

HALIFAX

P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. 11.1.3
Halifax Regional Council
May 12, 2015

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original signed by 
Richard Butts, Chief Administrative Officer

Original Signed by
Mike Labrecque, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: April 13, 2015

SUBJECT: Bicycle Lane Partnership with Dalhousie University

ORIGIN

February 3, 2015 resolution 13.2.1 of Halifax Regional Council directing staff to conduct further public engagement on the proposed construction and operation of a protected bicycle lane on University Avenue, with a staff report incorporating the results being brought back to Council.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Section 322(1) of the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter states that "Council may design, lay out, open, expand, construct maintain, improve, alter, repair, light, water, clean and clear streets in the Municipality." In support of this, the Motor Vehicle Act (section 90) authorizes the Traffic Authority to mark lanes on a street and control their use.

On October 4, 2005, the Halifax Regional Municipality and the Metro University Presidents' Consortium, entered into a memorandum of understanding to pursue collaborative opportunities, specifically mentioning improvements to the transportation network.

Recommendation #23 of "Making Connections: 2014-19 Halifax Active Transportation Priorities Plan" approved by Halifax Regional Council on September 9, 2014 provides that prior to establishing painted or protected bicycle lanes there should be public engagement.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

- 1) Approve the construction of protected bicycle lanes on University Avenue as described in this report; and
- 2) Authorize the Chief Administrative Officer to enter into an agreement with Dalhousie University for the construction and pilot operation of said bicycle lanes.

BACKGROUND

The Active Transportation Priorities Plan was approved by Regional Council on September 9, 2014. Within the Regional Centre, the Plan identifies University Avenue as a candidate route for establishing bicycle lanes. The Plan also sets the goal of implementing 30% of these candidate routes within the next five years and that at least one candidate project be a protected bicycle lane. Protected bicycle lanes are separated from motor vehicle traffic by a physical barrier, and have been shown to significantly increase the appeal of riding a bicycle for transportation to persons who are not otherwise comfortable riding in mixed traffic.

The University Avenue – Morris Street corridor has been recommended as a bicycle route in other municipal and district plans. Halifax's 2006 Active Transportation Plan and the 2002 Blueprint for a Bicycle Friendly Halifax both identified this corridor. The Dalhousie University Campus Master Plan (2010) recommended the installation of protected bicycle lanes on University Avenue. The Urban Halifax Institutional District Bikeways Plan (2011) commissioned by Dalhousie University, Saint Mary's University, Capital Health and the IWK Health Centre also recommended protected bicycle lanes on University Avenue.

On September 23, 2014 Council authorized the CAO to enter into an agreement with Dalhousie University for the construction and pilot operation of a protected bicycle lane on University Avenue. On February 3, 2015 Council rescinded this resolution, and referred the matter back to staff to conduct further public engagement on the proposed construction and operation of a protected bicycle lane on University Avenue. Halifax staff has since conducted this public engagement, the results of which are contained within this report.

Halifax's Traffic Authority has approved the proposed plans and specifications for the pilot project, taking into consideration the results of the public engagement and the requirements of the *Motor Vehicle Act*.

DISCUSSION

In 2014, Dalhousie University proposed showcasing a protected bicycle lane on University Avenue between LeMarchant and Robie Streets. This was intended to implement previous university and district plans, and support HRM's active transportation objectives. While the Municipality would retain full ownership of the street, a partnership with Dalhousie was proposed to help expedite implementation of the project, and to provide increased monitoring support than the Municipality could achieve on its own. Dalhousie and its funding partner, the Province of Nova Scotia, have offered to pay the entire construction cost (approximately \$50,000) and all operational costs (approximately \$150,000 over two years) for the pilot project. To solidify this partnership, an agreement is now required.

Highlights of the plan are listed below:

- A 1.8 metre bicycle lane will be installed on both sides of the street that will be separated from the traffic lane by a 1.0 metre wide painted buffer area and flexible plastic delineators (posts);
- Parking on these four blocks of University Avenue will change. A total of 43 meters will be removed from University Avenue and replaced by 27 metered stalls in Dalhousie's new parking lot beside LeMarchant Place and two metered parking spots in Seymour Street. Nine accessible parking spaces will be relocated from University Avenue to the corners of Edward, Henry and Seymour streets and the area in front of the Killam Library (these replace standard metered parking spots). Staff is prepared to add more accessible parking places if requested or if project monitoring reveals high occupancy at these and other accessible parking spaces in the vicinity. There is a loss of 24 metered parking spots due to this project and no loss of on-street accessible parking spots;
- Three taxi stand spaces formerly in front of the Student Union Building will be relocated to LeMarchant St.; and,

- Loading zones providing the ability to load and unload vehicles in front of the buildings in the bicycle lane will remain (there will be larger breaks between the delineator posts at these locations).

