4. SERVICE STANDARDS

Service standards are fundamental to the operation of any public transit organization as they provide the rationale for making decisions on the transit services and associated allocation of resources. Standards provide the basis for evaluating such key service parameters as route coverage, service levels (frequencies) and ridership performance.

While informal service standards have been in place for some time, a formal set of service standards needs to be adopted by Council if the HRM vision of providing higher quality transit services is to be achieved. The standards in this section are for the conventional transit services of the municipality, and are generally based on the service standards that were in use by Metro Transit before amalgamation, updated to reflect the HRM vision for transit and the changing market in which it is operating. The standards are intended to guide the design and operation of Metro Transit's conventional services over the next five years.

As a tool for evaluation purposes, service standards should not necessarily imply a specific action if a standard is not met. For example, if a route does not meet a ridership performance standard, there is not an automatic requirement that the service be cut or eliminated, but it does suggest some remedial action, such as a route re-structuring or a change in service frequency, should be considered. A route may not be able to meet both a minimum frequency and a performance standard, in which case, a sub-standard frequency or a sub-standard performance may have to be accepted if a suitable remedial action is not available. Also, bringing service levels up to meet a standard does not necessarily have to happen immediately, but can be phased in according to such things as resource availability and anticipated ridership performance. For example, local services in new developments may start as peak-hour-only services and be upgraded to all-day services at a later date.

On the other hand, it is generally desirable to introduce transit services into new developments as early as possible, in order to encourage transit use and potentially prevent or affect the development of automobile travel habits, perhaps eliminating the need for new residents to purchase a second car. Service should be introduced or extended only after detailed investigation to forecast demand, revenues and costs. A minimum 6-month trial period should be established for service in any new area, with a reasonable (modest) ridership objective, in order to give the service an adequate chance to reach the regular performance targets identified in these standards.

4.1 SERVICE COVERAGE

Metro Transit will provide conventional fixed route transit services within the built-up urban areas of the former municipalities of Halifax, Dartmouth, Bedford and Sackville. The transit routes will be located so that 90% of all residences, places of work, secondary and post secondary schools, shopping centres, and public facilities in the urban area are within a walking distance of not more than:

- 500 metres of a bus stop during the daytime Monday through Saturday, and
- 1 kilometre of a bus stop during the evening and all day Sundays and holidays.

Rural areas and small communities with population densities over 1,000 persons per square kilometre will be considered for community transit services provided that 90% of the population is within a 1 kilometre walk of roads on which a community transit route can be operated. ***Service will not necessarily be provided to all rural and small communities.*** A decision to serve a specific area will depend on whether the service can meet the ridership standards in this section and whether or not the community decides to pay for transit through their taxes (most rural areas do not pay for transit, while the urban areas and a few rural areas do).

4.2 ROUTE STRUCTURE

Transit service in urban areas will be provided by a network of core and local fixed routes, described as follows:

- ***Core Routes*** - These are the primary services of Metro Transit, operating in the major travel corridors on the main arterial roads in the urban area. They form a route network, focused on the main transit centres in the urban area including the Halifax and Dartmouth central business districts and the designated transit terminals at major non-downtown destination points. The ferries and certain crosstown routes may also be considered core routes where they connect key activity centres or transit focal points.

  The core route network provides a basic level of mobility to all residents in the urban area and 90% of all residents should be within 1 kilometre of a core route. Route structure and minimum service level standards are very important for core routes as they need to be direct, relatively fast, and available to all residents. Core routes are potential candidates for higher-order transit services including express bus and "Rapid-Bus" services.

- ***Local Routes*** - These routes circulate within the various communities in the urban area and provide a feeder function in the transit system by connecting communities to a transit centre or major local activity centres where transfers can be made to the core network. Local routes operate primarily on arterial and collector roads and supplement the core route network to bring most residences within 500 metres of a transit route. Certain routes may interline at transfer points and have both a core route portion and a local route portion (or branches). Local routes could include alternative forms of community circulators or feeder shuttles and could comprise the local portion of express bus services to major activity centres and employment concentrations.

- ***Small Community Routes*** - These are routes that serve smaller communities and rural areas outside the urban transit service area, where population and transit demand are sufficient to justify fixed route or demand responsive services (see above). The community transit services will operate on arterial and collector roads, focused on the nearest transfer point to connect with the core route network (usually at a transit centre or main activity centre). If service is provided, alternative forms of service, such as dial-a-ride, vans, taxis or other form of community transit service may be used to reflect a lower demand level and provide a better chance of performance standards being met.

4.3 MINIMUM SERVICE LEVELS

The following are minimum service frequency standards and minimum spans of service for the various route types. As noted above, all services also should meet ridership performance standards, otherwise remedial actions need to be considered. All routes can start earlier or operate later than the designated minimum hours if a minimum performance level of 15 passengers per vehicle service hour (25% cost recovery) can be maintained after a one year month trial period.

- ***Core Route Minimum Frequencies and Spans of Service (including ferries):***

Weekdays	15 minutes	6:00 to 9:00 am / 3:00 to 6:00 pm
	30 minutes	9:00 am to 3:00 pm / 6:00 am to 12 midnight
Saturdays	30 minutes	6:00 am to 12 midnight
Sundays/Holidays	30 minutes	7:00 am to 11:00 pm

In general, it is more important for core routes to meet minimum frequency standards, so that the overall integrity of the route network is maintained and passengers maintain confidence in the system.

- ***Local Route Minimum Frequencies and Spans of Service:***

Weekdays	30 minutes	6:00 am to 9:00 am / 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm
	30 minutes	9:00 am to 3:00 pm
	60 minutes	6:00 pm to 12 midnight
Saturdays	30 minutes	6:00 am to 6:00 pm
	60 minutes	6:00 pm to 12 midnight
Sundays/Holidays	60 minutes	7:00 am to 11:00 pm

Local routes can operate during weekday peak periods only, or can be extended to other periods and days depending on their ability to maintain the minimum performance targets after a one-year trial period.

- ***Small Community Minimum Frequencies and Spans of Service (when operating):***

Weekdays	60 minutes	6:00 am to 9:00 am / 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm
	120 minutes	9:00 am to 3:00 pm
	120 minutes	6:00 pm to 12 midnight
Saturdays	120 minutes	6:00 am to 12 midnight
Sundays/Holidays	120 minutes	7:00 am to 11:00 pm

Small community routes can operate during weekday peak periods only, or can be extended to other periods and days depending on their ability to maintain the minimum performance targets after a one-year trial period.

4.4 PEAK-POINT RIDERSHIP

For all bus services, average maximum peak-point ridership per bus will not exceed the following standards and service frequencies will be increased if these standards are exceeded:

Regular routes (all stops) - peak periods	150% of seating capacity over a 60 minute period
Express routes - peak periods	100% of seating capacity over a 60 minute period
Ferries - all times	100% of seating capacity over a 60 minute period
All routes - off-peak periods	100% of seating capacity over a 60 minute period

4.5 RIDERSHIP PERFORMANCE

Transit routes are expected to equal or exceed the following performance targets. If they cannot meet these targets, possible remedies could include route changes, lower service levels or cancellation. These standards do not apply to the ferries because of their high capacity.

- ***Core Route Performance Targets:***

Weekdays Daytime	35 passengers per service hour
Evenings and Weekends	20 passengers per service hour

In general, the core routes should maintain minimum service level standards even if they cannot meet these performance standards, although restructuring or other remedial actions may be required.

- ***Local Route Performance Targets:***

Weekdays Daytime	25 passengers per service hour
Evenings and Weekends	15 passengers per service hour

- ***Small Community Performance Targets:***

Weekday Peak Hours	15 passengers per service hour (fixed route)
	10 passengers per service hour (demand responsive)
Other times and days	10 passengers per service hour (fixed route)
	5 passengers per service hour (demand responsive)

4.6 COST RECOVERY

To achieve the system financial target, each transit route will recover a minimum percentage of its operating costs from the operating revenues attributed to the route (based on boardings). The minimum percentage depends on the financial target established for the transit system as a whole (see previous chapter), which is a minimum 65% recovery of operating costs by 2003, increasing to 70% by 2006. Targets for individual routes vary by type of route, time of day and day of the week, and take into account that some routes will exceed the targets.

- ***Core Route Cost Recovery (including ferries):***

Weekdays Daytime	65% - 80% (75% average all core routes)
Evenings and Weekends	40% - 50% (45% average all core routes)

- ***Local Route Cost Recovery:***

Weekdays Daytime	45% - 60% (55% average all local routes)
Evenings and Weekends	25% - 40% (35% average all local routes)

- ***Small Community Cost Recovery*** - rural community transit services (fixed route or demand responsive) will should have a minimum cost recovery of 30% for the period of operation. To achieve this recovery level, the service may need to charge a premium fare or be operated by a lower cost operator such as a local taxi company.

4.7 BUS STOP AND SHELTER STANDARDS

Bus stops should be placed at most intersections, passenger generators and transfer points subject to minimum spacing criteria. The spacing of stops should not normally be less than 250 metres in developed areas (except in downtown Halifax and within major trip generators where closer spacings may be warranted), and 500 metres in undeveloped areas.

As a general rule, bus stops at intersections should be located at the near side of the intersection for safety considerations although the actual location will depend on traffic and street conditions. Where possible, stops should be located close to signalized intersections.

Stops and the area around them should be made accessible to people with disabilities, including wheel-chairs and other mobility aids. Stops and the area around them should also have a high priority for snow clearing.

Bus bays should generally not be used, because of the difficulty for buses trying to re-join the traffic flow. They may be considered in certain instances, however, such as for stops located on higher-speed arterials or near major trip generators, transfer points, timing points and terminus locations where a bus is likely to have an extended stop time.

Regarding shelters, there are currently 357 shelters installed at bus stops and transit terminals throughout the Metro Transit route network out of some 2,100 bus stops. Thus, approximately 17% of all stops have shelters. Even allowing for the potential of close spacing of some stops, the percentage of shelters per bus stop is low, particularly when considering the local climate. Many transit systems have a percentage rate in the 25 to 30 percent range, with many targeting to have 1/3 (33%) of their stops equipped with shelters. To achieve even a rate of 25%, HRM would need to have 525 shelters, an increase of 172 over the current level.

As a minimum, shelters should be placed at all bus stops when the passenger activity exceeds 100 passenger boardings on weekdays. Stops with lower volumes may also be considered, if other criteria are met and resources are available. Other warrants for shelters can include such things as exposure, significant transfer activity or proximity to certain land uses with special needs (e.g. seniors manors, community centres).

The shelters should be a minimum of 5 square metres and should be enclosed on three sides. As a general rule, the shelters should be located a minimum of 1 metre behind the curb and no more than 10 metres from the bus stops. Benches and schedule information should be provided in all shelters.