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## Info Item No. 1

Transportation Standing Committee  
January 14, 2014

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Transportation Standing Committee

Original signed

**SUBMITTED BY:**

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Eddie Robar, Director, Metro Transit

**DATE:** October 24, 2013

**SUBJECT:** Transit Engagement Models

### INFORMATION REPORT

#### ORIGIN

On March 28<sup>th</sup> 2013, the Transportation Standing Committee directed staff to prepare a report identifying engagement models through which citizens could advise HRM on transit issues:

**MOVED by Councillor Watts, seconded by Councillor Outhit that the Transportation Standing Committee direct staff to prepare a report identifying engagement models through which citizens can advise HRM on transit issues.**

**MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

#### LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Section 21 of the *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter* provides the legislative authority to establish Advisory Committees.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Transportation Standing Committee directed staff to prepare a report which identifies ways in which citizens can advise HRM on public transit issues. There are a number of diverse engagement models used across North America which allow members of the public to inform decision making related to public transit planning and operations. These models include standing committees, project based advisory committees, sounding boards, issue specific committees, and technology based panels. Although these are not common in Canadian transit agencies of Metro Transit's size, depending on the type of information and engagement the Transportation Standing Committee would like to elicit from the public, any of the five models (or some combination thereof) could be implemented.

## **BACKGROUND**

The North West Transit Advisory Committee (NWTAC) was dissolved by a motion of North West Community Council on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013. At the March 28<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Transportation Standing Committee, staff was directed "to prepare a report identifying engagement models through which citizens can advise HRM on transit issues."

### **Transit Engagement in HRM**

There are a number of ways in which HRM engages with its citizens on an ongoing basis. The primary model used to support ongoing citizen engagement on a particular topic or issue is through the use of advisory committees. Today, citizens of HRM may serve on 13 Regional Council advisory boards, committees and commissions and five Community Council advisory committees. Of these 18 bodies, none have a mandate specific to public transit; however, transit issues are raised occasionally by the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Additionally, Metro Transit has an Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC). This group is composed of citizens and a Council representative and advises Metro Transit on issues of accessibility related to Metro Transit's Access-A-Bus and conventional transit service.

Currently, there is no public advisory committee, board, or commission which provides feedback to Metro Transit on an ongoing basis on issues beyond those related to accessibility.

In addition to public advisory committees, HRM has also begun to develop a more formal online engagement strategy through the recent implementation of the SustaiNet engagement portal. This tool was used successfully by Metro Transit in the recent public consultation as part of the Five Year Service Plan, and technology could be adapted to support engagement on a more ongoing basis.

The following report discusses these and several other engagement models that are used in agencies across North America to involve members of the public in a more in-depth, ongoing basis than standard public meetings allow.

## **DISCUSSION**

The following summarizes five models of citizen advisory committees that exist for transit agencies across Canada and the United States. Depending on the type of information and engagement the Transportation Standing Committee would like to elicit, any of the five models (or some combination thereof) could be implemented.

### **1. Standing Advisory Committee**

Standing advisory committees (also called stakeholder working groups, or citizen advisory committees) are used by some transit agencies to formulate the backbone of public engagement programs, and play an advisory role on general agency operations. The committee composition and their role vary widely across transit agencies in Canada and the United States, but could include providing input on service changes, infrastructure projects, and operational issues.

The composition of the committee is often intended to represent a broad range of community interests, and usually includes representation from both Council and the transit agency. Members of the standing advisory committee sit for one or more years depending on the terms of reference, and usually apply to become members via a formal application process made through the municipal clerk's office. Meetings are held regularly throughout the year, even when there are no ongoing infrastructure or planning projects.

The benefits of using this model is that it allows the transit agency and committee members to engage in in-depth discussions, and the appointment of members for one or several years can improve continuity and effectiveness. Some of the challenges of this model are that it can be considered exclusive, and can be perceived to lack transparency. Some agencies also pointed out that their committees often felt frustrated by lack of authority to make decisions. In addition, this model would require staff resources to initiate and manage.

The former NWTAC was a standing committee whose purpose was to advise the North West Community Council on issues related to transit services. It is anticipated that any new advisory committee created would be regional in nature, and therefore would have a different, broader mandate. However, it is also anticipated that any new standing advisory committee would face some of the same challenges as the former NWTAC, particularly related to their scope and limited ability to direct changes.