Halifax staff has met with Dalhousie representatives and together have developed the following criteria for the pilot project:

- The pilot will be operated for two years unless terminated sooner by HRM in its sole discretion, or unless a shorter term is agreed to by both parties;
- All proposed traffic control signs and devices must be authorized by the Traffic Authority;
- Dalhousie will accept the cost of clearing snow, ice, dirt and litter from the bicycle lane and be obligated to meet the service standards and other responsibilities normally associated with contracts for these services;
- Dalhousie will accept the cost of constructing and maintaining all devices specific to this pilot (with the exceptions noted in the bullet below);
- The Municipality will retain responsibility for maintenance of traffic lanes, installation of traffic control signs and removal/relocation of parking meters; and,
- All necessary permits and approvals will be the responsibility of Dalhousie.

These aspects of the project will be captured in an Agreement to be signed on behalf of the Municipality by the Chief Administrative Officer at the direction of Regional Council.

Should a partnership agreement be reached, Dalhousie plans to install the protected bicycle lane this spring or summer (subject to any approvals which may be required from the Halifax Traffic Authority).

This pilot project will form part of a larger planning study that HRM will undertake in the next year to consider a permanent bicycle facility to be proposed for the entire University Avenue-Morris Street corridor. That study will consider a range of facility types for the corridor.

The monitoring process that Dalhousie has commissioned for this pilot project will be very helpful in the larger corridor study. The monitoring will be conducted by the Dalhousie Transportation Collaboratory (DalTRAC). They are undertaking a before and after study to understand any changes in volume of vehicles, pedestrians, and people on bicycles. Other impacts will also be documented.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Dalhousie will be responsible for all capital and operating costs associated with the pilot project.

The installation of signs and removal/relocation of parking meters as required by this project are tasks that the Municipality normally undertakes in support of construction projects, and these costs are covered under existing approved budgets. The estimated loss of revenue from the removal of 43 existing parking meters on University Avenue is estimated to be \$70,000 per year. This is captured in M550 4901 which has an annual budget of \$2,750,000. The lost revenue is approximately two and a half percent of all anticipated revenue from parking meters.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Both stakeholder engagement and public engagement have taken place as part of planning this project.

Stakeholder engagement has taken place with HRM departments and officials (e.g. Fire Services, Halifax Transit, Road Operations & Construction, Project Planning and Design, Planning and Development and Traffic Management). It has also included consultation with roughly 15 internal Dalhousie University organizations, faculties and committees (e.g. Killam Library, Arts Centre, and Accessibility Office). The Nova Scotia Archives (the sole non-Dalhousie University abutter) was informed and invited to comment.

As the project was planned, the comments and concerns of these stakeholders were taken into consideration and incorporated into the project. Some examples of project elements that were added to accommodate stakeholders include:

- Loading and unloading will still be permitted in the bicycle lane (accommodated by increased gaps between the posts in front of buildings);
- To reduce the potential of parking pressures on surrounding neighbourhoods, especially during events at the Arts Centre, there will be proactive marketing of free parking available in Dalhousie University's off-street lots;
- Accessible parking spots are being retained, but are being relocated to the Killam Loop and to nearby side streets at the corner of University Avenue. These will be monitored, and Halifax staff are prepared to install additional on-street accessible parking spots upon request;
- Two new short-term metered parking spots were added to Seymour Street near the Arts Centre; and,
- The east-bound bicycle lane will end roughly half a block before Robie Street in order to retain an accessible parking spot outside the Nova Scotia Archives.

In March 2015, a public engagement process on the bicycle lane pilot project was implemented to share information on project features, invite and receive comments, identify potential changes and identify factors to monitor. The two key elements of the engagement process were on-line engagement via Shape Your City and a public open house. The public and stakeholders were made aware of these opportunities via a banner on Halifax.ca, posters, a public service announcement, and via advertisements purchased in local media. Dalhousie University advised neighbouring residents via their Dalhousie Neighbourhood Notice, and the broader university community via the Dalhousie Daily Newsletter.

HRM's on-line engagement portal "Shape Your City" was updated to include information about the proposed project. An online survey and an opportunity to submit comments were available on this portal for a two week period from March 4 to March 18, 2015. There were over 1,600 visits to the web site and about 640 of those visitors explored the site to find other information (e.g. the FAQ section, or the maps illustrating various components of the project). Fifty-six surveys (47 in favour; 9 opposed) were submitted and four comments were received via the Shape Your City site.

