

**Transportation Standing Committee
September 27, 2012**

TO: Chair and Members of Transportation Standing Committee



SUBMITTED BY: _____
Eddie Robar, Director, Metro Transit

DATE: August 29, 2012

SUBJECT: MusGo Rider Rural Public Transit Pilot

ORIGIN

Transportation Standing Committee request for a staff report at its meeting of May 24, 2012.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Transportation Standing Committee recommend that Halifax Regional Council:

- (1) not grant a request for \$10,000 from MusGo Rider for the operation of a community-based rural public transit pilot service in the Musquodoboit Harbour area; and
- (2) express its support in principle for community-led rural transit initiatives and direct staff to develop a funding program for consideration in the 2013-14 budget.

BACKGROUND

At the May 24, 2012, meeting of the Transportation Standing Committee, a presentation was made by MusGo Rider describing the community-based rural transit service they are proposing to pilot in 2012 in the Musquodoboit Harbour area. The presentation included the following requests of HRM:

1. For HRM to assist MusGo Rider with obtaining vehicle financing for the bus from the Credit Union, where they will utilize a Provincial program of small business loans for Social Enterprises;
2. For \$10,000 in financial support from HRM to offset MusGo Rider operating costs, possibly through Councillors' district capital funds; and
3. For support and commitment from HRM to prioritize rural transportation concerns.

The Committee passed a motion that HRM staff prepare a report discussing these three requests. Additional questions were raised by the Committee regarding the applicability of other approved HRM programs to this funding request.

DISCUSSION

MusGo Rider completed a service feasibility study March 2011, with funding from the provincial NS-TRIP program. The following year, a business and pre-implementation plan was completed through the same funding program. Based on these planning studies, MusGo Rider is proposing to operate a transit service pilot for one year beginning in 2012. They project an operating deficit of \$60,000, most of which will be covered by a NS-TRIP service start-up grant.

The service proposed by MusGo Rider is a door-to-door on-demand service operated by a non-profit co-operative. A community co-operative such as this has the potential to be a very efficient form of transit for small communities by tailoring their service to meet local needs, leveraging support from local businesses, encouraging volunteer hours and reducing 'dead-heading' costs by basing and servicing their vehicle(s) within the community. A funding process to support community-led transit initiatives in rural areas can be drafted by staff and presented to Regional Council for its consideration during the 2013-14 budget approval. This funding process will have checks and balances to ensure money is being effectively spent and may be combined with the provincial NS-TRIP program.

Until such a process is developed and approved, it would be premature to grant funding to any applicant.

During discussion following the May 24, 2012, presentation, questions were raised by the Committee regarding the applicability of other approved HRM programs to this funding request. The conditions on applying Councillor's district capital funds preclude that as a source of

funding for costs associated with transit operation. This request would also not qualify as a grant, as managed through the HRM Grants and Contributions Program, as the funds requested are for operating costs.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications at this time.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

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

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This project arose from the Musquodoboit Harbour Community Vision and Action Plan, which culminated an intensive public consultation process with ongoing implementation led by the Musquodoboit Harbour Community Association (formerly the Musquodoboit Harbour and Area Ratepayers and Residents Association). Community engagement on the issue of transit service in rural areas has been, and will continue to be, a part of the RP+5 process.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The MusGo Rider project is expected to result in more environmentally sustainable commuting choices.

ALTERNATIVES

The Transportation Standing Committee may choose to forward a recommendation for immediate funding to Regional Council. This is not recommended as no mechanism currently exists at this time to manage and evaluate the project and HRM's contribution.

Should the Committee choose to forward a recommendation to Regional Council to fund the MusGo Rider project, it is recommended that:

- (1) Funding be recommended to come from CTR00908 - Transportation Demand Management Program; and
- (2) The MusGo proposal be subject to HRM staff review prior to award of funding.

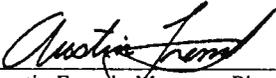
ATTACHMENTS

There are no attachments.

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

Report Prepared by: David McCusker, P.Eng., Manager, Strategic Transportation Planning, 490-6696

Report Approved by:


Austin French, Manager, Planning, 490-6717