If this model were implemented in HRM, this committee could advise Metro Transit on a variety of operational issues and infrastructure or planning projects on an ongoing basis. Like other standing committees, it would likely meet monthly and members would be selected in order to represent the diverse needs of all current and potential transit users in HRM. Members could remain a part of the Committee for a predefined period of time and would be appointed in accordance with the Public Appointment Policy adopted by Halifax Regional Council August 2011.

There would be a requirement for the committee's scope to be very carefully designed to ensure clarity of their role, particularly versus the roles and responsibilities of staff. This role would

need to be clearly understood by committee members for the committee to have the best chance of success.

*Examples: The Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) has a Customer Liaison Panel which provides a mechanism for ongoing customer engagement. This standing committee is composed of 11 TTC customers and a member of the TTC's Advisory Committee on Accessible Transportation. Members serve a two year term and meet bimonthly.*

*The Burlington Transit Advisory Committee is a standing committee that provides input on initiatives affecting public transit, establishes partnerships with other local service providers, provides comments on transit issues in the municipal plan, and assists in hosting public consultation. The committee is established for three year terms, and is made up of both citizen and community representatives, and at least two members who require the aid of mobility devices and use specialized transit service.*

## **2. Project Based Advisory Committee**

A project based advisory committee is generally involved in the planning or development stages of a major capital project (for example the construction of a new terminal). It has a narrower mandate than a standing advisory committee, as it is usually limited to one project, and is disbanded once it has developed its recommendations or otherwise fulfilled its mandate to provide feedback related to the project.

Like standing advisory committees, the composition can vary widely but will also generally include at least one representative of Council and one representative from the transit agency. Unlike a standing advisory committee where members sit on the committee for a set term, members on a project based committee sit on the committee for the entire length of the committee's mandate.

The benefits of using this model include that it allows continuity and in-depth, technical discussion through the life of a particular capital project. Another benefit offered by this model is that as these committees are project based, a specialized group of members can be selected to benefit the unique needs of each project. A challenge faced by the Committee could be frustration related to their narrow mandate.

If this model were introduced in HRM, it would be used to advise Metro Transit on specific projects. For example, committees could be established to provide insight into the development of the Metro Transit Five Year Service Plan, or for new infrastructure projects such as constructing a new terminal or Park & Ride. Unlike a standing committee, a project based advisory committee would meet more or less frequently depending on the needs and phase of the project, and members would be selected based on the unique needs of the project, not necessarily with the intent to represent all transit users and community members.

*Examples: The Hamilton Street Railway has a 26 member Rapid Transit Citizen Advisory Committee. Their mandate is to identify any current and potential community issues related to the Rapid Transit Initiative, to share information on the study area, and to provide a community*

*perspective. A professional facilitator is present at all of their meetings, and manages communication between the project team and the committee.*

*TriMet in Portland, Oregon, uses project based Community Advisory Committees. These committees are typically between 21 and 25 members, and their mandate varies depending on the project.*

### **3. Standing Advisory Committee for a Specific Operational Issue**

A standing advisory committee on an operational issue provides insight into the management of a particular ongoing issue. Metro Transit currently has an Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC) which falls into this category. In Canada, some transit agencies have a dedicated committee to advise Council on accessible transit or transportation, while others have accessibility committees who are mandated to advise council on all accessibility issues including those related to transit.

The composition of this type of Committee can vary widely, but will generally include at least one representative of Council, and one or more members with particular expertise related to the operational issue.

The benefits of using this model include that it allows continuity and in-depth, technical discussion enhanced by those who can contribute their first-hand experience. Challenges faced by the Committee could be frustration related to the narrow scope of the committee.

HRM has an existing Committee, ATAC that advises Metro Transit on both conventional and Access-a-Bus service issues. This model would be useful if another ongoing operational issue became apparent.

*Examples: The ATAC in HRM advises Metro Transit on accessibility of the transit service. Victoria Region Transit also has an Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee. Other transit agencies, such as London Transit, and Transit Windsor, have accessibility committees with a broad mandate, which includes transit.*

### **4. Ad Hoc Sounding Boards**

This unique model typically provides members of the public an opportunity to provide feedback on a transit agency's proposed service changes. Sounding boards are established on an ad hoc basis and disband once they develop their recommendations. Although it appears that this structure is not as widely used, it does provide the opportunity for members of the public to contribute feedback.

