

NORTH WEST TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Wednesday, October 19, 2005

PRESENT: Mr. Phil Cox, Chair,
Mr. Bill Chaffey, Vice-Chair
Mr. Alastair Lawrie
Mr. John Merrick
Mr. Gunther Seyffarth
Councillor Brad Johns

ABSENT
WITH REGRETS: Mr. Alain Bourgeois
Mr. Ron McKinnon

STAFF AND
OTHERS: Mr. Geoff Wright, Project Manager, Metro Transit
Mr. Brian Taylor, Senior Advisor, Regional Transit Planning
Mr. Dave McCusker, Manager, Regional Transportation Planning
Mr. Robert Gair, TDLGlobal Inc. Consultant, Fast Ferry Project
Ms. Chris Newson, Legislative Assistant

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The Vice-Chair called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm in the Fenerty Room, Sackville Library, 636 Sackville Drive.

2. APPROVAL OF ORDER OF BUSINESS AND ADDITIONS/DELETIONS

Additions: Item 4.1.5 Form Letter re: Requests for Metro Transit Service and a draft report to Northwest Community Council regarding extension of transit services in District 19.
Item 7.2.1 Fast Ferry Presentation

Move: Item 4.1.1 to be dealt with immediately following approval of the Agenda.
Item 7.2.1 to be dealt with immediately following item 4.1.1 Transit Study Update.

The Committee approved the agenda as amended.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - September 29, 2005

Deferred to the November meeting due to time constraints. Mr. Cox advised that there is a correction to be made at the bottom of page 5, the reference should be to the government of *Canada* not *Nova Scotia* in regards to the transit funds.

4. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES

4.1 Status Sheet Item

4.1.1 Transit Study Update

The Committee confirmed the original objective of the transit study was to compile information to be presented to the Federal/Provincial governments (upon approval from the North West Community Council and Regional Council) regarding the need for Federal/Provincial funding for transit services. The information would highlight current deficiencies with the transit services such as: overcrowding, passengers being left behind at bus stops due to the overcrowding and riders standing on the buses for long distances (from Sackville to downtown Halifax). Concern for safety is a major motivating factor for this research as well as the reality that the situation will worsen with the addition of the Dal U-Pass in January 2006. There is not sufficient infrastructure to handle the expected increase in ridership. It is hoped that this report will assist in

securing additional funds for the 2006/2007 budget.

Mr. Chaffey advised that the numbers circulated at the last meeting regarding ridership were part of the effort to determine projected ridership for 2006. He is attempting to separate the information to show the past sales of student passes in an effort to project the affect of the Dal U-Pass coming into effect in January 2006.

Mr. Geoff Wright, Project Manager, Metro Transit confirmed that the ridership numbers were up dramatically from last year.

Councillor Johns advised that there is transit funding coming from the Federal government. Mr. Wright confirmed that there is \$22.5 m coming to the province with guidelines that it be distributed according to ridership. Mr. Brian Taylor, Senior Advisor, Regional Transit Planning, confirmed that the funding is secure.

Councillor Johns added that since there is funding coming (over the next two years) perhaps this study is a moot point. He added that the statistics in the study are good to have on hand and could be used to continue to lobby for financial assistance for transit services.

Mr. Dave McCusker, Manager, Regional Transportation Planning, explained that there will be a report going to Regional Council regarding the recommended use of HRM's portion of the Federal funds. One recommendation will be for a new transit garage as the Burnside garage is over capacity by 25 buses. He emphasised that the first priority will be to have existing transit services met. Mr. McCusker advised that the Federal program's intention is to fund new projects that add to capability. Mr. Gunther Seyffarth suggested Bedford/Sackville be considered as the area for the new transit garage as there is land to build on.

Mr. Chaffey requested direction from the Committee as to how to proceed with the statistical information he has compiled. He suggested that the members provide further information to the Legislative Assistant who could then forward the information to him. The Committee agreed that the statistical information is a useful tool to identify existing deficiency issues and will be helpful in determining the distribution of the money. Mr. Chaffey explained that the statistics will show that ridership in the Northwest Community Council region will be a lot higher than just the normal incremental increase. Councillor Johns advised that the information being compiled will assist him at Council in presenting the case for the necessity of additional transit funding as well as determining the allocation of the forthcoming Federal transit funds.

Mr. Cox arrived at 7:22 pm.

Mr. Merrick suggested that Metro Transit staff prepare a graph of other areas (other than the Northwest Community Council region) and compare the growth (in ridership) from 2003 forward. Councillor Johns advised that he will ask staff to look at compiling that information.

Mr. Chaffey left the meeting at 7:24 pm turning the Chair over to Mr. Cox.

The Committee agreed to hear the Fast Ferry Presentation at this time.

7. ADDED ITEMS

7.2 Added Items

7.2.1 Fast Ferry Presentation

- A page entitled *Why We Should Tie These Things Together* was circulated to the Committee at this time.

