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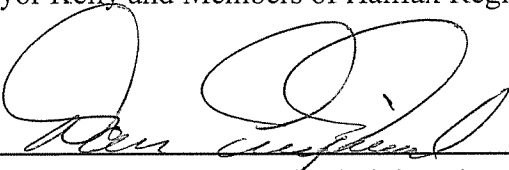


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Halifax Regional Council
July 13, 2004

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:



Dan English, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: July 5, 2004

SUBJECT: Robie/Cunard Intersection Project

ORIGIN

May 11, 2004 Halifax Regional Council meeting, item 10.1.10.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. Halifax Regional Council endorses staff's recommendation to proceed with the intersection improvements at Robie/Cunard, which includes the widening of Robie Street between Cunard Street and West Street to five lanes.

BACKGROUND

On May 11, 2004, staff recommended that Regional Council endorse the intent of the Roadway Network Optimization Plan. Five corridor continuity projects were identified in the plan, including the Robie/Cunard intersection project. Regional Council endorsed the intent of the Roadway Network Optimization Plan with the exception of the Robie/Cunard component which was deferred pending further public consultation.

DISCUSSION

The widening on Robie Street between Cunard Street and West Street was identified by staff as a traffic improvement project in 2000 and subsequently capital funds were approved by Regional Council in the 2001/02 budget year. The implementation of this project was significantly delayed due to the ongoing negotiations that staff had with the property owner on the northeast corner of the Robie/Cunard intersection over the necessary property acquisition for the widening.

A public meeting was held on June 23, 2004 to solicit input from the area residents. Only 19 people were in attendance and all were against the proposed widening. The meeting notes and a statement from the Commons North Neighbourhood Association (CMMA) are attached. The CMMA is against any widening, however, should Regional Council wish to proceed with any traffic improvements, they would prefer that a four-lane cross-section on Robie Street be constructed.

Staff still feels that the five lane option will maximize the infrastructure investment benefits along this corridor. Several factors were considered as part of staff's evaluation:

- **Corridor Continuity.** This refers to situations where the municipality has already made an investment in traffic lanes along a corridor, but for a short section the number of lanes is reduced. A five-lane cross-section would provide two continuous through lanes in each direction on Robie Street at Cunard Street whereas a four-lane cross-section would provide only one exclusive through lane in the southbound direction.

- **Intersection Vehicular Capacity.** One factor that is utilized by traffic engineers is the Intersection Capacity Unit Level of Service (ICU LOS) which gives insight into how an intersection is functioning. ICU LOS is not a value that can be measured in the field. It is generated by inputting all relevant information into a transportation software package. It does give a good reading on the conditions that can be expected at the intersection if you can accurately replicate the location.

Staff modelled three scenarios: existing conditions, a four-lane cross-section and a five-lane cross-section. Under existing conditions, the intersection operates under a ICU LOS G. This means that the intersection is 10 to 20 percent over capacity and is experiencing congestion periods of over 120 minutes per day. Long queues are common and motorists are likely to use alternate routes. The four lane configuration produced a ICU LOS E, which means that the intersection is right on the verge

of congested conditions. Minor traffic fluctuations would cause significant congestion. The five lane configuration produced a ICU LOS D and would normally operate without congestion. The intersection could accommodate 10 to 20 percent additional capacity before operating on the verge of congested conditions.

- **Traffic flow on Cunard Street.** As a result of improving vehicular capacity on Robie Street by providing two continuous through lanes in each direction, a higher percentage of green time can be assigned to the Cunard Street traffic signal phase, thus increasing the capacity on Cunard Street as well. This will be beneficial especially during the a.m. traffic peak period.

- **Short-cutting in adjacent residential neighbourhoods.** Staff does not anticipate an increase in short-cutting through adjacent neighbourhoods. If anything, this project may reduce short-cutting on certain streets. Staff has received many complaints from the Compton/Williams/Welsford residents regarding increased short-cutting in their neighbourhood. Improvements to the Robie/Cunard intersection could go a long way in reducing traffic volumes on their streets.

- **Collision history.** Staff reviewed the five-year collision history for the intersection. The predominant collision pattern is that northbound left turning vehicles are colliding with southbound through vehicles. This is primarily due to the inadequate left turn holding lane offset. Widening Robie Street to five lanes on the north side will improve the offset at the intersection and potentially reduce collisions.

