of this motion, a special meeting of the Accessibility Advisory Committee was called on September 10, 2015 at the request of staff. Mr. Bruce Zvaniga, Director of Transportation and Public Works (TPW), and TPW staff attended the meeting, and requested that the Committee provide advice to staff, and to Regional Council, through the Transportation Standing Committee, identifying priority outcomes for the 2015/16 winter season.

The purpose of this report is to communicate to Regional Council, through the Transportation Standing Committee, the outcome of staffs' September 10, 2015, consultation with the Committee, and is intended as a companion document for Council in consideration of the November 2015 staff report, to inform Council's decision from the perspective of residents with disabilities.

DISCUSSION

The Committee discussed issues encountered over the 2014/15 winter season, and made suggestions for improvements. The following is a summary of the issues and suggestions raised by the Committee:

- Articulating service standards so that they reflect what is needed and is enforceable.
- Having one contractor clearing bus stops, shelters, and the sidewalks around them would eliminate one service provider from plowing in the work of another.
- The clearing of sidewalks and bus stops should have the same standard as the street that they are adjacent to. For example, if a Priority 1 Road is to be cleared in 12 hours, the bus stops and sidewalks on that road should also be cleared in 12 hours.
- Snow clearance needs to be to the curb so that buses can provide their usual standard of service.
- Snow needs to be cleared around the signalized crosswalk activation push buttons at pedestrian crossings.
- Curb cuts need to be properly cleared, and should be designed with snow clearance in mind.
- Residents should have access to information about the locations of storm drains. A formal program be developed where individuals could adopt a drain, and an app be produced with the drain locations. The appropriate clearance of drains is very important to individuals in wheelchairs.
- An "E-311" app could be developed so that residents can take a picture of a problem, voice their concern and mark the location through Google Maps to ensure accurate reporting
- Improved training for snow removal staff, noting that it can be intimidating and difficult to navigate sidewalks being cleared by a bobcat for those with visual or other physical impairments.
- Reducing the height of snow banks is an important factor in increasing visibility and improving conditions for driver and pedestrian safety.
- Many individuals with disabilities view mobility in a complete start-to-finish trip fashion; any barriers encountered in their trip can make moving from place to place very difficult and potentially impossible.
- Challenges created when navigating pot holes.
- The significance of long term planning for winter operations, as opposed to short term measures, and the importance of communicating that plan to the public.
- Communication via all forms of media, including radio, for those without internet access.

- Difficulties encountered by individuals with guide dogs, as guide dogs are trained to go around obstacles, and many guide dogs considered snow and ice covered sidewalks last season to be obstacles, leading their owners into the road.

Several recurring themes were brought up throughout the meeting by members, those being the clearing of sidewalks, curb cuts, bus stops (including access to the street), and clearing of signalized crosswalk activation push buttons.

The Committee put forward the following recommendation by motion:

THAT the Accessibility Advisory Committee recommend to the Transportation Standing Committee the following four areas for priority snow clearing for the 2015/16 winter season, in no particular order:

1. Sidewalks
2. Curb cuts
3. Bus stops, including access to the street
4. Signalized crosswalk activation buttons

And that consideration be given to aligning snow clearing standards for sidewalks and bus stops to be the same standard as the street they serve.

Mr. Zvaniga advised that staff would take this recommendation into consideration in their November report to Regional Council.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications associated with the Committee's recommendations will be outlined in the November staff report to Council.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) is comprised of eight volunteer citizen members and two members of Regional Council, plus staff liaison members from a number of HRM business units. Meetings are held monthly and are open to the public. Minutes, agendas, reports and other information on the AAC are posted on the HRM website.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

None identified.

ALTERNATIVES

None identified.

ATTACHMENTS

None

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

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