

NORTH WEST TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES
October 18, 2006

PRESENT: Mr. Phil Cox, Chair,
Mr. William Chaffey, Vice-Chair
Mr. Terry Churney
Mr. Ron McKinnon
Mr. John Merrick
Mr. Gunther Seyffarth

ABSENT
WITH REGRETS: Mr. Alastair Lawrie
Councillor Brad Johns

STAFF: Mr. Edward Robar, Metro Transit
Ms. Chris Newson, Legislative Assistant

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm in Boardroom #1, Sackville Planning Office, 1st Floor, 636 Sackville Drive, Lower Sackville. The Chair welcomed new member, Mr. Terry Churney, to the Committee.

2. APPROVAL OF ORDER OF BUSINESS AND ADDITIONS/DELETIONS

Additions: 8.1 Metro Transit - Advertising of Tax Credit - Mr. Ron McKinnon
8.2 Wilson Lake Road Area - Acquisition of Land for a Park 'n Ride - Mr. Gunther Seyffarth

MOVED by Mr. Gunther Seyffarth, seconded by Mr. Ron McKinnon that the agenda be approved as amended. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - September 20, 2006

Correction: Page 10, Item 9: Date of Next Meeting should be "October 18, 2006"
Page 9, Item 8.3: Parking lot in Burnside reference was in regard to a possible Metro Link terminal not a condo development.
Page 7, Item 4.1.8 - Should be Bedford Highway not Barrington Street.

MOVED by Mr. Bill Chaffey, seconded by Mr. Gunther Seyffarth, that the minutes of September 20, 2006 be approved as amended. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

4. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES

4.1 Status Sheet Item

4.1.1 Transit Study Update / Presentation to North West Community Council

- Copies of the updated slide presentation, received October 18, 2006, were circulated to the Committee at this time.

Mr. John Merrick agreed to present the report to NWCC on behalf of the NWTAC. The Committee agreed that comments should be included in the objective and conclusion sections of the slide presentation. Mr. Merrick will add the pertinent information.

Mr. Robar reviewed the history of the slide presentation for Mr. Churney and responded to his question in regard to crush loads indicating that for high floor buses the crush load is 72+ people and for low floor (ALF - Accessible Low Floor) buses the crush load is 54+ people. The NWTAC has prepared the statistical data as supporting information to lobby the Provincial/Federal governments for transit funding to address the serious service deficiencies such as capacity (overcrowding). He further explained that the data was compiled through the use of load profiles (counts) from Metro Transit. Mr. Robar responded to Mr. Churney that the industry no longer manufactures double seated buses. Only ALF buses are now available which have approximately six (6) fewer seats than the traditional high floor buses.

Mr. Chaffey added that the slides indicate the current situation. The future prediction is an 11% increase in transit ridership. This increase, coupled with the use of low floor buses, will increase the number of people standing for long distances on buses reaching speeds of 70km+ which raises a serious safety concern.

The Committee provided the following background information:

- HRM sustains Metro Transit through 70% recovery from the fare box - higher than anywhere in the country. Some cities receive transit subsidies from other levels of government as outlined in the statistical data included in the presentation to NWCC.
- It is difficult to promote and encourage Metro Transit use in HRM due to the capacity issues and the inability to handle the current demands on the system.
- A significant increase in ridership occurred when the U-Pass (University Transit Pass) and ALF buses were introduced. A major concern is that Metro Transit cannot offer the U-Pass to other educational institutions due to the lack of capacity.
- Transit use has increased, and will continue to increase, with the high cost of gas/downtown parking and the introduction of the U-Pass.
- The issue of transit deficiencies has to remain a focal point for all levels of government. The gas tax credit funds, when available, should be focussed toward transit services, not bridges and roads.
- A further concern is the poor performance of ALF buses in the winter. Transit service was rarely interrupted in the winter months prior to the introduction of the ALF fleet. Due to the difficulties experienced with the ALF fleet, a higher priority is now placed on snow removal at bus stops.

Mr. Cox, on behalf of the NWTAC, acknowledged the tremendous contribution made by Mr. Bill Chaffey in regard to the compilation of Metro Transit's raw data into comprehensible graphs/statistical data.

The Committee agreed that similar data should be compiled for 2006 as there have been tremendous changes from last year.

Mr. Robar advised that he has requested Metro Transit staff prioritize inputting of load counts for the Route 80 series, and the Sackville Metro Link service, so that the information will be available to this Committee as soon as possible.

The Committee thanked Mr. Robar for his assistance in providing the raw data.

4.1.2 Metro Link - Sackville Terminal

i) Parking

Mr. Robar advised that work is progressing on the 138 parking spaces at the Sackville Metro Link terminal. The additional parking spaces will alleviate congestion in the main road and gravel sections but will fill the parking lot. He added that he has been attempting to improve service to the facility rather than increase the parking lot in an effort to reduce the volume of cars. Mr. Robar explained that, with the aid of new software that permits staff to flag changes and determine the impact, a synchronization study is underway to assist with better alignment of the routes.