The composition of this type of Committee can vary widely, but generally members would be selected to represent a diversity of viewpoints, or to represent the geographic areas that will be affected.

The benefits of using this model include that it allows the agency to become more responsive to new ideas which originate in the community, and can alert the agency to any unforeseen consequences of service changes. Challenges faced by this type of committee could be the

significant amount of staff time required to recruit and select members of the Sounding Board each time there are service changes, and that members of the board may be frustrated at the narrow scope of their mandate and limited ability to make a larger impact.

If this model were introduced in HRM, sounding boards could be established annually or semi-annually to advise Metro Transit on proposed service changes. Each sounding board would be composed of different members, thus involving a diversity of residents over time. It is also possible that this format could be adapted to address some decisions related to a particular project, for example, a sounding board could have been developed to complement public consultation related to the design of the new Lacewood Terminal.

*Example: King County Metro Transit in Seattle, Washington uses Ad Hoc Service Change Sounding Boards to provide input on proposed service changes and make recommendations to the King County Executive and Council. Sounding boards are composed of 10-15 community members selected through an open application process to represent a variety of viewpoints, and are disbanded once they develop their recommendations on the proposed service changes.*

## **5. Technology Based Engagement Panel**

Technology offers a valuable opportunity to have a large group of people provide feedback to a transit agency quickly and on a regular basis. While this is fairly uncharted territory by many agencies, Metro Vancouver's TransLink has made a serious commitment to continually engaging members of the public by sending out monthly online surveys. The program (called *TransLink Listens*) includes a panel of approximately 5,000 members who have signed up to participate through links available on the TransLink website, and through a number of other initiatives. The entire panel is engaged monthly with questionnaires on topics related to the various services TransLink offers and input is used to inform ongoing decision-making.

The benefits of using this model include that it allows the agency to engage directly and regularly with a large number of individual transit riders. The approach is flexible, allows for broad and more frequent participation by residents from many areas of HRM, walks of life, age, interests and mobility. Challenges faced by this type of engagement could be that the conversation could be fairly high-level, and prescriptive, due to the nature of a close-ended survey as compared to the more conventional in-person meetings. Another potential challenge would be that as the panel is open to participation from anyone, there is no way to ensure that results provide an accurate representation of transit users or residents. In addition, residents without easy access to a computer would be underrepresented.

If this model were introduced in HRM, it could be used to gather regular input on a variety of topics, for example the design of the new Lacewood Terminal, the development of the new Metro Transit route map, and in the development of planning documents. It could also be adapted to allow subscribers to make suggestions for the topic of the next survey, and to disseminate the results of past surveys. Metro Transit could also explore the potential for having a paper based subscription to make the program more inclusive.

*Example: TransLink, in Metro Vancouver, has a technology based engagement program called "TransLink Listens." There are 5000 participants who have volunteered to regularly provide*

*feedback related to the day to day operations of the TransLink network. An online questionnaire is distributed to the participants monthly, and there is a 40% completion rate.*

### **Engagement Models used by Similar Canadian Transit Agencies**

Overall, the most common engagement model in both Canada and the United States is one of three types of citizen transit advisory committee: a standing committee, a project-based committee, or a standing committee for a particular operational issue. The most common model in Canadian transit agencies of a similar size to Metro Transit is a standing committee on a particular operational issue (most often one with a mandate related to accessibility).

As the Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) does not formally collect any data related to transit engagement models/ advisory committees, staff conducted a review of selected Canadian transit agencies which serve a population of 150,000 – 400,000 residents. Of those examined, only one currently hosts a standing transit advisory committee composed largely of citizens (Burlington Transit). Both Oakville Transit and Regina Transit formerly had standing transit advisory committees that were recently dissolved. Victoria Regional Transit has made use of project-based advisory committees, while others, including London Transit, and Transit Windsor do not have any advisory committees focused on transit, although some input is gathered from other committees with broader mandates, particularly those related to accessibility. None appear to have made use of either the Sounding Board or technology based models (See Attachment 1).