A public open house was hosted by HRM in co-operation with Dalhousie University on March 11, 2015 from 4-8pm at LeMarchant Place. This event featured information panels, comment cards, and eight staff (from HRM and Dalhousie) available to speak about the project. Approximately 70 people attended, and 55 submitted comment cards. Out of these, 36 gave unqualified support to the project; nine were generally supportive of bicycle facilities on University Avenue, but preferred that other facility types be considered (e.g. "use the median") or had specific design suggestions; two comment cards, plus one additional comment received via 311 had no clear opinion, but rather posed questions or provided suggestions; and, eight of the cards expressed opposition to the project, primarily due to concerns related to parking and the suitability of the street for bicycle lanes.

Combining all of the comments received online, at the open house, and via 311, 15% were opposed to the project, 74% were in favour, 8% were supportive of bicycle facilities on University Avenue, but had concerns about the facility type, and 3% had no opinion.

The following summarizes the main issues prompting concerns or opposition, and how HRM and Dalhousie are responding.

- 1) Concern: The elimination of on-street parking will be an inconvenience and may push additional parking pressures onto neighbouring streets.

Staff Response: Access to parking around Dalhousie University is already under pressure so this is a legitimate concern. The fact that 27 of the 43 metered parking spots removed will be replaced in a new parking lot near LeMarchant Place helps mitigate this loss. Furthermore, the net loss of 24 parking spaces represents less than 2% of the total parking spaces available in the area (on-street and in Dalhousie parking lots).

There is a specific concern for the loss of parking for Dalhousie Arts Centre patrons. In response, Dalhousie is planning to proactively promote the 1,200 parking spaces in their off-street lots. Most of these are free after 4:30pm weekdays and all day on weekends, and have previously been poorly-promoted and hence underutilized.

It is also important to consider that the implementation of this protected bicycle lane is intended to encourage more people to travel to Dalhousie University by bicycle in part to reduce the need to provide parking spots. Dalhousie has installed over 900 bicycle racks on-campus to encourage bicycle commuting.

Finally, there will be an ongoing process to continue exploring options for replacing short term parking in the vicinity of the bicycle lanes over the course of the pilot.

- 2) Concern: Accessible parking spots are being relocated to nearby side streets and this makes it more difficult for people with accessibility challenges.

Staff response: Ensuring that the parking requirements of visitors to Dalhousie University who have accessibility challenges are met is an ongoing goal of the project. There are currently ten accessible parking spots impacted in the project area on University Avenue. Most of these were installed following requests, by Dalhousie to provide accessible on-street parking near major buildings. Nine of these are proposed to be relocated to side streets at the corner of University Avenue and in the area in front of the Killam Library. One will remain on University Avenue in front of the Nova Scotia Archives. As noted above, Halifax staff are prepared to add more on-street accessible parking spaces upon request and there will be an ongoing process over the course of the pilot project to monitor the use of these spots.

- 3) Concern: Another facility-type should be used during the pilot project, or the project is too short to be of much value. Many individuals commenting on the proposal identified the wide median of University Avenue as an opportunity to develop bicycle lanes. There were also a number of comments questioning the need for protected bike lanes on a street such as University Avenue which has moderate traffic volumes and typically lower vehicle speeds and on the value of a short, four block facility.

Staff Response: The permanent facility-type to be implemented on the entire University Avenue and Morris Street corridor will be studied as part of a planning process in the next year. This will consider the use of the median as well as other options. Consideration of whether a protected bicycle lane is required on this type of street will also be evaluated.

In considering the type of facility to be piloted, use of the median was not proposed for two reasons:

- i. The safety impact of positioning persons on bicycles in the middle of intersections needs further evaluation. Staff have concerns that such a facility may present a greater risk of collision from left-turning vehicles or vehicles traveling north/south on Edward, Henry, Seymour and LeMarchant Streets; and,
- ii. Piloting the bicycle facility on the median would have a significantly higher capital cost due to the need to build and pave the facility and to make curb cuts at intersections.

Regarding the short length of the protected bike lane, this will be the beginning of a longer east-west bicycle route on University Avenue and Morris Street. Regional Council has also approved the installation of a bicycle route on Seymour Street that would connect north to Vernon and Windsor Streets. In the development of a bicycle route network that there may initially be shorter fragments. There are a number of projects underway that aim to connect this project into the growing bicycle route network.

- 4) Concern: There is a concern that the food vendor who has been operating on the south side of University Avenue between Seymour and LeMarchant Streets will be displaced.

Staff Response: This is not the case. The proposed plan does not involve any changes to uses permitted on the sidewalk. Two 30-minute parking spaces will be removed in this location to accommodate the bicycle lane; however, a vendor would still be able to load and unload (but not park) at the curb as there will be sufficient spaces between the delineators in front of the Student Union Building.