- **Bike lanes.** The 'Blueprint for a Bicycle-Friendly HRM' endorsed by Regional Council in December 2002 indicates that Robie Street should be a short term project for bicycle lanes. The Blueprint, however, does not take into consideration the existing infrastructure and what would be required to provide bicycle lanes. Given that there is little opportunity in the near future to widen Robie Street between West Street and Almon Street for the provision of bicycle lanes, staff feels that there is little value to consider bicycle lanes for such a short section in this project.

- **Pedestrians.** Staff recognizes that the crosswalk will be longer on the north leg as a result of the widening. The proposed project includes the installation of appropriate pedestrian ramps and the relocation traffic signal poles next to the ramps so that pedestrian push buttons can be installed. Once the project is completed, staff intends to introduce new traffic signal timings which will provide adequate pedestrian crossing times and install audible pedestrian signals to assist the visually impaired to cross the street.

- **Snow Removal.** With the five lane cross-section on Robie Street, a boulevard area between the curb and sidewalk, which is important for snow storage, cannot be accommodated on the east side adjacent to The Lexington condominium building. Although not ideal, this situation is prevalent throughout the municipality. The adjacent property owner would be responsible for snow removal.

For the above reasons, staff believes that this intersection improvement project, including the widening of Robie Street to five lanes in this short section, would provide significant improvement to intersection operation, safety and vehicular capacity.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

Capital funding for this project was approved by Regional Council in 2001/02 under CTU00143 - Robie Street (Cunard-Garrick).

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.


ALTERNATIVES

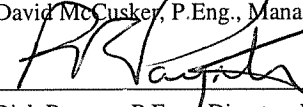
1. Regional Council may choose to direct staff to design and tender the project based on a four-lane cross-section on Robie Street. This is not recommended as staff, while recognizing the concerns of abutting residents with the proposed five-lane cross-section, believes this is exceeded by the overall value to the community of fully realizing existing corridor investment.
2. Regional Council may choose to direct staff to postpone the implementation of this project pending completion of the regional transportation plan. This is not recommended as staff feels that the widening will provide noticeable improvement in traffic delay and vehicular capacity at this intersection. Additionally, safety issues and short-cutting concerns would not be addressed.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Robie Street meeting notes
2. Statement from the Commons North Neighbourhood Association opposed to the widening of Robie Street.
3. Functional Sketch - Robie Street (Garrick to Cunard) with a five-lane cross-section
4. Functional Sketch - Robie Street (Garrick to Cunard) with a four-lane cross-section

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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Report Approved by: 
Rick Paynter, P.Eng., Director, Public Works & Transportation

Minutes from Robie Street Widening Meeting

- First speaker e-mailed you his notes
- I took digital photos of the intersection and the street scape is ugly from the 5 lane option. Short term and long term is ugly on widening side of the street. This is one of the main ways into and out of the city. We are only talking about 10 hours a week of improvements. Trees add a lot of aesthetic value to our city. We need to do what is best for the city and people that live in it, and this is not it.
- **Andrea Doncaster, Davidson Street.** Any consideration as to the impacts on the streets that feed onto Robie Street in the area that your going to be widening? There are other streets in the area that may not be able to handle the capacity and they are without sidewalks. By driving cars onto these other streets it is dangerous for pedestrians. What about the continuity in the south bound direction? Right turning traffic from Cunard onto Robie is not going to the bridge and therefore will cause congestion switching lanes before North Street. I'm apposed to the changes, but he 4 lane is a better alternative, especially for pedestrians, council should refuse the design.
- **Tom White, Charles Street.** Traffic problems are being caused by Willow tree intersection and not Cunard Street. Where are the 4 lanes on North Street to help you get to the bridge? This project only alleviates 2 blocks. People who live off the peninsula would love to have Robie Street as a major artery to the new bridge and Bedford. But people who live on the peninsula don't. If you want good public transportation, you should have lousy traffic patterns. The data is not there to support this.
- **Susan Akin, Robie Street.** I rent and I do care what happens in the community. I moved to this area because I didn't want to contribute to the problem. I am a cyclist and where are the bike lanes? This is an incredibly difficult city to be a bicyclist. A lot of children ride their bikes to the Commons and the high school's in this area. I just want to know, where are the bike lanes? There will never be bike lanes here. If there were bike lanes, maybe we wouldn't have the congestion problems.
- **Tamara Rival, Robie Street.** Scrap this plan and just widening the street enough to build a bike lane. How can you justify this expansion when I'm sitting at a traffic light for 3 lights and the wait isn't that long to require a \$250,000 expansion? The issue is that from the hospital up Robie Street to my house is that every light is out of sync. This issue needs to be addressed. People chose to live in the suburbs, so too bad.
- **Ben Hoff, Sara Street.** You don't want to encourage drivers and you don't want single occupancy vehicles. You are encouraging drivers, therefore carrot for the drivers, where is the carrot for transit users, bike users and pedestrians and where is the stick for the drivers? This is not showing the carrot and stick method which would be inline with

