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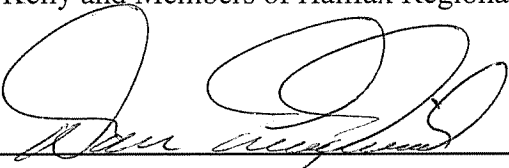


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Halifax Regional Council
July 13, 2004

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:



Dan English, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: June 22, 2004

SUBJECT: Automated Vehicle Location Funding Proposal

ORIGIN

Funding program announced by Transport Canada related to HRM's regional transportation goals.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that :

1. Halifax Regional Council authorize staff to submit a funding proposal for an "Automated Vehicle Location System for HRM" under the Transport Canada's Intelligent Transportation Systems Deployment and Integration Plan
2. and that, should federal funding be approved, increase the 2004/05 Capital budget for a new account, "Automated Vehicle Location" in the amount \$500,000 with funding from the Federal Government in the amount \$250,000 and \$250,000 from the Strategic Growth Reserve, Q126, be committed for HRM's 50% contribution towards the project.

BACKGROUND

Since being implemented in 1987, GoTime has provided Metro Transit passengers valuable real-time bus departure information contributing to the usability of the transit system. In recent years, the GoTime system has become obsolete and the hardware needed to maintain system and expand the fleet is no longer available.

On May 18, 2004, Transport Canada announced a call for proposals for funding under the Intelligent Transportation Systems Deployment and Integration Plan. The goal of this program is to maximize the use and efficiency of existing infrastructure and meet future mobility needs more responsibly through the development and implementation of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS). The deadline for applications is July 29, 2004.

DISCUSSION

An oft-cited deterrent to riding the bus is waiting at a stop not knowing when the bus will arrive. One means of successfully overcoming this is providing the customer with real-time information on where the bus is and when it will arrive. In HRM, the GoTime system has been providing that information through a dial-up phone number for each bus stop. An average of 11,000 calls per day to the GoTime system attests to the value that Metro Transit customers place on this information.

When Metro Transit implemented GoTime in 1987, it was on the cutting edge of this type of technology. More recently, the availability of global positioning systems (GPS) technology has brought about a new generation of automated vehicle location (AVL) systems. Although these systems are becoming well-established for large scale commercial trucking operations, their application in the urban transit industry is still relatively new.

The GoTime system is no longer supported by its original manufacturer and Metro Transit has found it increasingly difficult to continue maintaining the system as equipment needs replacing and the fleet expands. Development of a replacement AVL system would ensure that Metro Transit customers continue to receive real-time information on transit service while also providing enhanced information features.

In addition to transit systems, AVL can provide significant benefits in dispatching emergency response vehicles and have been shown in other Canadian cities to provide great improvements in the management of snow clearing operations. Consideration of a corporate vehicle tracking technology is part of the Integrated City initiative. In scoping an AVL system for Metro Transit, discussions will be held with other HRM business units to explore the potential for future extension of the system to other components of the fleet. Extending AVL to business units beyond Metro Transit, however, are beyond the scope of the project currently being proposed.

The Regional Planning process has already underlined the importance of increased transit ridership in a sustainable long term transportation strategy. It is clear that transit ridership will not grow meaningfully without ensuring it is attractive and easy to use and understand. Providing accurate and accessible real time transit information is an essential part of instilling confidence with the bus departure times for both regular users and potential users of the transit system.

Although maintaining a real time information system has become a critical issue and was included in the business plan for Metro Transit, it was felt that funding for a replacement AVL system could be delayed until the 2005-06 capital budget. The only funding included in the approved 2004-05 capital budget was for the AVL Needs and Scoping Study now underway. The announcement of the federal ITS funding program, however, has created an opportunity for moving implementation of this project forward and receiving federal funding assistance. HRM's Strategic Growth Reserve was established explicitly for the purpose of leveraging external funding opportunities such as these, which can not always be anticipated when planning budgets.

The federal program will provide a 50% contribution towards public sector projects to a maximum contribution of \$250,000. Accordingly, staff intend to develop a proposal for a \$500,000 project. As a full AVL system for Metro Transit is likely to exceed \$500,000, the budget for the initial project will limit its scope to a selected portion of the transit system, quite possibly HRM's new Bus Rapid Transit routes.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

Preparation of the funding proposal will be completed by HRM staff within the current approved operating budget.

If the application is ultimately selected by Transport Canada for funding, HRM's \$250,000 portion of the project is proposed to be taken from the 2004/05 Strategic Growth Reserve, Q126. Availability of funds in the reserve have been confirmed by staff of Financial Services. The current balance in the Strategic Growth Fund as of June 30, 2004 is \$9,166,862 with projected contributions of \$3,111,111 by March 31, 2005. Funding for future stages of the project (completion of the Metro Transit system and potentially a HRM fleet-wide system) will be proposed in a future capital budget.

If the project is not accepted for funding, the project will be set aside for now, but be included for consideration in a future capital budget.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy and the approved Operating budget, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation. If approved, this will increase the 2004/05 Capital and Reserve Budgets.

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ALTERNATIVES

Regional Council may choose to delay this project for consideration in a future capital budget and leave the Strategic Growth Reserve for other projects. This is not recommended, as an opportunity to capture federal funding assistance will be missed and may not become available again.

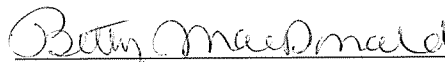
ATTACHMENTS

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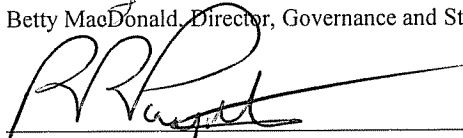
Additional copies of this report, and information on its status, can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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