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Item No. 1
Halifax Regional Council
February 7, 2012

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original signed
Ken Reashor, P.Eng., Traffic Authority

DATE: February 6, 2012

SUBJECT: Parking – Vacant Roadside Bus Bays/Un-Metered Zones

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

The need to assess potential parking issues due to the increase in vehicle traffic as a result of the strike by Metro Transit which began on Thursday, February 2, 2012.

BACKGROUND

Several suggestions have been made regarding how to mitigate parking challenges for those residents that normally would use transit, but who are now using a vehicle for their daily commute and are having difficulty finding parking spaces. Suggestions to ease the burden of finding long-term, on-street parking have included, allowing free and unlimited time parking at parking meters, allowing unlimited time parking in signed short-term parking zones, and allowing parking in bus stops which are no longer in use.

DISCUSSION

The Nova Scotia Motor Vehicle Act (NSMVA) empowers the Traffic Authority to make and enforce temporary regulations to cover emergencies or special conditions. Thus in this case, the Traffic Authority has the sole responsibility to determine if a temporary regulation is required for the duration of the Metro Transit strike to allow all-day parking in limited time zones and bus stops.

It has also been suggested that Parking Enforcement Officers be directed not to enforce all-day parking in limited-timed zones, parking meters and bus stops. Parking Enforcement Officers are appointed Special Constables by the Province; and while individual discretion exists, they cannot be directed not to enforce the law.

The Traffic Authority will consider making physical sign changes to selective limited-time zones and bus stops in areas in the Peninsula Central Business District where there is the greatest parking demand to legally allow for all day parking. This review is underway, but it will take some time to complete because impacts to small business, local residents and traffic flow must be carefully considered.

On the surface the suggested changes seem simple and reasonable; but, the impacts must be carefully considered.

Allow All-Day Parking at Parking Meters and in Existing Signed Limited-Timed Parking Zones

Institutions and businesses rely almost exclusively upon the availability of short-term, on-street parking to provide their services to the general public. In fact, the vast majority of our short-term parking spaces were created for this very purpose. There is already a severe shortage of long and short-term on-street parking spaces. This has resulted in signed limited time parking restrictions being extended well into residential areas on the periphery of business and institutional districts.

Allowing free and unlimited time parking at parking meters and in signed time restricted zones would result in those spaces being taken up on a full time basis early each day by employees, students, etc. and being occupied throughout the day by those same people to the detriment of those who arrive later. In the case of those who require medical appointments to cite one example, which are obviously a serious concern, there would be no parking spaces to be found.

Area residents, especially on peninsular Halifax, would also be impacted. Many have purchased residential parking exemption permits to allow them to park in limited time zones near their home all day. Allowing anyone to park all day within these zones would make it even more difficult than it already is for local residents to find a spot near their home.

In addition, providing free on-street parking would encourage even more vehicular use placing more demand upon the limited number of available parking spaces, as well as contributing to the already congested peak hour traffic periods.

In summary, allowing all-day parking in all limited time zones will have a significant and adverse impact upon the business community, residents wanting to access various businesses/institutions, and local residents.

Allow Parking Within Bus Stops

The NSMVA prohibits parking within a bus stop. However, as previously indicated, the legislation issues can be overridden by the Traffic Authority via temporary regulation. Bus routes are predominantly located on major roadways through business and institutional districts where the greatest demand for on-street vehicle parking exists. Given the overall function of these roadways, parking is seldom permitted in order to allow for safe traffic circulation, as well as the short-term stopping of transit buses and commercial or any passenger vehicles for (un)loading purposes.

Therefore, for the most part, those bus stops for which there is the most demand for long-term parking are already located within areas of "No Parking" or "No Stopping" (e.g. Barrington Street, Spring Garden Road) and/or near intersections. Allowing parking within bus stops, depending on the location, would have a significant negative impact on traffic flow by creating pinch points throughout the street network which will lead to gridlock and potential safety concerns.

Options

At this point, it is prudent to allow residents to explore other options for commuting such as car-pooling, biking and walking where feasible which are all initiatives championed by our Active Transportation Policy. Also, it has been observed that there are still paid off-street parking spaces in the downtown core which can be utilized by those residents that do not have a choice but to use their own vehicle.

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, 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

Community Engagement was not required as this report is only providing Council with information.

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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