HRM policies. I question you disagreeing on only putting 2 blocks of bike lanes. 2 blocks at a time is what it is going to take, so it has to start somewhere. Include bicycle transportation in your plan, just like on Brunswick Street.

- **Glen O’Neil, West Street.** This expansion will make it much more difficult to turn left off West Street onto Robie Street. I may resort to other options to get to my house on West Street. This will affect the side street traffic. I will have to cross 5 streets of traffic to head onto Cunard Street. We are electors and I think you are trying to sell us an agenda from council. My house is my investment and I try to do everything I can to make my neighbourhood as good as possible. We represent the future. Your trying to sell me your vision of how this city should work and it is wrong.
- **Jeff Finey, Clifton Street.** You have proposed one solution, but have you done a pedestrian count? It’s a funnel for pedestrians and cyclists in this area. Continuity lies on the west part of Cunard Street and the south part of Robie Street. The Continuity problem is tourists going down Cunard Street the wrong way. Give it 4 lanes on either side and give it the continuity. This will be less safe for pedestrians. Fix Robie Street from the south and Cunard Street from the west, and with leftover money fix Windsor Street at Cunard Street.
- **Ian Fallkeith, Harris Street.** I support the 4 lane option, being much more preferable compared to the five lane option. The 5 lane option would support a major artery through the city. This encourages the city to evolve towards suburban sprawl through the continuity argument. Where do you draw the line in this continuity argument? Where do you draw the lines on the rights of the residents to counteract this argument?
- **Larry Steele, Maynard Street.** I strongly hope you pass on to council the clear message that the neighbours have been giving. This is an attractive part of the city and it would be a shame to make it about speeding cars through there. There may be the idea of us versus the suburbs, but the whole city needs a downtown core working well. We have pretty well unanimosity against the 5 lane proposal, and the 4 lane proposal is interesting. The clear message from us is that the 4 lane proposal is favourable compared to 5. Evidence of 11 accidents per year isn’t that spectacular and there is little evidence to demonstrate the need of this proposal.
- **John Peek, Clifton Street.** My wife has walked or biked the last 18 years to work. During rush hour traffic, you can’t make a right hand turn on North Street towards the bridge. If we filled 50 of these churches, you might believe us. Voices in suburbs against the voices on the peninsula. Your trying to move traffic more efficiently, and I know that’s your job, and I know everyone can’t live near their work. You have to start thinking about the people that live in the neighbourhood. This will not accomplish anything in the long term, but I agree it will make it more efficient. You have to start thinking about the best option for people, and if you don’t start putting in bicycle lanes, then we will never have them.

- **Robby Thompson, Clifton Street.** You look at this as a corridor continuity and we are thinking about the neighbourhood. 4 and 5 lane options are picking between bad and worse. There is no agreement with either of these options and I do agree with all of Steven's comments earlier.
- The do nothing option, use the \$250,000 to reduce the 80% single occupancy operators to 70% . What happens to the density on Quinpool Road if we drop the numbers by 10-15%. Between carrots and sticks - Carrot could be a congestion sur-charge on people that park downtown all day. Drop the parking charge for first hour, and then a hefty fine after 75 minutes, like in California. \$250,000 could be invested, but not on cement. Trees would be a nice investment. You need to convince people to not drive at all.
- **Andrea Doncaster, Davidson Street.** There is always more than one solution to a problem, and you've only looked at one scope and the advantages and not the disadvantages. People in the suburbs want a better commute, but at the same time there are people in this neighbourhood as well, but this proposal doesn't have the balance and you need to see both sides of this.

