



P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. 9.1.2
Transportation Standing Committee
December 3, 2014

TO: Chair and Members of Transportation Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed

Bob Bjerke, Director, Development & Planning

DATE: November 23, 2014

SUBJECT: Variable Message Signs Project Status

ORIGIN

The approved Project Budgets for 2012-13 and 2013-14 included \$1,060,000 in funding for a project titled "Variable Message Signs". At the October 1, 2014 meeting of Transportation Standing Committee, Councillor Hendsbee gave Notice of Motion that he intends to request a staff report regarding variable message signs (VMS).

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

HRM Charter section 74 (1) states: "The Municipality may agree with one or more municipalities, villages, service commissions, the Government of the Province or of Canada or a department or agency of either of them or a band council pursuant to the Indian Act (Canada) to provide or administer municipal or village services."

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Transportation Standing Committee provide direction to Halifax Regional Council to re-allocate the capital contribution for this project to other strategic transportation priorities for the 2015/16 Budget.

BACKGROUND

In 2002, the Atlantic Provinces Regional Intelligent Transportation Systems Strategic Planning Study was released. This study identified the critical role that dynamic messaging signs (also called variable message signs or VMS) play in “centre to wayside” communication and how that addresses key areas such as traffic control, incident management, environmental conditions management, disaster response and management, weather and environmental impact management, and traveller information. HRM and Halifax Harbour Bridges (HHB) then began discussions on partnering to build a network of VMS within the region to better manage incidents, scheduled construction, and weather events.

Working on their own, HHB erected six VMS in 2010 on the approaches to the McKay Bridge along with a 24/7/365 control centre. In 2008, HRM first identified funding in the five-year capital plan with the objective that in 2013 HRM and HHB would share in the cost of constructing additional signs at key locations within the regional roadway network. The intention was that the capital cost and maintenance of the signs would be shared, access to messaging would be equal, but operation of the central control centre would be funded fully by HHB.

In the 2011-12 HRM Project Budget, \$60,000 was approved as 50% of the cost of the engineering design of five additional VMS (see Attachment One). The following year, \$1,000,000 was approved for HRM’s 50% share of the construction cost of the signs along with a \$3000 share of annual operating costs. At the invitation of Transportation Standing Committee, a joint presentation on the project was delivered on April 26, 2012 (Attachment Two). The objective of that presentation was to have members of the Committee knowledgeable about the project and its benefits in preparation for consideration of the project in upcoming budget discussions.

Four of the locations selected for signs provide potential for “outbound” messaging related to the provincial highway network in addition to the “inbound” messaging HRM and HHB wished to provide for the roadway network elements under their control. N.S. Transportation & Infrastructure Renewal was invited to join the project and pay the incremental cost of adding outbound messaging to the sign structures, but declined.

The HHB has indicated that they will proceed with this project with their own resources to ensure the signs are in place to provide active messaging capacity is available throughout the MacDonald Bridge refurbishment project.

DISCUSSION

Following the initial consideration of the project and budget allocation through the capital budget Halifax, new transportation priorities have emerged. The municipality has been working to take a more focused and strategic approach to achieving Regional Plan transportation objectives, including the recently approved Active Transportation Functional Plan.

As part of this renewed focus on ensuring effective use of resources this project has been identified as one as a possible opportunity to re-allocate funding to other higher priority strategic transportation initiatives. In addition, this project has been delayed in order to resolve the following issues:

- (1) Continued efforts to bring the Province into sharing the cost of this project; and
- (2) Details of the operating agreement required further discussion with Halifax Harbour Bridges.

The signs will be connected to the control centre operated by HHB, which is manned 24 hours a day and 365 days a year. Those costs will continue to be borne by HHB, but the direct cost of operating the sign (power, communication, insurance and routine inspection/maintenance) will be split. A protocol will be established that allows HRM to provide messaging related to its roadway network and both HRM and HHB will have full access to the messaging capability when required. Awarding the construction contract

for the signs will be done by Halifax Harbour Bridges through a public tendering process, in compliance with the Halifax Harbour Bridge Commission Procurement Policy.

It is possible that some or all of the initial project objectives could be met through negotiation of a future arrangement with HHB. This would allow Halifax to display specific transportation messaging outside of participation in the initial capital and operation costs for the VMS project.

Should Transportation Standing Committee recommend that Regional Council not proceed with this project, Staff recommends that the capital allocated to this project be considered for re-allocation to other priority strategic transportation initiatives. These will be brought forward through the 2015/16 budget process.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications to recommending that this project proceed as funds have been approved through the budgeting process. Similarly, there are no financial implications to redirecting this funding to another project.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There has been no community engagement as part of this project.

ALTERNATIVES

Transportation Standing Committee could recommend that Regional Council proceed with this project, in this case an operating agreement will be signed with Halifax Harbour Bridges which, in addition to dividing the design and construction costs equally, will outline how the signs will be operated.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment One: Variable Message Sign Locations – Existing and Proposed

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.php> 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

Original Signed

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

