



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

Item No. 7.1
Transportation Standing Committee
January 22, 2015
February 26, 2015

TO: Chair and Members of Transportation Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: Original signed by Bob Bjerke

Chief Planner and Director, Planning and Development

DATE: January 7, 2015

SUBJECT: Pilot Project Pedestrian Vehicle Shared Street Concept Argyle Street

ORIGIN

Transportation Standing Committee meeting of June 4, 2014, item 10.1

MOVED by Councillor Mason, seconded by Councillor Walker, that the Transportation Standing Committee request a staff report outlining a pilot project to test the pedestrian vehicle shared street concept on Argyle Street during the construction phase of the Nova Centre, to use that test to inform the Committee regarding a permanent installation, and to ensure a report back on results so that the Committee may consider recommending to Council creating a permanent shared street on Argyle when the road is reinstated upon completion of the Nova Centre.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, Sections 318, 319, 321 and 322.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Transportation Standing Committee recommend to Regional Council that Council;

1. Approve in principle the development of a pilot project for a trial demonstration of an "alternative street design concept" on the section of Argyle Street between Blowers and Sackville Street.
2. Direct staff to advance the preparation of design details of the trial demonstration, in consultation with the Nova Centre Project, Downtown Halifax Business Commission and other area stakeholders, that addresses the trial design and issues raised in this staff report.
3. Direct staff to prepare a construction budget and identify a source of funding in support of the proposed pilot project for consideration of the Audit & Finance Standing Committee and recommendation to Regional Council.

BACKGROUND

The Nova Centre is under construction in the two-block area bounded by Argyle Street, Sackville Street, Market Street, and Prince Street. This construction activity includes work within the street ROW as well as activity on the Nova Centre property along the west side of Argyle Street. While the majority of intensive disruption to the street on this block is now complete, it is anticipated that moderate activity in this area will continue through 2015. The establishment of finished grades for the sidewalk, curb, and roadway on the Nova Center side of this block will be done during the final stages of construction later in 2015 and into 2016.

A concept plan for Argyle Street as a shared street was completed in 2012 by the local non-profit Planning & Design Centre with support of the Downtown Halifax Business Commission. This plan was presented in the "Sharing the Possibilities on Argyle Street" report and advanced partly in contemplation of the Nova Centre on the Prince/Sackville block. The shared street concept mixes very low speed motor vehicle traffic with pedestrian traffic and includes changes in the street cross-section (mainly eliminating the vertical barrier curbs on each side of Argyle) and provision of various amenities and street furniture.

DISCUSSION

The Concept

The plan from the Planning and Design Centre differs from what Halifax Regional Municipality has done to date in the public right of way. In particular the concept has these major features:

1. Change the street cross-section by removing the two barrier curbs and asphalt paving so as to have a surface that is easy to traverse on foot and removes the common distinction between the pedestrian space (the sidewalk) and the motor vehicle space (the roadway).
2. Storm water drainage would be provided by a swale with a continuous longitudinal drain grid.
3. A narrow central vehicle path – 3.5 metres wide, which is sufficient for passenger vehicles legal on Nova Scotia Roads.
4. Street light standards or other street furniture placed alongside the 3.5 metre path to give a minimum 6.0 metre clear right of way, in a curved path. 6.0 metres is wide enough for fire trucks to attend at a fire and lower the truck stabilizers. 6.0 metres is a bit narrow for two-way passage of large trucks – but Argyle Street is a one-way street.
5. Other street furniture is included in the design such as canopies to provide shade, chairs and tables, planters, benches, etc. Some would be outdoor café space where needed, while other locations would be for general use.
6. The concept suggests pedestrian scale lighting through the blocks and includes a suggestion of in-ground lighting in some locations.
7. The concept envisions permanent installations that are not removed in the winter season (except perhaps some café furniture).

The shared street concept would support principles espoused in policy, including portions of the Downtown Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy in section 2.3.6 Vision for Precinct 6: Upper Central Downtown, "Streetscape improvements will accommodate the area's high pedestrian volumes and support spill out activities ..." and in Appendix A, Streetscape Typology 7 "Pedestrian Priority Streets". Pedestrian priority streets are identified as streets that serve as pedestrian destinations or connections that do not accommodate a significant level of vehicular traffic. Features envisioned in the Downtown Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy for this type of street include broadened

sidewalks, reduced roadway width, unique lighting, banners, furnishing, and fixtures that can assist in closing the street to vehicular traffic on occasion.

Nova Scotia Motor Vehicle Act

Under the Charter most public roads in the Halifax Regional Municipality are vested in the Region, and are not under Provincial ownership and control.

Under the Motor Vehicle Act are the Rules of the Road describing behaviour expected of drivers and pedestrians. To install features as presented in the concept implies motor vehicle traffic and persons on foot to share a common area, not segregated to sidewalk and roadway as they are now, and to share the space differently than is laid out in the Rules of the Road.

The concept in trial and permanent form would benefit from markings or signage by the Regional Traffic Authority to allow for the shared space to be similarly enforceable under the Motor Vehicle Act. There is evidence that where shared spaces have been established with sufficiently low motor vehicle volumes there was a reduction in pedestrian-motor vehicle crashes.

In the Motor Vehicle Act vehicle drivers are subject to a requirement to drive in a “careful and prudent manner having regard to all circumstances” (MVA Section 100(1)). Careful and prudent speeds are required under Section 101 of the MVA.