**COMMONS NORTH NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATION
JUNE 23, 2004**

STATEMENT TO PUBLIC MEETING

The CNNA does not support the proposed plan for the Robie St. continuity project, and recommends that council not undertake any changes to the width of Robie St.

If however, council decides that the small improvement in intersection capacity is warranted, the CNNA strongly urges that the four-lane alternative be constructed.

There are 6 reasons Why the CNNA is opposed to the current project for Robie St.

The need for the so-called improvement has little or no justification

HRM has not supported the proposal by showing any actual data that demonstrates the improved capacity the project affords. How much time will the average commuter gain?

Congestion occurs for a short amount of time between 7:30 and 8:00 am and 4:30 and 5:00 pm

Observation shows that most northbound cars want to travel straight through North St. and are constrained by upstream bottlenecks rather than the Cunard intersection. There is little demand for the lane to turn onto the bridge.

Observation shows that most southbound cars are constrained by the lights at the Willow Tree and not by Cunard St.

While HRM states that this project should be viewed as making the best use of the existing roadway investment, it is not clear if the earlier investments were ever justified for traffic reasons□ they are aesthetic rather than providing capacity.

While the justification for the project is corridor continuity, Robie St lane width will continue to be constrained to a maximum of three lanes between Garrick and Almon without a costly undertaking involving demolition of structures and removal of old trees

Research has shown that road widening does not actually reduce congestion.

Even if it accepted that there is some justification for the project, why should low value cars trips in rush hour be considered more valuable than our neighbourhoods?

The built heritage, tree-lined streets, the parks and the harbour are what residents and visitors alike point to when asked what makes Halifax and our neighbourhood in particular great. It is these aspects of our community that we should strive to not only maintain, but enhance

The project has many negative impacts on the historic residential and commercial community including faster traffic, loss of a buffer between the road and buildings, and reduced aesthetic value.

Road widening is at best, a temporary measure. Eventually traffic will increase further and the amount of congestion will be the same again. Where does road widening stop?

Congestion can be a good thing□ because it discourages people from living in sprawl locations, it reduces traffic speed, and promotes alternative transportation choices

The proposed plan has been done in isolation of a comprehensive transportation plan

*Future studies and plans may make this improvement unnecessary
HRM should try to live up to its state policy objectives on alternatives to cars*

The intersection is a very important pedestrian crossing. This is one of the main access points to the Commons and is used by pedestrians, cyclists, dog walkers etc. The design as proposed has many negative features. These include:

*Cars will move through the intersection at faster speed, which are therefore more dangerous
Pedestrians must cross five lanes of traffic instead of the current three
The sidewalk against the Lexington is wedged between the building and the road with no verge. This is not only very pedestrian unfriendly but creates a major snow removal problem
All of the other corners of the Commons are unfriendly to pedestrians. We are making the Commons very difficult to access.*