Mr. Robert Gair, Partner, Strategic Management Consultants, TDVGlobal Inc. presented a verbal overview of the Fast Ferry Project. He advised that he has been working on the Fast Ferry project since May 2005.

Mr. Gair raised the following points during his presentation:

- Benefits - Cost: not having to do something to the Bedford highway.
Quality of life: citizens can choose a different transportation option.
- Cost and return: It is a complex decision in choosing the right ferry. The following points are to be considered in the selection:
 - < If the selected vessel is not big enough - people will try the service but will not continue using that service.
 - < If the propulsion system is too small there will be maintenance issues
 - < What is the market demand, what is the market size and requirement, how will the demand be met?
 - < What price point, what is the life cycle cost?
- Terminal - Bedford site.

An extensive market survey was done of 3500 people with 776 survey results completed. There is a high degree of certainty with the market results as 7 out of 10 people in Bedford indicated they would consider using the ferry and 6 out of 10 people outside Bedford indicated they would consider using the ferry. This shows a high interest in the market.

The following points were raised by those surveyed in regards to what would influence them to use the ferry:

1. The major influence would be free parking. This response is driving the project team to look at a broader solution.
2. The transportation excursion would have to add value to the transportation process for the user: For example: provide daycare at the terminal.

Mr. Gair advised that the transportation model was reviewed from a commuters perspective rather than transit terminal to transit terminal. The information was fed into the model and it was determined that 23 trips per day, operating at around the 30 knot mark, would be required. The speed requirement assists in choosing the propulsion package as over 30 knots would require a larger propulsion system. There is some debate that the 30-35 knot ability would provide the extra speed to make up any delays in the schedule. A twenty (20) minute ride is the goal. He added that as the population grows, and without investment in the road system, transportation on roads will only worsen. The ferry provides an option.

Mr. Gair responded to Mr. Seyffarth advising that high speed buses will get the commuter to the traffic centres faster where they will then sit in traffic. The ferry, an underused transportation option, is part of an integrated transportation system with a full spectrum of options to provide citizens with a less stressful commute. The Metro Link is one solution to the regular transit system. The ferry is an additional asset toward the Regional Plan objective of a more multi-mode transportation system.

Mr. Seyffarth, acknowledging the value of ferries, stressed the importance of addressing present transit problems. He added there is continued expansion in Middle Sackville but there have been no improvements to the bus system.

Mr. Gair explained that parking is a critical decision factor for the terminal. Building parking on the waterfront would not service the broad population as everyone would have to come down to that point. It would also result in a very expensive parking lot due to the value of waterfront land. An alternate site, HRM land at the foot of Hammonds Plains

Road and Highway 102, could be developed as a multi-mode transportation hub. That hub would allow the commuter to select a transit mode from that location such as: regular transit, Metro Link or the Ferry. A shuttle service to the ferry terminal could be provided. A projection of how long it would take to get downtown via the variety of transportation options could be provided thereby permitting the commuter to choose the quickest option for them.

Mr. Gair added that informal meetings have been held with the development community regarding whether they thought a multi-mode transit hub at that location (Hammonds Plains Road/Highway 102) would add value to their land. The developers agreed that a transit hub would add value. Mr. Gair commented that there are huge developments occurring which will only worsen the traffic situation and the transit hub would help alleviate some traffic concerns.

In response to Councillor Johns, Mr. Gair advised that there are many opportunities in regards to retail and other business ventures for the "hub" location. The hub will become a reason to do other things. He further explained that discussions have been held with the Waterfront Development Corporation in regards to a "draw" such as an Arts, Sports or Culture facility to attract people to that area. To draw people from Halifax would require a unique facility (retail/restaurant/contemporary architecture/museum) that does not exist in Halifax. This proposed facility would be in response to new growth, not transference, and therefore would not detract from existing retail centres/facilities.

The Committee raised the following comments/concerns:

- A brand new transit hub is being created to fit the cars to the ferry. Cars are driving the location of this hub. Hammonds Plains Road/Highway 102 is an odd place to have the transit hub. Is this location fitting with the vision of the Regional Plan? Is this area planned for high density residential?

Mr. McCusker explained that the Regional Plan is trying to have development around transit nodes. The cars have to be captured and commuters placed on other transportation modes to get downtown. The waterfront is an expensive place to put parking therefore a less expensive option has to be found.

Mr. Gair added that there would be parking available at the ferry terminal but it would not be free. He responded to further questions of the Committee as follows:

- < the downtown terminal will be located at the same site as the existing ferry terminal on Lower Water Street.
- < the area around the proposed transit hub would be high density residential.
- < there is still some operational review and analysis to be done regarding the fare:

Possible cash fare of \$4 and by pass only \$2 He added that a return trip from New Jersey/New York is \$37.00.

In regards Metro Transit's service standard goal of 70% return, Mr. McCusker responded that part of the Regional Plan is to have Council reduce their expectations of return. Mr. Brian Taylor added, for example, that a transit route would have to have a 40% return to stay on the road. Mr. Taylor confirmed that Nova Scotia receives zero transit subsidy from the Provincial and Federal governments.