Section 125(1) says pedestrians have a right of way while in or facing a crosswalk. While Section 125(5) says where a pedestrian is crossing a roadway at any point other than within a crosswalk the pedestrian shall yield the right of way to vehicles on the roadway. And Section 125(6) says those provisions do not relieve a pedestrian or a driver from the duty to exercise due care.

In some locations where a shared street or similar concept has been considered there has been opposition from organizations advocating for persons with sight limitations or reduced hearing.

Issues

The Planning and Design Centre’s “Sharing the Possibilities on Argyle Street” report suggests that Regional staff and committees have been sufficiently consulted about the proposal. While staff have been privy to the content of the plan and some ad-hoc review of the concept has been conducted, there are many unresolved issues that remain outstanding:

1. How will delivery trucks and fire apparatus be able to use the street when needed? Proper geometric designs must be developed.
2. How will snow and ice control be done? Will there be room for snow storage?
3. What trench drain specifications can be supported?
4. What is the funding source for the installation and maintenance of any infrastructure to be located within the ROW beyond the pilot and what are the options for distribution of those costs among the various stakeholders?
5. A formal circulation of whatever streetscape proposal is to be considered must be made to Halifax Fire and Emergency Services, Regional Police Service, Emergency Health Services, Regional Water, Regional Operations, Regional Legal Services, and Regional Risk Management.

6. Materials proposed to be used need to be evaluated for cost, practicality, and durability in our climate and considering the variation of traffic contemplated over different sections of Argyle Street.

Trial Logistics

Building a trial installation of an alternative street design is advisable to help provide context around answering these questions. Trial installations assist in assessing the popularity and utility of new concepts, and allow for important ground testing of design principles and operational function of a new street concept. A trial of a street would be facilitated through the installation of semi-permanent infrastructure in a configuration similar to the intended final street design, or representing facets of the design concept.

A program of communication throughout the trial with businesses, community groups, and internal stakeholders will enable staff to be informed in recommending and pursuing changes in design of permanent street infrastructure in this area.

To ensure a robust test of the concept, the trial should be in place during the milder months when sidewalk cafes are in place and pedestrian activity is at its peak. Due to the ongoing construction activity along the Sackville Street / Prince Street section of Argyle Street there are significant barriers to operating a functioning trial along the entire length of Argyle or even in that block. The construction traffic and the reduced usable street right of way contribute to a determination that running the trial coincident and adjacent the Nova Centre construction is not advisable.

Staff recommend that, should Council support the adoption of an alternative street design trial demonstration, that it be undertaken south of the Nova Centre construction site, on the stretch of Argyle Street between Blowers Street and Sackville Street, there is an active, double loaded commercial stretch. A trial installation could be run for varying lengths of time; staff would advise that due to the fact that design and set-up / take-down of the trial will be time-consuming, the trial length should be 6 weeks.

During this time there will be no alteration to the ability of businesses to operate.

Installation Details

The concept proposed in the "Sharing the Possibilities on Argyle Street" report is for a complete redesign of Argyle Street. Staff is in support of a trial, including the deployment of a relatively simple set of features to allow for testing of the concept in an exciting and refreshing manner along Argyle Street. Features that will be deployed in a trial include;

- (a) Temporary raised planter boxes delineating the travel way;
- (b) Street furniture to encourage staying on the street;
- (c) Uniform installation of widened (temporary) sidewalk along both sides of 3.5m travel way; and
- (d) Addition of temporary Pedestrian Scale Lighting through the widened sidewalk.

These trial installations will allow for consideration of the questions raised in response to the concept that have not been detailed in the report, that are site specific, and that are not answered through best practice research alone.

Planning & Development Projects

The Regional Centre planning projects are currently bringing a comprehensive lens to the Municipal Planning Strategies and Land Use By-Laws in the area. As part of this work a deeper understanding of how the street network and public right of way is used is being considered, this trial will not only inform the final design solution for Argyle Street, but also the great set of planning projects underway in the Regional Centre.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The trial is currently unfunded. The cost is anticipated to be approximately \$40,000.

Staff will confirm the pilot project scope and identify the source of project funding – in a separate report – for consideration of the Audit & Finance Standing Committee and recommendation to Regional Council.

In addition to the funding program for the pilot project, a clear funding source will have to be established for any resultant permanent program including an equitable distribution of capital and maintenance costs among various stakeholders.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The concept has the support of the local business community, via the Downtown Halifax Business Commission (DHBC). The trial installation is envisioned as an in-depth public consultation on the overall impact of the concept that will allow businesses to further understand potential impacts of changes and continue to be involved in the planning for the future.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The natural environment is expected to see little direct change if a trial and then permanent installation were to occur. The amount of hard surfaces capturing rain and snow-melt would be little changed.

The trial and perhaps permanent installation of a new methods of street delineation and amenity provision is intended to enhance the sustainability of the Regional Centre as it can;

- preserve and promote sustainability of cultural, historical and natural assets; and
- support the Regional Centre as the focus for economic, cultural and residential activities.

ALTERNATIVES

The Committee could choose to not to recommend to Regional Council in favour of the development and planning for a trial installation of the Argyle Street shared right of way features as outlined above.

ATTACHMENTS

Report prepared by Planning & Design Centre, dated September 15, 2012: ***“Sharing the Possibilities on Argyle Street”***

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/index.php> then choose the appropriate Community Council and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

Report Prepared by: Alan Taylor, P.Eng., Transportation Planning Engineer, Strategic Transportation
902.490.6680

Original signed by

Report Approved by:

Jacob Ritchie, Urban Design Manager 902.490.6510