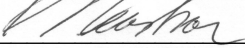


Item No. 11
Halifax Regional Council
May 18, 2010

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: 
Ken Reashor, P.Eng., A/Director, Transportation & Public Works

DATE: May 11, 2010

SUBJECT: Metro Transit Bridge Terminal

INFORMATION REPORT

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

ORIGIN

Request from the May 4, 2010 Halifax Regional Council meeting, item 11.2.1 Case 01360 - MPS Amendment - Dartmouth Bridge Transit Terminal, asking that staff provide a supplementary report prior to the public hearing for Case 01361 addressing the following points:

1. More information about alternate sites, the Scotiabank site, the Alderney Drive site and the Faulkner/Wyse Road site, including cost efficiency, costs to acquire, benefits of closer location to north end residents.
2. What are the implications to Dartmouth High atmosphere and outdoor activity opportunities? Will there be any increase or decrease in gas fumes, etc. for the high school population? What is the extent of the reduction in bus idling and in buses travelling empty in the neighbourhood? Are there any other concerns about having a major terminal this close to a high school? Do the benefits to students, if any, offset any negative aspects?
3. Would HRM be suggesting this location if the land was not a problematic piece of wilderness park?
4. Are there any other possible locations for the terminal? Why does the terminal have to be at this location and not located outside the Dartmouth Regional centre?
5. How does this new terminal benefit the disabled community?

6. Verify new Schedule M, is maximum area 3.5 acres. Attachments A and B do not state 3.5 acres (Page 7).
7. Is there written comment from Traffic Services on traffic issues, i.e., Wyse/Thistle and a half signal on Nantucket?
8. What happens to 2.5 acres not part of the transit terminal?
9. Is there legal comment on the use of parking spots after existing terminal is moved?
10. Is the consultant report on the HRM website?
11. More details on the rationale for the need of an expanded transit terminal.

BACKGROUND

Halifax Regional Council originally approved in principle the construction of a transit terminal on the Dartmouth Common at the June 17, 2008 with the following motion:

That Halifax Regional Council approve, in principle, the concept of creating a new transit terminal on the Dartmouth Common, *including the Wilderness Park area between Nantucket and Thistle Streets (the area west of Dartmouth High School)* and further, that Halifax Regional Council approve the recommended amendment to the *Municipal Government Act* in relation to the Dartmouth Common and that the recommended amendment be forwarded to the Province of Nova Scotia for consideration for the Fall 2008 sitting of the Legislature.

The necessary amendment to the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter was subsequently altered and passed by the Nova Scotia Legislature during the Fall 2008 session of the Legislature. The alteration was to remove reference to Sportsplex parking uses from the amendment.

Subsequently, the Terminal has been discussed through the Dartmouth Common Master Plan project, including discussion at several public meetings. There has also been a public information meeting held as part of the process for Case 01361. Based on previous direction from Regional Council, staff have directed that detailed design be undertaken on the site. As of May 7, 2010, detailed design was approximately 80% complete.

DISCUSSION

The specific items raised by Council are discussed individually below:

1. More information about alternate sites, the Scotiabank site, the Alderney Drive site and the Faulkner/Wyse Road site, including cost efficiency, costs to acquire, benefits of closer location to north end residents.

Utilizing Lands Currently Owned by the Bank of Nova Scotia

If HRM were to take possession of these lands there would be no impact on the Bridge Terminal project as currently conceived. There would only be an impact if the terminal were built in the originally proposed alignment parallel to Nantucket Avenue. This alignment was previously eliminated from further consideration in response to consultation with Dartmouth High School/Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB), Dartmouth Sportsplex, and the public at large. This alignment was also eliminated from further consideration because the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter would not permit rebuilding any displaced Dartmouth Sportsplex parking elsewhere on the Common. Additionally, if the terminal were built parallel to Nantucket Avenue and extended to the Scotiabank property, it would sever Sportsplex's driveway access to Nantucket Avenue. This loss of access and/or loss of parking would have a significant negative impact on their operations.

There are no opportunities to expand the current terminal layout into the Scotiabank site as this would not allow adequate space for the required program elements of the terminal. The assessed value of the two property parcels occupied by the Scotiabank is \$1,199,200; however, this does not necessarily reflect the market value of the property and the final price to acquire the property would be subject to appraisal and negotiations.

This location would not have a tangible difference in proximity to residents of North Dartmouth from the preferred location.

Building on the Keating (Faulkner/Wyse) Lands.

These lands were considered initially but were found to be not operationally feasible for the following reasons:

- They are within an established residential area with little opportunity for a visual or acoustic buffer.
- Halifax Harbour Bridges has indicated that the implication of having all Metro Transit buses turning left onto Wyse Road from the MacDonald Bridge toll plaza would have severe negative effects on the overall operation of the Bridge. This left turn is currently the largest single constraint to Dartmouth-bound traffic capacity. Current peak hour queues reach beyond the toll plaza to the eastbound travel lanes

and block the centre traffic lane. This would be further exacerbated by adding Metro Transit buses to that queue. Further, this would add significant delay to the thousands of Metro Transit customers using buses to cross the MacDonald Bridge during peak hour. Halifax Harbour Bridges would not support Metro Transit making these traffic movements.

- Realignment/reconstruction of local roads would be required in the area.
- Wyse Road would require a widening to accommodate a transit-only lane to access the MacDonald Bridge Halifax-bound.
- The lands are currently a mixture of R-2 residential and C-2 commercial zoning. Parcels in the R-2 zone have been subdivided into smaller, residential-sized lots. A re-zoning would be required to build the terminal.
- The previously considered parcel of land does not front onto Wyse Road, reducing the visibility of the site from this busy arterial road. This conflicts with the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principle of natural surveillance.

The assessed value of the parcels in question is \$1,093,900, however, this does not necessarily reflect the market value of the property and the final price to acquire the property would be subject to appraisal and negotiations.

Annual operating costs would be similar to those of the proposed Dartmouth Common Bridge Terminal site.

These lands would be marginally closer to some residents of North Dartmouth. However, it would be further removed from major trip generators such as Dartmouth Shopping Centre, Sportsplex, Dartmouth High School and Metropolitan Place (99 Wyse Road).

Building near the Alderney Ferry Terminal

There has never been a specific site considered on Alderney Drive. The Alderney Drive area is not considered a suitable candidate site for the following reasons:

- There are no parcels of land available that are large enough to accommodate the footprint of the proposed terminal.
- Providing service to the terminal would require major route deviations, resulting in approximately \$550,000 per year in additional operating costs.
- The above-mentioned deviations would be a significant inconvenience for transit passengers, particularly those wishing to travel between Halifax and Burnside, North Dartmouth, MicMac Mall, Westphal and Port Wallace. Also, those passengers using some routes to access destinations such as Bayers Lake, Mumford Terminal, Clayton Park, Universities and Hospitals would also be significantly inconvenienced. These passengers would be forced to travel approximately two additional kilometres on

- every trip. This would greatly reduce the appeal of using public transit throughout HRM given that this is our busiest regional transfer terminal.
- The existing Alderney bus-ferry transfer point is insufficient in size to accommodate all bus traffic from the Bridge Terminal.

As there are no lands that could accommodate the terminal, it is not possible to provide a cost to acquire lands in this area.

A terminal in the Alderney area would be significantly further from residents of North Dartmouth than the proposed Terminal site. It would represent a very significant inconvenience for North Dartmouth transit passengers as described above.

2. What are the implications to Dartmouth High atmosphere and outdoor activity opportunities? Will there be any increase or decrease in gas fumes, etc. for the high school population? What is the extent of the reduction in bus idling and in buses traveling empty in the neighbourhood? Are there any other concerns about having a major terminal this close to a high school? Do the benefits to students, if any, offset any negative aspects?

The currently proposed design was created partially in response to concerns raised by Dartmouth High School/HRSB regarding proximity of the original terminal design to the school. Under the new design, the transit terminal is as far away as possible from Dartmouth High School while still balancing the requirements of other tenants on the Common. HRSB has submitted a letter to HRM acknowledging that they have been consulted with respect to the Bridge Terminal and Dartmouth Common Master Plan and that they prefer the currently proposed terminal layout over the original alignment.

The majority of the Bridge Terminal (the bus circulation area in particular) would be below the grade of Dartmouth High School. This allows the contours of the area to serve as a visual and acoustic buffer between the school and terminal. In addition to grade separation, the Bridge Terminal would be separated by a green buffer from Dartmouth High School. Given the design of the site there would be no greater impact on Dartmouth High School than the current site. This is especially true when compared to Thistle Street and Victoria Road, which serve a far higher number of vehicles and bring those vehicles much closer to Dartmouth High School. Additionally, Metro Transit is responsible for removing more private vehicles from HRM's roadways than any other mode of transportation, reducing overall emissions.

The Bridge Terminal would enhance the attractiveness of public transit and could further reduce car usage in the area, reducing the number of vehicles passing directly in front of Dartmouth High School. Metro Transit has one of the newest transit fleets in Canada. As such, Metro Transit buses are continually becoming cleaner as engine technology progresses to meet strict environmental regulations. As an example, the average emissions released by a bus built in 2010 is 1/60th of the emissions released by a bus built in 1988. Finally, the emissions released by a single transit bus are

far less than the emissions that would be released if Metro Transit's passengers decided instead to drive their own vehicles.

Currently, Metro Transit buses "layover" between in-service trips at various locations around the Bridge Terminal. This is because the current terminal has no space for buses to layover on-site. This practice requires buses to continually drive empty around the Nantucket-Victoria-Thistle-Wyse block to transition between the terminal and these layover locations. This practice would cease with the new terminal and the overall number of out of service buses passing Dartmouth High would be reduced. Under current operations, approximately 224 buses per weekday pass Dartmouth High School on Thistle Street. With the new Bridge Terminal, this would decrease to approximately 144 per weekday. This represents a 36% reduction in overall transit traffic in close proximity to the school. Also, one of these layover locations is near Dartmouth High School on Thistle Street. This area would no longer be used by Metro Transit buses, alleviating sight-line concerns that have been expressed by Dartmouth High School.

Concepts included in the Dartmouth Common Master Plan include a new sports field near Dartmouth High on the opposite side of Thistle Street (similar to several other high schools in HRM) and the proposed transit terminal. One is not necessarily exclusive of the other. Metro Transit has received no indication from HRSB that the terminal as proposed will impact any other future growth plans at Dartmouth High School.

Many Dartmouth High School students use the current Bridge Terminal both for commuting to/from school as well as other travel. They would directly benefit from having a significantly improved transit terminal they can easily access. An additional benefit would be not having buses laying over on Thistle Street any longer.

3. Would HRM be suggesting this location if the land was not a problematic piece of wilderness park?

The proposed site is the only viable option in the area. Also, a significant portion of the budget escalation in this project is related to returning green space to the Common based on public feedback. The "bridge" structure that is proposed for the terminal is planned to be a "green roof" that will add attractive, usable park space to the Common.

4. Are there any other possible locations for the terminal? Why does the terminal have to be at this location and not located outside the Dartmouth Regional centre?

There are no other viable locations for the terminal that would be operationally feasible. Based on the origins and destinations of the routes and passengers that use the terminal (and the structure of the surrounding road network), the proposed location for the Bridge Terminal is a natural convergence point for Metro Transit's service. The terminal serves as a transfer point for routes from throughout HRM (primarily the Harbour East area and routes crossing the MacDonald Bridge).

As such, it must be located centrally within the Dartmouth Regional Centre, near the MacDonald Bridge. Moving the facility outside Central Dartmouth would not allow for convenient transfers and would severely hamper the ability for residents to effectively travel within HRM by public transit.

5. How does this new terminal benefit the disabled community?

The current Bridge Terminal has several limitations which preclude it from being designated as wheelchair accessible. These limitations cannot be addressed on the current site. As a result, persons using mobility devices (such as wheelchairs) cannot make use of the busiest transfer terminal in HRM. This is a significant impediment to the mobility of people who typically face more mobility challenges than the rest of the population. This is also a major impediment to Metro Transit's efforts to transition some clients from a very expensive Access-a-Bus system to more cost-efficient conventional low floor service where possible.

The new Bridge Terminal is designed to be completely accessible for those with mobility challenges including design elements such as appropriate grades, barrier free access etc. As a result, persons using mobility devices will now be able to access transit service at the terminal, making connections to buses they couldn't make before, and greatly enhancing their overall mobility by public transit.

Additionally, after consultation with the CNIB, Metro Transit will be incorporating features to aid customers who have a visual impairment. This includes braille bus stops and guidance markers on the platform and at individual bus stops to provide assistance to those with a visual impairment as they navigate their way through the terminal.

6. Verify new Schedule M, is maximum area 3.5 acres. Attachments A and B do not state 3.5 acres (Page 7).

Planning staff have confirmed that the area for the proposed terminal, as identified on the proposed amendment to Schedule M of the Dartmouth Land Use By-law, is slightly less than 3.5 acres in size.

7. Is there written comment from Traffic Services on traffic issues, i.e. Wyse/Thistle and a half signal on Nantucket?

Traffic Services has reviewed an analysis provided by Metro Transit's consultant for the Wyse Rd./Thistle St. intersection. The analysis indicated favourable results for signalization regarding delay, volume to capacity ratios, Level of Service, etc. Although there were benefits associated with the signals, one item of concern at this point is the queuing indicated in the analysis that will take place with a signals installation. In particular, the northbound approach on Wyse Rd. This approach is fed mainly by the free right turn bringing vehicles from Alderney Dr. / Windmill Rd. onto Wyse Rd. The existing grade and retaining wall along this right turn lane limit visibility as you turn onto Wyse Rd. and distance from Thistle St. to Windmill Rd. is quite short. This could potentially result in rear-end collisions as drivers turning right onto Wyse Rd. may not be able to see a stopped vehicle

at the back of the queue with enough time / distance to stop.

A request has been made by Traffic Services staff that Metro Transit's consultant carry out a sight distance evaluation for the free right turn from Alderney Dr. / Windmill Rd. onto Wyse Rd. in order to show what sight distance is required, what is available and how these relate to the potential back of queue that the proposed signals will create. This assessment should also provide indication to what extent the embankment behind the retaining wall would need to be cut back to provide adequate sight distance (if required).

Regarding the pedestrian half-signals proposed for Nantucket Ave., design is currently underway and progressing. Traffic Services staff had been considering half-signals at this location and decided to move forward based on concerns from Metro Transit and Traffic Services surrounding potential impacts to traffic and transit operations along Nantucket Ave. The bus access to the new terminal would be downstream from the current RA-5 crosswalk for all busses traveling from Wyse Rd. to the terminal. Pedestrian crossings at this location are very random and it was felt that this randomness would cause increased delays potentially resulting in busses queuing back into the Wyse Rd. / Nantucket Ave. intersection. Installation of the pedestrian half signal would help to regulate pedestrian crossings at this location and allow for coordination with the signalized Wyse Rd. / Nantucket Ave. / Macdonald Bridge intersection.

8. What happens to 2.5 acres not part of the transit terminal?

Metro Transit is permitted under the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter to make use of up to six acres on the Dartmouth Common for a transit terminal. Approximately 3.5 acres is required, meaning there will be 2.5 acres un-used.

Metro Transit has no intentions to build anything further on the Dartmouth Common after the currently proposed terminal is built and would support a further amendment to the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter to this effect.

9. Is there legal comment on the use of parking spots after existing terminal is moved?

The existing Transit terminal is located on lands which were earmarked for the Dartmouth Sportsplex. In 1994, when the Legislature amended the *Dartmouth Common Act* to allow an addition to be built to the Sportsplex, a new expanded legal description was created to include lands from the Dartmouth Common. The addition could be built anywhere on the expanded lands of the Dartmouth Sportsplex.

In April 1995, the bus terminal site arrangement with the Dartmouth Shopping Centre was coming to an end. The then Common Committee, the Dartmouth Sportsplex Board, and the Dartmouth City Council agreed that Metro Transit could relocate its terminal from its Dartmouth Shopping Centre site to the present site, with Metro Transit undertaking significant improvements to the upper and

lower parking areas and landscaping.

It was anticipated that a legislative amendment for the use would be acquired but the timing involved necessitated the amendment be sought in the 1995 Fall sitting of the Legislature. While the necessary MPS and Zoning amendments were done, the amendment to the *Dartmouth Common Act* to allow Metro Transit to use the site as a terminal was not pursued. No lease was entered into at this time because it was known that Metro Transit would become part of the new HRM municipality within a few months.