Mr. Gair responded to Councillor Johns that the next step in the process is to get the report to Regional Council for approval. If approved, an RFP (Request for Proposal) for design will go forward in early winter. Then detailed costing information would be provided next spring to be approved by Council before continuing to the next RFP to seek builders. The process could take 2 to 2.5 years. He confirmed that within three years the ferry should be in the water.

Members of the Northwest Transit Advisory Committee advised that they are not in favour of the fast ferry project going ahead at this time as there are inadequacies in the current system that have to be addressed. The current system is not meeting the needs and there are better uses for the money in the immediate future. The Committee agreed with a fast ferry project in the future but not until current needs are met.

Mr. McCusker emphasised that funds will be spent on the current system first before the ferry gets in the water.

Mr. Gair advised it has been forecasted that within three years the commute time on Highway 102 will have increased by fifteen minutes.

Mr. Gair will forward the following information to the Committee:

- Market questions showing six out of ten residents in Sackville said they would use the fast ferry.
- Complete study on the Bedford Basin.

Mr. Gair responded to Mr. Cox indicating that additional infrastructure for the transit hub and shuttle service to the ferry would be part of the funding element involving the development community. The transit hub would increase the value of the developer's property as their intent is to provide for types of employment where people would buy property close to work giving them the option of walking/cycling/taking transit to work.

Mr. Gair responded to Mr. Lawrie that capital costs are not part of the business case. He

elaborated that capital costs would be approximately \$20m and would include: the ferries (2-3 ferries), the new terminal in Bedford and changes to the existing terminal in downtown Halifax. Parking would not be included in this figure.

Mr. McCusker responded to Mr. Cox that it is in the three year plan to provide additional buses to service existing areas such as Lucasville Road/Patton Road. The plan is to build on existing core services first.

In response to the Committee's reservation regarding a fast ferry at this time, Mr. Gair added that a fast ferry could be of benefit when bidding for major sporting events as it could be used in the marketing of the event. The ferry would be operational by the time the Commonwealth Games arrive in Halifax.

Councillor Johns advised that approximately 175 people are left standing at bus stops due to overcrowding on the current system. He emphasised that issues such as this have to be resolved first.

Mr. Lawrie commented that the infrastructure (roads) are already there for buses but the terminal/ferry are not.

Mr. Gair responded to the Committee that providing ferry service beyond George's Island (Eastern Passage/Purcell's Cove areas) would require a different propulsion system. He added that there may not be the population to support a ferry service at those locations.

Mr. Gair advised demo rides on a fast ferry will be offered next Friday and Saturday for members of the Committee and the public. Mr. McCusker will advise as to the time and location.

The Committee thanked Mr. Gair, Mr. McCusker and Mr. Taylor for their attendance and presentation this evening.

4.1.2 MSVU Shelter

Deferred to the next meeting due to time constraints.

4.1.3 Pedestrian Push Buttons

Deferred to the next meeting due to time constraints.

4.1.4 Pedestrians Crossing Intersections (Bedford area near Bedford Place Mall and Sackville area near Highway 101)

Deferred to the next meeting due to time constraints.

4.1.5 Form Letter re: Requests for Metro Transit Service

- A draft form letter regarding requests for metro transit service was before the Committee.
- A draft report dated October 19, 2005 to the Northwest Community Council regarding extension of transit services in District 19 was before the Committee.

The Committee **approved** the form letter as presented.

The Legislative Assistant clarified that the letters would be disbursed by Metro Transit in response to future requests for transit service/extension of transit services.

The Committee reviewed the draft report at this time.

As a result of previous discussions by the Committee regarding extension of services to the Lucasville Road/Patton Road areas, the following motion was made:

MOVED BY Councillor Johns, seconded by Mr. Merrick that the Northwest Transit Advisory Committee recommend that the North West Community Council request Metro Transit give priority consideration to providing extended transit service to District 19 once current deficiencies are addressed.

The Committee agreed that Community Transit is not a recommended alternative at this time as there remains a capacity issue once the commuter arrives at the regular transit service locations.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

The report was **approved** to go forwarded to the Northwest Community Council for consideration at their November 24, 2005 meeting.

5. CONSIDERATION OF DEFERRED BUSINESS - None

6. REPORTS

6.1 November Schedule Changes

Deferred to the November meeting.

7. NEW BUSINESS / ADDED ITEMS

7.1 New Business

7.1.1 Fast Ferry - Pros/Cons

Deferred to the November meeting. Mr. McCusker is invited to attend.

7.2 Added Items

7.2.1 Fast Ferry Presentation

This item was dealt with previously. See pages 3-9.

8. NEXT MEETING DATE

Mr. Cox advised he is unavailable on November 16th. The Legislative Assistant is to confirm a meeting date with the Committee.

9. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Chris Newson
Legislative Assistant