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# Item No. 13

Halifax Regional Council May 13, 2008

### TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Cathie OToole

SUBMITTED BY:

Cathie O'Toole, Director, Infrastructure & Asset Management

**DATE:** May 7, 2008

SUBJECT:Commuter Rail Information Sheet

## **INFORMATION REPORT**

#### <u>ORIGIN</u>

Staff.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The HRM Regional Plan provides a framework for expanding transit service within HRM. Commuter rail is not part of that plan. Many residents of HRM have seen how well commuter rail systems work in major cities and make inquiries regarding why a system like this is not being implemented here.

#### **DISCUSSION**

To aid in the understanding of why commuter rail is not part of HRM's Regional Plan an information sheet has been prepared by staff. This information will be provided to residents making inquiries and will be available on the website at this address:<u>www.halifax.ca/metrotransit/news</u>. A hard copy of the information sheet is attached to this report.

#### **BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

There are no budget implications.

#### 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.

#### **ATTACHMENTS**

Commuter Rail and the HRM Regional Plan

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <u>http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.html</u> 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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# Commuter Rail and HRM's Regional Transportation Plan

Population (millions)

10

20

## Commuter Rail is effective in North America's bigger cities

This chart shows population for metropolitan areas in the United States and Canada all the way from New York City (#1) to HRM (#143). Yellow bars indicate metropolitan areas with their own commuter rail system and purple bars show areas without. Between the smallest city with commuter rail (Edmonton #54) and HRM there are 88 cities without commuter rail.

It is clear from this chart that only cities with a population of one million or more have found commuter rail systems to be viable. The metropolitan population of HRM is currently 385,000 and is expected to remain well under 500,000 for the next twenty years.

## Why a Large Ridership Market is Needed to Support Commuter Rail

The benefit of commuter rail in large cities is that once the large investment in infrastructure is made and an engine and crew is assembled, adding additional capacity is simply a matter of adding more railcars. Buses, on the other hand, are ideal for smaller markets where there is little startup cost, but adding more capacity requires another bus and another driver for each increment in capacity addition.

As the chart shows, there is a point where a market can be large enough whereby commuter rail becomes less expensive than buses. HRM is nowhere near that point. In fact, a recent analysis determined that the per-seat cost of rail from Bedford



to downtown Halifax would be 5 to 6 times the cost of express transit buses.

## OK, so we don't have a big population... ...what about all of our "natural advantages"?

We already have a rail track coming right into the Halifax peninsula. Having a "head start" like that will surely overcome our lack of population.

Most urban commuter rail systems, including light rail transit (LRT), take advantage of abandoned, or underutilized rail lines. LRT can only be mixed in the same corridor as heavy freight rail if a physical separation between lines can be made to minimize the potential of crashes. Most urban rail corridors are straight with flat grades, allowing high speeds to be achieved. They travel through the heart of the city and higher density growth radiates out from the station locations.

In HRM, the only corridors available to us are a single rail line through the south end and an abandoned line along the north end waterfront. The lands across which the north end line traveled have now been redeveloped and can no longer realistically be re-assembled into a rail corridor. Using the still-active south end corridor poses many potential problems on its own:

- The single line must be shared with a steady schedule of freight train traffic. Rental would be paid to CN.
- Adding a second parallel rail line is expensive and could not be separated enough to allow for the use of LRT trains.
- The curvature, sight distances, yard movements and grade crossings dictate speed limits of 15-20 miles per hour along lengthy sections of the line.
- Much of the line travels along the waterfront where the needed high-density development is contentious and can only "radiate" in one direction.



## Track speed limits mean "rapid transit" will not be so rapid.

This diagram shows a commuter train trip from Cobequid Road in Sackville to the VIA Rail station in downtown Halifax. The total length of the trip is 35 minutes with five intermediate stops. The travel time downtown by local bus from Sackville in peak time is only 30 minutes and by express bus is 24 minutes. The trip from Mill Cove in Bedford to downtown is 27 minutes which is significantly more that the 15-18 minutes that a high speed ferry would take.



A commuter rail line would terminate at the the VIA Rail station, as this is where the track ends. Although other cities will run LRT trains along streets, that is not practical here as LRT trains can not be used in the CN corridor alongside heavy rail freight trains. As the map on the right, shows very little of our downtown employment is located within comfortable walking distance of the VIA Rail station, particularly when compared to other downtown transit nodes. A system to shuttle passengers to downtown employment by bus is possible, but this adds time to the already long commuting trip shown in the box above.

## How well does the terminus at the VIA Rail station serve downtown employment?



	Employment within 4 minute walking radius	Employment within 6 minute walking radius
SCOTIA SQUARE	12,400	22,100
FERRY TERMINAL	11,300	17,300
VIA RAIL STATION	2,200	4,400



For more information on HRM's transit planning visit www.halifax.ca Or contact: Brian Taylor, Transit Planning Specialist taylorb@halifax.ca 490-1665