


Halifax Regional Council
May 13, 2008

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: 
Cathie O'Toole, Director, Infrastructure & Asset Management

DATE: April 29, 2008

SUBJECT: **Alternative Uses of Chester Rail Spur Corridor**

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

At the January 30, 2007 meeting of Halifax Regional Council, a motion was passed that staff look at alternative uses of the Chester Rail Spur corridor.

BACKGROUND

The Chester Rail Spur was abandoned by CN on March 6, 2008. Prior to that, HRM staff held two public open house sessions to receive feedback to assist Regional Council in determining the value of purchasing the corridor for public use. The HRM Active Transportation Plan, approved by Regional Council in 2006 identifies this corridor as a key element to the Active Transportation Network.

DISCUSSION

Although Staff has considered uses of the rail corridor other than (or combined with) an active transportation corridor, these alternatives have not been explored in depth based on the considerations outlined below. Overarching all of these considerations is the indication from Halifax Water that they would oppose any use of the abandoned rail corridor other than as passive parkland or as an active transportation corridor, including the reinstatement of rail.

Return of Rail

Under the Rail Abandonment process, any rail operator interested in operating trains in this corridor could have expressed that interest to the Canadian Transportation Agency. No such expressions of interest were received. It is evident that there is insufficient market on this line, now or in the future, to make it a viable operation and it should be assumed that a substantial municipal subsidy would be required to interest any short line operator.

The HRM Regional Plan clearly determined that passenger rail was not economically feasible in a large ridership market like Bedford-Sackville. It stands to reason that passenger service to an even smaller market like Timberlea, with indirect access from the community to the rail line, is significantly less feasible. The geometry of the track combined with numerous at-grade road crossings dictates and operating speed of 15 mph which is not conducive to effective transit service.

Truckway

This corridor travels through a residential neighbourhood (Fairmount) and although an average of three trains a week may have been tolerated, creating a wider roadway with a steady stream of truck traffic would generate a significant impact. Although the cost of a truckway has not been calculated, it would be significant, as the rail line has several large cut and fill sections that would have to be widened substantially to create a two-lane roadbed.

Busway

The costs and impacts of a busway are similar to those of the truckway above. Although the concept of creating a dedicated corridor for transit is an important part of the regional transit strategy, this corridor is not attractive for that purpose. It provides a very indirect path for buses coming into the region on Highway 102 and will add significantly to operating costs. A more efficient and less costly alternative is to create a dedicated transit lane on Highway 102 and Bayers Road.

Disposal of Property to Adjacent Landowners

This will be the inevitable consequence of not taking action to secure the corridor for another purpose. Limited disposal of property is possible if the corridor right-of-way is narrowed for active transportation.

These alternatives were identified in promotion of the public input sessions and a slide was included in the public presentation explaining how the truckway/busway alternative had limited feasibility.

Although some speakers at these sessions lamented the loss of rail, there was little support expressed for any of the other alternatives listed.

One alternative that was raised by the public was to leave the corridor as is. Staff indicated that this is not a realistic alternative, as it is clear CN will strive to maximize the amount of land that it can sell to the private sector and this will sever the continuity of the corridor.

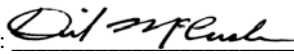
BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications at this time.

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.

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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