The only use permitted under the present legislation for the site is for the Sportsplex, and for further clarity, when the bus terminal is relocated again, the site can only be used for the Sportsplex barring further amendment of the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter.

10. Is the consultant report on the HRM website?

The original consultants report prepared by Entra Consultants is located in the Bridge Terminal section of the Metro Transit website. This report represents an early analysis of the situation and has been supplemented by significant additional research and findings by staff along with public consultation. As a result, some aspects of this report are out of date.

11. More details on the rationale for the need of an expanded transit terminal.

Metro Transit has identified the replacement of the Bridge Terminal as a high priority. It is the busiest terminal in the Metro Transit system, serving an average of 18,000 passengers per day. This exceeds even Scotia Square. The current Bridge Terminal is inadequate in several key areas which are discussed below. Appendix A illustrates some of these inadequacies.

Capacity

The current terminal cannot efficiently accommodate existing bus traffic, and cannot accommodate any future growth. The current terminal has an effective capacity of six buses; in practice more than double this number can be in the terminal at any given time. There is no location on-site for buses to layover between trips. As a result buses must circulate throughout the local neighbourhood and layover on local streets. This practice is not sustainable as buses must burn additional fuel to reach their off-site layover point rather than parking at the terminal.

Safety & Security

The current terminal is deficient in terms of overall security and operational safety. Buses are forced to load passengers in the outer lanes of the terminal, meaning that passengers queue for loading or are discharged in the active inner bus lane. This is a significant safety concern. Also, the central platform is too narrow to safely accommodate the number of passengers using it and the potential

for passengers to accidentally step off the platform into an active bus lane is high. Additionally, overcrowding in a public place such as this terminal can often lead to altercations between members of the public.

There is minimal security equipment at the terminal and lighting is insufficient. These items would be rectified with the new Bridge Terminal. The existing Bridge Terminal rated poorly during a CPTED audit undertaken by HRM's Community Response Team. In contrast, the designs for the proposed new Bridge Terminal rated highly in a recent CPTED examination.

Accessibility

The current terminal is completely non-accessible for those person using a mobility aid. Despite having seven designated low floor accessible routes serving the terminal (including the busiest route in HRM - 1 Spring Garden), people requiring accessible bus service are not able to make connections between these routes at Metro Transit's busiest transfer terminal. This is because the platform is too narrow to deploy the onboard wheelchair ramp and because many buses load passengers from an active bus lane, meaning the ramp cannot be used at all.

The lack of an accessible Bridge Terminal is one of the largest impediments to the provision of accessible transit in HRM.

Amenities

The current terminal is lacking in customer amenities. There is no enclosed, climate controlled waiting area that is now standard at Metro Transit's busier terminals. From a customer perspective, the current terminal also lacks public washrooms, adequate lighting, landscaping, access control and seating.

From the perspective of Metro Transit's bus operators, there is no washroom or adequate facilities for use between trips. This forces bus operators to use neighbouring public washrooms, which can often be difficult when scheduled breaks are short.

Conclusion

The decision to propose building a transit terminal on the Dartmouth Common was not made without significant consideration for the public benefits and impacts of doing so. It was a decision made because there are no other suitable options in the area that would not have a drastic and irreparable negative impact on Metro Transit's service and its customers. Construction of this terminal on the site proposed is one of the most important infrastructure improvements required by Metro Transit in order to continue to grow the service and reach the modal split targets as set out in the Regional Plan.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications related to this report.

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.

ATTACHMENT

Appendix A - Existing Bridge Terminal Deficiency Photos

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.

Report Prepared by: Dave Reage, MCIP, LPP, Coordinator, Project Planning, Metro Transit, 490-5138

Report Approved by:



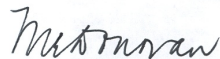
Pat Soanes, CMA, General Manager, Metro Transit, 490-6388

Report Approved by:



Taso Koutroulakis, P.Eng., A/Manager, Traffic & Right of Way Services, 490-4816

Report Approved by:



M.E. Donovan, Q.C., Director, Legal Services & Risk Management, 490-4226

Appendix A

Existing Bridge Terminal Deficiency Photos

Buses loading passengers in an active bus lane



Bus Capacity Issues