The Committee commented as follows during the ensuing discussion:

- The best connection for the Metro Link to Cobequid Terminal is to disembark in Burnside and wait for the Route 87 which is only 4 minutes behind the link bus. The Route 87 will take you directly to the Cobequid Terminal.
- The Metro Link service was not planned for connections, it was planned for those travelling by car to the terminal.
- Mr. Robar advised that Metro Transit is attempting to have more attractive connections during the morning and afternoon peak periods so that the rider could, in theory, get a bus with only a ten minute wait. He further advised that the Route 82 and 83 have good connections at night but the Route 83 will miss its connection to the link by fifteen minutes. The connection will match up with the Route 82 as the ridership is higher.
- Ridership on the 80 series buses cannot increase until parking is provided in the outlying areas or expanded at Downsview. To develop Sackville as a transit hub, outlying areas have to be developed to provide parking in order for people to leave their cars. Mr. Robar responded that the goal is for better service to the terminal rather than more parking facilities.

ii) Scheduling

Mr. Robar advised that the Metro Link weekend service (Saturday's) was cut as Metro Transit was required to cut \$1 million from its operating budget. Cutting the weekend Metro Link service, which had low ridership, will save approximately \$352,000 per year. He advised that every department in HRM was told to cut 10% from its current budget. To continue weekend Metro Link service would require staffing the Thornhill site in Burnside seven days per week instead of five. The Metro Link showcase funding was for start-up costs not operational costs.

The Committee commented as follows during the ensuing discussion:

- On a recent Friday night approximately twenty people were riding the Metro Link at 10:00 pm.
- Metro Link service should be seven days per week. Perhaps not full service on the weekends but some service as the service has to be offered to attract riders.
- Metro Transit should be putting creative thought into other uses for the Metro Link service. It is a shame to have buses sitting idle when there is such demand for increased service.
- Perhaps ridership will increase with Sunday shopping/bar patrons.
- It is alarming that a cut to transit service would occur with no input from the NWTAC. The NWTAC could have prepared recommendations for consideration.
- Perhaps consideration should be given for the NWTAC to hold summer meetings since this cut to transit service occurred in late June/July when NWTAC does not meet.
- Some Committee members commented that the Councillor representative on the NWTAC should have brought the budget cut/service cut to the attention of the Committee.
- The only direct route to downtown from Sackville, without the weekend Metro Link service, is the already overcrowded Route 80.

Mr. Robar responded that the Metro Link buses are branded and are for commuter service only. The Metro Link (weekend) route was not an established route so it was easier to cut the weekend service. The weekend ridership on the Metro Link was expected to be lower but not quite as low as it had been. Other routes had low ridership on weekends but if that service were cut the area would have no transit service. Metro Link buses were used during the Rolling Stones concert and successfully cleared commuters from the concert grounds in 1.5 hours. He further explained that the use of Metro Link buses at events would be warranted by the number of people expected for the event. Mr. Robar added that if there were anyway that he could have kept the Metro Link weekend service, he would have.

MOVED BY Mr. Bill Chaffey, seconded by Mr. Terry Churney that the North West Community Council be requested to notify the North West Transit Advisory Committee

of any change in budget restrictions that would affect transit service. MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Mr. John Merrick entered the meeting at 7:55 pm.

(iii) License Plate Survey

Mr. Robar advised that he will confirm with Access Nova Scotia as to when the requested information (place of origin for cars parked in the Sackville Metro Link Terminal parking lot) maybe available. His previous discussion with Access Nova Scotia (ANS) indicated that, due to computer upgrades underway at the ANS offices, the information would not be available for at least one year.

4.1.3 Cobequid Terminal - Alternate Site

Mr. Robar advised that the Cobequid Terminal is third on the list for consideration. The Dartmouth Shopping Centre (to be moved from the shopping centre to Faulkner Street) and Lacewood (intended as a temporary terminal and now at capacity due to the U-Pass) terminals are the top two priorities to be addressed by Metro Transit.

Mr. Cox strongly encouraged HRM/Metro Transit not to miss out on land acquisition opportunities for a new or expanded Cobequid Terminal. Currently, due to a variety of development, there is land available. He suggested advance planning by Metro Transit/Real Property should occur as soon as possible in regard to the amount of land that would be required and a suitable location for a new terminal site.

The Committee suggested that HRM explore placing an option on a suitable property as land is at a premium along the Cobequid Road.

MOVED BY Mr. Ron McKinnon, seconded by Mr. Bill Chaffey that the North West Transit Advisory Committee recommend that the North West Community Council direct Metro Transit to ensure a succession plan is in place for the Cobequid Terminal and that adequate property is identified for a new/expanded transit terminal on Cobequid Road, Lower Sackville.

Without a vote being taken on the motion on the floor, the Committee agreed to defer the motion pending an update from the Regional Planning Transportation staff in regard to future plans for the Cobequid Transit Terminal.