Given that this is a two year pilot project, trial implementation will be an opportunity to consider whether public and stakeholder issues are being dealt with appropriately and to make adjustments as needed before considering a permanent installation.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The project is intended to encourage more residents to travel by bicycle, which has a positive environmental impact.

ALTERNATIVES

Council could decide not to approve the construction of the bicycle lane or entering into the partnership with Dalhousie; however, staff does not recommend this alternative.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Dalhousie Protected Bicycle Lane Proposal

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.php> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

Report Prepared by: David MacIsaac, TDM Program Supervisor, Project Planning and Design Services
902.490.1665
and,
Dave McCusker, Manager, Regional Transportation Planning, Planning & Development,
902.490.6696

Report Reviewed by: _____
Colin Taylor, Solicitor, Legal Services 902.490.4653

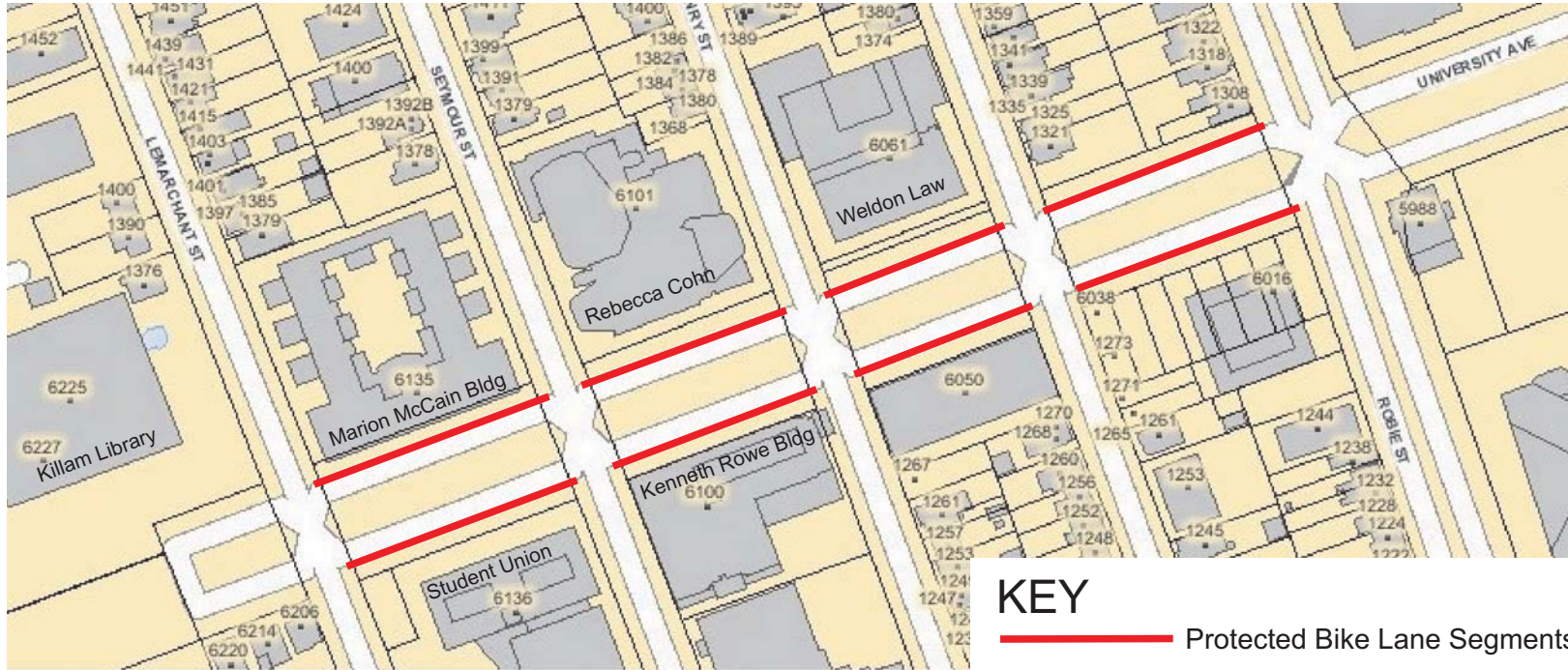
Report Approved by: _____
David Hubley, Manager, Project Planning and Design Services, 902.490. 4845

Report Approved by: _____
Bob Bjerke, Director of Planning & Development 902.490.1627

Financial Approval by: _____
Greg Keefe, Director of Finance & ICT/CFO, 902.490.6308

Original Signed

ATTACHMENT A: DALHOUSIE PROTECTED BIKE LANE PROPOSAL



[Source: *Urban Bikeway Design Guide* (NACTO, 2012)]