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Item No. 4

**Halifax Regional Council
September 29, 2009**

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Labrecque", written over a horizontal line.

Mike Labrecque, Director, Transportation & Public Works

DATE: September 2, 2009

SUBJECT: Halifax Student Alliance

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

This report originates from the February 10, 2009, Halifax Regional Council session where the Halifax Student Alliance (HSA) presented a report to Regional Council requesting a Late Night Transit Pilot to be included in the 2009/10 Halifax Regional Municipal Budget.

BACKGROUND

The Halifax Student Alliance is requesting Halifax Regional Council make the appropriate budgetary adjustments to ensure that the municipality is able to provide a Late Night Transit Pilot program that services the downtown and student residential areas during busy times. This request is prefaced by Professor Donald Clairmont's report on violence in which he recommended the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) implement a late night shuttle service.

DISCUSSION

In April, 2008 Professor Donald Clairmont presented his final report on Violence and Public Safety in HRM. The report followed an extensive public consultation process and contained a large number of recommendations to address the issue of Public Safety in HRM. In response to the report, in March, 2009 a Public Safety Officer was appointed to lead and direct a coordinated response to the report.

One of the key components of the report is the issue of safe trip home for the many students attending post-secondary institutions in HRM. The strategies to address this issue include a variety of approaches, including enhancing walking corridors, improved taxi availability and introducing alternative transportation, including the potential for late-night transit service. It is the position of staff that the universities and colleges share in the responsibility of ensuring their students arrive safely back to campus.

With respect to the issue of late-night transit service, it is acknowledged that students represent a significant portion of Metro Transit's annual ridership and revenue. The importance of this ridership group is acknowledged through the various U-Pass programs that Metro Transit provides in partnership with many of the post-secondary institutions within HRM. When the U-Pass program was introduced in 2003 there was an immediate increase in ridership and demand for service increases and Metro Transit responded to this demand through targeted service enhancements on routes specifically servicing the universities. The value of that service in 2003 was \$4.3 million and since that time has grown to a value of \$9.8 million, an increase of 43.8% over the life of the U-Pass program. During the same time period, revenue from the program has remained relatively stable, with only modest contract increases. Today revenue from the program totals \$2.7 million, or a cost recovery of 28.5%. This recovery ratio is well below the average of 53%, validating the importance Regional Council and Metro Transit has placed on serving this ridership group.

As with most aspects of Metro Transit service, there is continued demand for service growth, and the HSA report makes the claim that student concerns have been largely ignored and implementations have not addressed specific transit inadequacies. Metro Transit service overall has increased by approximately 60% since the introduction of the 2002 Operational Plan. This average compares favourably to the increase in U-Pass targeted service increases. Further, the updated 2009 Operational Plan and corresponding 5 Year Approach to Transit Enhancements (Capital Plan) contemplate continued significant service enhancements throughout HRM, including those routes that serve the many universities and colleges.

During the 2009/10 fiscal year, Metro Transit has been constrained in its ability to grow service due to overcapacity at its Burnside Transit Centre. As such, only those service changes that can be accomplished without utilizing additional vehicles are possible. Priority has been given to areas where riders have been left behind at stops due to overcrowding on the bus.

Specific service increases planned for August 2009 include increased frequency on Route 1 Spring Garden, with 10 minute mid-day service to address student demand as identified through Metro Transit's periodic review of ridership and statistical analysis. In 2008/09 Metro Transit focussed service implementation on routes that were over capacity and in doing so reduced passenger pass ups by 62%.

There has been no proven demand for late night transit service other than that raised by the HSA. Their report urges Halifax Regional Council to approve funding for a late night bus service pilot to address the perceived gap. Based on the routes recommended in the HSA report, Metro Transit has estimated the cost of extending service would be \$1.8 million annually. As most of the students using this service would do so with their U-Pass, there would be no additional revenue for Metro Transit to help offset this increased cost.

Metro Transit is concerned about the safety and security of all its employees and customers, and as such has expedited the installation of on-board video surveillance cameras on its entire fleet. This represents an investment of \$1.3 million. Other security features include a sophisticated communication system, panic buttons and the creation of a Transit Security Office to focus on this important aspect of providing public transit.

In addition to the budgetary constraints, there are other operational and Collective Agreement issues that make the Halifax Student Alliance request difficult. Metro Transit adheres to mandatory hours of rest for its operators. Extended late-night service would add a significant complexity to next day work assignment for operators and increase the risk of service cancellations due to operator availability. Based on the operational complexity and estimated cost of providing late night service, and the corresponding low demand for the service, staff feel that introducing late night service is not the best approach to improving safety for students.

Metro Transit will continue to work with the Office of Public Safety and coordinate efforts to engage the universities and colleges to develop plans and strategies to provide safe travel for students.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

HSA is requesting that a number of routes be extended well into the evening and would increase Metro Transit's annual operating budget by \$1.8 million. The costing of the requested service is as follows:

Extended Service - Late Night Transit Service			
Route	Weekday Cost	Saturday Cost	Sunday Cost
Route 1	\$122,700	\$24,800	\$38,400
Route 9	\$71,900	\$14,600	\$17,700
Route 17	\$418,000	\$200,700	\$244,000
Route 41	\$274,600	\$163,400	\$198,700
Total	\$887,200	\$403,500	\$498,800
Grand Total			\$1,789,500

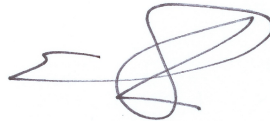
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

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

There are no attachments.

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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