MOVED BY Mr. Bill Chaffey, seconded by Mr. Gunther Seyffarth that the North West

Transit Advisory Committee request an update from the Regional Plan Transportation staff in regard to future plans for the Cobequid Terminal. MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

4.1.4 Traffic Impact Studies

- A draft report to the North West Community Council was before the Committee.

Mr. Robar explained that actual traffic impact studies currently do not include consideration of pedestrian, transit or bicycle users. The Committee approved the draft report, as presented, to go forward to the North West Community Council for their Thursday, October 26, 2006 meeting.

4.1.5 Barrington Street - Pedestrian Activated Signal / Metro Link Stop near Canadian Forces Base on Barrington Street

An e-mail response from staff indicated that HRM's Traffic and Right of Way Services will respond to the issue of pedestrian activated signals.

Mr. Robar advised that he has responded to Mr. Puddington regarding his request for a transit stop at the Barrington Street Canadian Forces Base location. There will not be a stop at this location as, during peak times, ridership on the Route 185 is at capacity. Metro Transit cannot accommodate extra passengers at the present time. The addition of one stop may set a precedent resulting in additional requests for stops along the route. Mr. Robar added that Mr. Puddington was satisfied with the response and understands the logic behind the decision.

4.1.6 MSVU Bus Shelter - Bedford Highway

Mr. Robar advised that the bus shelter is expected to arrive in six (6) weeks. The concrete base will be completed in a few weeks. He explained that only eleven (11) Viacom shelters are received per year. The MSVU shelter was delayed due to contract negotiations with Viacom.

5. CONSIDERATION OF DEFERRED BUSINESS - None

6. REPORTS

6.1 Route 88 Northgate - Direct Transit Service to the Cobequid Medical Health Centre

Mr. Robar advised that Route 88 Northgate will not service the Cobequid Medical Health Centre as buses cannot make a right turn onto Glendale Drive and there is a 90° angle. Metro Transit refrains from entering parking lots. Mr. Robar confirmed that there is not sufficient room for a bus to turn in the turning bulb located at the end of the public street.

MOVED BY Mr. Bill Chaffey, seconded by Mr. Ron McKinnon that the North West Transit Advisory Committee request that the North West Community Council recommend that Metro Transit Route 88 Northgate provide direct transit service to the Cobequid Medical Health Centre. MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Mr. Merrick suggested consideration be given to a realignment of the 90° angle and inquired who owned the property, the Sackville Industrial Park or the Province. Mr. Cox responded that he will determine ownership of the property.

Mr. Robar commented that the creation of Route 88 Northgate is a direct result of the North West Transit Advisory's Committee input.

6.2 Opportunity for a Metro Link Parking Lot in Burnside.

Mr. Robar advised that the terminal will not be going ahead at this time (behind the MacDonald's in Burnside). He explained that the Burnside Industrial Park is in the process of further expansion and will be 50/50 Industrial/Business park. A terminal near the Burnside Drive area is more likely.

6.3 Term of Service for NWTAC Members

Mr. Cox requested that the Legislative Assistant confirm the terms of service for the existing NWTAC members. Various members indicated that they have served on the Committee since prior to amalgamation. The start date and expiry date for all NWTAC members is to be confirmed.

7. CORRESPONDENCE - None

8. ADDED ITEMS

8.1 Advertising of Tax Credit

Mr. Robar advised that Ms. Patterson, Communications Officer with Metro Transit, responded that a note was posted on the Metro Transit website, highlighted in yellow, with a link to the Canada Revenue Agency's news release in regard to the tax credit. In

November CUTA will introduce a marketing campaign including bus boards, internal and external posters etc. She added that if Viacom (owner of the bus shelter) permits, a notice will be posted on the shelter located on Barrington Street.

Mr. Cox requested statistical information on whether or not there was an increase to bus pass sales after the tax credit was announced. Mr. Robar will consult Ms. Patterson in regard to bus pass sales.

Mr. Robar advised that he would be attending a transit trade show in Toronto next week and will provide an update to the NWTAC upon his return. He added that Metro Transit is moving toward better technologies such as the trip planner software to improve service. Another possible initiative is to provide small bus service in areas where the ridership numbers would not warrant a full service bus; for example, a smaller bus on the Route 83 may increase frequency and provide better service/connections.

Mr. Cox offered to research the "rumour" that the provincial government may be willing to match the tax credit rebate.

8.2 Land for Park and Ride - Wilson Lake Road Area

MOVED BY Mr. Gunther Seyffarth, seconded by Mr. Terry Churney that the North West Transit Advisory Committee request that the North West Community Council consider a Park'n Ride for the Wilson Lake Road area. MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

9. NEXT MEETING DATE - November 15, 2006

Items for the next agenda:

1. Update on the EAC's (Ecology Action Centre's) ECO PASS Pilot Project - Mr. Ron McKinnon
2. Statistical information on demographics of transit commuters. Is transit their sole means of transportation. This information could be useful in regard to subsidies if it is shown that a commuter's sole means of transportation is the transit system.

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 pm.

Chris Newson
Legislative Assistant