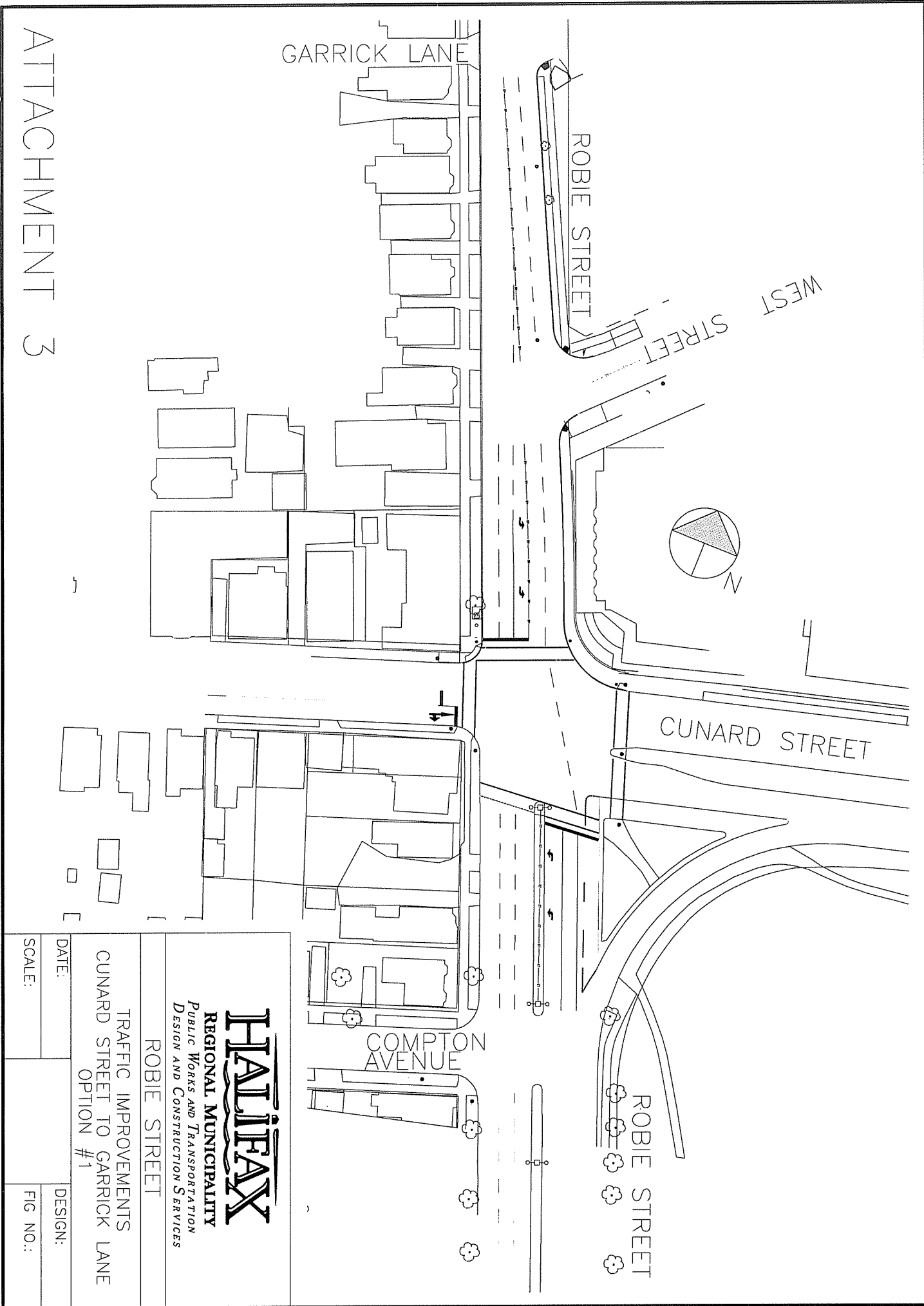
There are alternatives to the current plan that have not been considered. These include:

*A one-way system
More intelligent signals along the entire corridor that allow more vehicles to move through the intersections
A lane that changes direction at rush hour
Reduced number of lanes*

The design as proposed is overkill. While we debate the necessity of the project, the exact same continuity can be afforded by four lanes.

See the details in the four lane drawing, which maintains the desired continuity but allows the construction of a grass verge along the length of the Lexington. Trees should be planted along the verge.

In conclusion, the CNNA does not support the proposed plan for the Robie St. continuity project, and recommends that council not undertake any changes to the width of Robie St. If however, council decides that the small improvement in intersection capacity is warranted, the CNNA strongly urges that the four-lane alternative be constructed.



ATTACHMENT 3

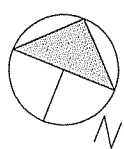
HAITHEX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY <i>Public Works and Transportation</i> <i>Design and Construction Services</i>	
ROBIE STREET	
TRAFFIC IMPROVEMENTS CUNARD STREET TO GARRICK LANE OPTION #1	
DATE:	DESIGN:
SCALE:	FIG. NO.:

ATTACHMENT 4

GARRICK LANE

ROBIE STREET

WEST STREET



CUNARD STREET

COMPTON AVENUE

ROBIE STREET

HAJIAX
 REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
 PUBLIC WORKS AND TRANSPORTATION
 DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION SERVICES

ROBIE STREET

TRAFFIC IMPROVEMENTS
 CUNARD STREET TO GARRICK LANE
 OPTION #2

DATE:
 SCALE:

DESIGN:
 FIG NO.:

