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Item No. 3
Halifax Regional Council
September 27, 2011
Committee of the Whole

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by Director

Ken Reashor, P.Eng., Director, Transportation & Public Works

DATE: September 1, 2011

SUBJECT: Road Network Functional Plan

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Transportation Standing Committee - June 23, 2011

BACKGROUND

The Road Network Functional Plan was before the Transportation Standing Committee at its June 23, 2011 meeting. A motion was passed to refer the report for discussion at Committee of the Whole along with an Information Report addressing questions raised by the Committee.

DISCUSSION

Three specific questions were raised by the Committee and are listed below with staff's response.

1. Councillor Watts requested comment on Pg. 24 of the Road Network Functional Plan. Specifically, she was looking for staff's understanding of what drastic increases in modal share may be. She felt there was very strong language used in the report, and she wanted to have a much better understanding of what was being said.

The Road Network Functional Plan is based on the projected mobility demands from the future growth pattern described in the Regional Plan. Trips throughout the region will be made by vehicle, or by another means such as transit or active transportation. The percentage of trips made by non-vehicle means is referred to as the "mode share". In doing the computer modeling for the Road Network Functional Plan, targets were set for mode share based on an expectation of increased transit ridership that would result from an improved level of service for transit. If that mode share is exceeded, the number of vehicle trips will be reduced and requirement for more road capacity will lessened. If that mode share is not achieved, the result will be higher vehicle demand on the road network and greater requirement for more road capacity. The mode share targets that staff, along with our transit consultant ENTRA, selected were felt to be aggressive, but not unrealistic.

On Pg. 24 of the Road Network Functional Plan, the consultant reiterates the risk of the mode share targets not being met with the consequence that the road infrastructure recommendations in the Plan may be insufficient for future vehicle demand. Staff is aware of other instances of the Regional Plan mode split targets being questioned as being overly optimistic by others knowledgeable in the field.

The reality is that no one can predict our road infrastructure needs with exact accuracy and plans need to remain adaptable to measured demands. There has never been an intention of building road infrastructure in anticipation of demand; only building it when demand has been realized. The Road Network Functional Plan provides guidance on where capacity is expected to be needed so that today's planning decisions can accommodate that future need, should it be realized.

2. Councillor Watts requested comment on Pg. 27 of the report, specifically referring to the following statement (which itself is referring to the TDM Functional Plan):

Revisiting the central core planning approach set out in the regional plan (such as a more dispersed employment model that may reduce the impact on the peninsula's limited access to traffic capacity)

The Councillor saw a contradiction between planning objectives in the different plans. Her interpretation of this statement is that we're looking at a more diversified employment model that does not focus on the central core, which contradicts other plans such as HRMbyDesign.

This statement is contained at the end of the report in a section titled “Concluding Thoughts”. This is not a recommendation, nor a policy, nor an objective. It is simply a suggestion the consultant has put forward as an option that HRM might consider. What is suggested is that demand for additional road infrastructure leading to and within the Peninsula might be significantly reduced if a substantive change to our future growth and settlement pattern is implemented, through a decentralized growth model. If, for example, Council put policy in place to encourage more employment growth in its suburban locations and discourage further employment growth in the Regional Centre, this would result in less vehicles travelling to the downtown areas. As the councillor points out, it is contradictory to current direction (Regional Plan policy and HRMbyDesign). However, without incorporating other implications of such a growth model, the consultant has simply raised this as a method by which Peninsula road capacity issues can be directly addressed. Unless so directed by Council, staff does not intend to pursue this suggestion at this time.

3. Councillor Watts felt more clarity was needed around the direction HRM is going in terms of planning, settlement, and the Road Network Functional Plan.

The Road Network Functional Plan is intended to support, and not lead, the settlement pattern described in the Regional Plan. The Functional Plan will undergo periodic review, as will the settlement pattern, but will always be supportive of strategic settlement decisions. Given that Council is about to embark on the 5-Year Review of the Regional Plan, Council could direct that staff revisit the fundamentals of the region’s growth and settlement pattern. Currently, this is not within the scope of the Regional Plan Review.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications to this Supplementary Report beyond those indicated in the original staff report.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES/BUSINESS PLAN

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

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Refer to staff report.

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.

Report Prepared by:

Report Approved by: Original Signed
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