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Item No. 03
Halifax Regional Council
November 8, 2016

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed by Director

SUBMITTED BY:

Dave Reage, Director, Halifax Transit

DATE: October 17, 2016

SUBJECT: Electric & Gas-Powered Scooters and Bicycles w Trailers Information Report

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

This report originates from the August 2nd, 2016 meeting of Halifax Regional Council, Item 15.2.

MOVED by Councillor Karsten that Halifax Regional Council receive a staff report on the public service announcement released on July 26, 2016 advising that electric and gas-powered scooters and bicycles with trailers are not permitted on Halifax Transit ferries.

BACKGROUND

Halifax Transit operates five harbour ferries on two routes between Halifax and Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. The ferries in the fleet were designed and certified to carry mainly walking passengers with a small number (four to six) of standard sized bicycles secured in bike racks. Additional information related to the design and certification of our ferries is included in this report.

Since the commencement of the Halifax Harbour Bridges Big Lift project, the number of customers arriving with various types of bicycles, scooters, strollers and Segways and expecting transportation via the ferry service has increased significantly. Staff have struggled to safely accommodate passengers with these items while maintaining safe and comfortable conditions for all passengers and crew. The challenges are particularly acute during peak periods of travel and special events; on Canada Day, 2016, staff observed hazardous conditions created by the carriage of these items. Complicating the matter is the wide variety of bicycles and scooters that are available today; our contract security staff, who are responsible to collect fares and monitor access, are sometimes unable to accurately classify passenger items to determine whether or not they are permitted for carriage.

Mindful of the interests of passenger and crew safety and in preparation for the Natal Day 2016 weekend, on July 26th, 2016 staff issued public service announcements prohibiting carriage of electric and gas powered scooters and bicycles with trailers from the ferry system. This announcement was subsequently modified to permit the carriage of bicycles with trailers, pending a review of related issues. This staff report is intended to inform Halifax Regional Council of the challenges to be considered.

DISCUSSION

The Nova Scotia Motor Vehicle Act provides the following definition;

“vehicle” means every device in, upon or by which any person or property is or may be transported or drawn upon a public highway, excepting a motorized wheelchair and devices moved by human power or used exclusively upon stationary rails or tracks

Halifax Transit vessels are certified as passenger vessels and, for the purpose of the Hull Construction Regulations issued under the Canada Shipping Act, our vessels have been assessed as “passenger ships” not “ferry vessels” as defined:

“passenger ship” means a ship carrying passengers, and “passenger steamship” means a steamship carrying passengers and in the case of a Safety Convention ship means a steamship carrying more than 12 passengers

“ferry vessel” means any vessel, having provision only for deck passengers and for vehicles, that is operated on a short run on a schedule between two points over the most direct water route and offers a public service of a type normally attributed to a bridge or tunnel

Scooters or any other devices that fall under the definition of “vehicle” under the Nova Scotia Motor Vehicle Act are prohibited on Halifax Transit vessels. If we were to choose to carry vehicles, the vessels would have to be re-assessed as a “ferry vessels” (as defined above) with implications such as structural fire protection, ventilation, electrical requirements, stability, and passenger capacity. It should be noted that scooters classified as vehicles are permitted to traverse the Halifax Harbour Bridges, providing avenues available to cross the harbour for these riders.

It should also be noted that regardless of classification or power output, items powered by gasoline engines are prohibited on our ferries due to the hazards posed by gasoline.

None of the aforementioned information should be interpreted to mean that if a mode of transportation is not a “vehicle”, it is permitted for carriage on our vessels without restriction. The bicycle racks on our vessels, and the area in the immediate vicinity, were not designed or scoped to accommodate anything other than standard sized bicycles. As a result, whenever any mode of transportation of abnormal length or wheel dimensions is carried, passengers typically situate their item in the passageways between the seats or in the area in the vicinity of the Engine Room door/bottom of the interior staircase. In the case of bicycles with trailers, as the ferries were not designed to carry arrangements of any length, there is no turning circle to assist in the embarkation and disembarkation of these units. As a result, the bikes are typically driven in and then backed out, which can be awkward and time consuming given the number of obstructing features in our vessels. Even if the trailer is decoupled from the bicycle and the bicycle put in a rack, the staff and passenger must still find a spot for the trailer. In all cases, items that cannot be safely stowed in the racks provided, due to size or number, can and do impede the safe passage of both passengers and staff under both normal and potentially emergency conditions. The difficulties and risks are amplified during peak and special events when there is a high passenger load, and there are associated impacts on schedule.

The Hull Construction Regulations state:

Means of Escape — Applicable to Passenger and Cargo Ships

84.(8) The stairways, corridors and doors, shall be so arranged as to permit ready and direct access to the various muster stations and lifeboat embarkation areas.

The Safe Working Practices Regulations, issued under the Canada Shipping Act, state:

10. No person shall cause an emergency exit to be obstructed or otherwise made ineffective.

“Person” includes the Owner (HRM), Master and crew; violation carries liability.

These regulations require direct and unobstructed access via passageways to escape routes and emergency exits. Practically speaking the modes of transportation under discussion are acceptable as long as they do not pose a hazard; properly stowed in designated areas and accounted for in stability data for each vessel. Unless the Halifax Transit vessels are modified (by removing passenger seating and installing racks, for example), there is currently very limited capacity for designated safe stowage areas.

While the bicycle and pedestrian lanes on the Macdonald Bridge are scheduled to reopen prior to spring of 2017, the increasing popularity of the Ferry Service and its potential roles in the expected Integrated Mobility Plan and the active transportation network require more detailed consideration of the associated challenges; these will be the subject of a staff initiated recommendation report that is planned for submission in December 2016.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No formal community engagement was conducted in preparation of this report, although staff met with one representative of the Halifax Bike Coalition to demonstrate and discuss some of the challenges associated with this issue. Staff will engage appropriate stakeholders in the process of preparing the staff initiated recommendation report that will follow.

ATTACHMENTS

None.

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.

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