Budget implications were not evaluated as part of this report, and it is anticipated that they would vary depending on a number of factors, including the model selected, the role it would play, and its composition. All of the committees above would require transit staff resources to support and facilitate the committee activities.

Additionally, if the Clerk's Office were to provide support to a committee, the cost will be an additional \$20,000 to account A121, Municipal Clerk, which is the standard cost for meeting space, transportation, special needs requirements, staff and equipment related to the support of a Regional Advisory Committee.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications with this report.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

As this report is only to provide information to the Transportation Standing Committee, there has been no community engagement related to this issue. The decision to proceed with the implementation of any of the models listed above would improve community engagement on public transit topics.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1: Summary of Engagement Models in Comparable Canadian Transit Agencies

**REFERENCES**

Hull, K. (2010). *TCRP Synthesis 85: Effective use of Citizen Advisory Committees for Transit Planning and Operations*. Transportation Research Board of the National Academies, Transit Cooperative Research Program. Washington, DC.: Transportation Research Board.

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.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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**Summary of Engagement Models in Comparable Canadian Transit Agencies**

**Attachment 1**

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Transit Agency</b>	<b>Transit Engagement Models</b>					<b>Description</b>
		<b>Standing Advisory Committee</b>	<b>Project Based Advisory Committee</b>	<b>Standing Advisory Committee for Specific Operational Issue</b>	<b>Ad Hoc Sounding Boards</b>	<b>Technology Based Engagement Panel</b>	
Burlington, ON	Burlington Transit	✓	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	The BT advisory committee is a citizen driven standing committee. Its mandate is to provide feedback to staff and Council on a number of topics including improving accessibility, and expenditure of gas tax money, as well as to review the City’s Accessibility Plan. They also provide feedback to other transportation organizations, and liaise with other community groups to improve the experience of transit users and promote transit.
Gatineau, QC	Société de transport de l’Outaouais	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	✓	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	STO has a Customer Relations Technical Committee which is composed partially of citizens as well as key staff members. It also operates a paratransit technical committee which is largely composed of STO representatives and provincial appointees, though it also has several members of the public.
HRM	Metro Transit	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	✓	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	Metro Transit’s Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee advises Metro Transit on issues of accessibility related to Metro Transit’s Access-A-Bus and conventional transit service.
London, ON	London Transit Commission	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	The City has an Accessibility Advisory Committee which sometimes provides insight into accessible transit, but does not have a dedicated accessible transit advisory committee.

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**Attachment 1**

Niagara Region, ON	Niagara Region Transit	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	The Niagara Region Inter-Municipal Specialized Transit Advisory Committee was dissolved in 2011 after fulfilling its mandate. The region still has an Accessibility Advisory Committee whose mandate includes transit, but does not have a dedicated transit advisory committee.
Oakville, ON	Oakville Transit	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	A recent committee rationalization eliminated the OT standing advisory committee. When in operation, it was composed of volunteer members and one Council representative. The advisory committee made recommendations directly to Council. The City has an Accessibility Advisory Committee which sometimes provides insight into accessible transit, but does not have a dedicated accessible transit advisory committee.
Regina, SK	Regina Transit	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	✓	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	RT formerly had an advisory committee which provided feedback on conventional and paratransit, but this was dissolved. Transit is now an issue addressed by the City's Community Services Advisory Committee. In September 2013, the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, stakeholders, and City established the Regina Accessible Transportation Stakeholder Advisory Committee who is mandated to resolve concerns related to accessible transit.
Sherbrooke, QC	Société de transport de Sherbrooke:	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	STO works towards incorporating members of the public into working committees, though they are outnumbered by members of Council or agency staff.
Victoria, BC	Victoria Regional Transit	<b>X</b>	✓	✓	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	As part of the Regional Rapid Transit study, a community liaison committee was established representing stakeholders and the public on topics related to the project. Victoria Transit

**Summary of Engagement Models in Comparable Canadian Transit Agencies**

**Attachment 1**

							also has a standing Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee.
Windsor, ON	Transit Windsor	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	The City has an Accessibility Advisory Committee which sometimes provides insight into accessible transit, but does not have a dedicated accessible transit advisory committee.