

# HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

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## COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

January 11, 2011

**PRESENT:**

Mayor Peter Kelly  
Deputy Mayor Jim Smith  
Councillors: Steve Streach  
Barry Dalrymple  
David Hendsbee  
Lorelei Nicoll  
Gloria McCluskey  
Darren Fisher  
Bill Karsten  
Jackie Barkhouse  
Mary Wile  
Jerry Blumenthal  
Dawn Sloane  
Sue Uteck  
Jennifer Watts  
Russell Walker  
Debbie Hum  
Stephen Adams  
Brad Johns  
Tim Outhit  
Reg Rankin  
Peter Lund

**REGRETS:**

Councillors: Linda Mosher  
Robert Harvey

**STAFF:**

Mr. Wayne Anstey, Acting Chief Administrative Officer  
Ms. Mary Ellen Donovan, Municipal Solicitor  
Ms. Sherrill Murphy, Acting Municipal Clerk  
Ms. Cathy Mellett, Municipal Clerk  
Ms. Krista Tidgwell, Legislative Assistant  
Ms. Sheilagh Edmonds, Legislative Assistant

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**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Kelly called the meeting to order at 10:25 a.m.

**2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES – December 7 & 13, 2010**

In response to a question raised by Councillor McCluskey, Ms. Cathie O'Toole, Director of Finance, indicated that staff will be providing her with a breakdown of the departments for General Government and Recreation & Cultural Services as identified under Expenditure Trends of the Fiscal Theme presentation.

**MOVED by Councillor McCluskey, seconded by Councillor Nicoll, that the minutes of December 7<sup>th</sup> and 13, 2010 be approved, as presented. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

**3. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS**

**MOVED by Councillor Karsten, seconded by Councillor McCluskey, that the Order of Business be approved, as presented. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

Councillor Adams indicated that Councillor Hendsbee is running late and requested that the discussion on Community Transit be deferred until he arrives, to which Council agreed.

**4. TRANSIT (Deferred December 7, 2010)**

**Dartmouth Bridge Terminal Project Update**

The following was before Council:

- A presentation dated November 30, 2010 entitled: Metro Transit Update, Five-Year Approach, Access-a-Bus and Ferry Strategic Plans.
- A presentation dated January 11, 2011 entitled: Metro Transit Update, Dartmouth Bridge Terminal.
- A staff information report dated November 26, 2010 entitled: Update – Dartmouth Bridge Terminal Project.
- A staff information report dated October 28, 2010 entitled: Community Transit & Route 3 Manor Service Options.
- A staff report dated October 20, 2010 entitled: Access-a-Bus Strategic Plan
- A staff report dated October 20, 2010 entitled: Metro Transit Strategic Ferry Operations Plan.

Mr. Ken Reashor, Director/Traffic Authority, Transportation and Public Works, introduced the staff members delivering today's presentations.

Mr. Edward Robar, Manager, Planning and Product Development, Transportation and Public Works, provided a brief update on the Dartmouth Bridge Terminal project to Council. The following points were noted respecting the project's re-scope:

- the project was originally budgeted at \$9.5 million; however, when it went to tender, the tender price came back at \$12.1 million, putting the budget over by \$2.5 million
- the removal of the pedestrian overpass (bridge); substantial cost savings
- the terminal has been elevated five feet; reduced excavation costs
- staff met with representatives from the Province, Halifax Regional School Board and Dartmouth Sportsplex to review the re-scope of the project

Council entered into discussion.

Deputy Mayor Smith expressed concern with respect to process and noted that the following groups have not seen the revised drawings:

- Dartmouth Sportsplex Board of Directors
- Halifax Regional School Board/School Advisory Committee
- Harbour East Community Council

He further asked whether there are plans to inform the public of these changes.

Councillor Hum entered the meeting at 10:33 p.m.

Mr. Terry Gallagher, Manager, Facility Development, Infrastructure and Asset Management, advised that discussions between staff and the Halifax Regional School Board and Dartmouth Sportsplex were regarding the project's details (ie. elevation of the building and access from the Dartmouth ferry terminal) in order to prepare the architectural drawings. Staff had intended on having discussions with the Harbour East Community Council respecting changes to the terminal once the drawings were complete. Mr. Gallagher noted that the architectural drawings will be ready as early as next week. He further commented that the changes to the terminal do not affect the overall scope of the project that was originally presented to the community.

Deputy Mayor Smith stressed the importance of having a public information meeting to review the changes with the community.

Mr. Robar confirmed that staff anticipates having the architectural drawings by January 17<sup>th</sup>.

In response to a question raised by Councillor McCluskey, Mr. Robar indicated that discussions were held with the Executive Director of the Dartmouth Sportsplex respecting the elevation of the building and stormwater run off.

Mr. Dave Raege, Coordinator, Project Planning, Metro Transit - Service Development, Transportation and Public Works, further noted that discussions were held with Superintendent Clattenburg of the Halifax Regional School Board respecting the removal of the bridge structure. He noted that the School Board was concerned with

strangers accessing the Dartmouth High School from the overpass, as well as noise level; the removal of the bridge addresses these concerns.

In response to a comment made by Councillor McCluskey respecting the terminal's accessibility, Mr. Raege provided the following clarification:

- the terminal is still accessible; however, the pattern in which passengers will access the terminal has changed
- access from the harbour side, which most passengers will be coming from, has not changed significantly; there will be full access to the terminal from the school side of the facility

In response to a question raised by Councillor McCluskey, Mr. Raege advised that with the elevation of the facility, approximately \$1.2 million will be saved in excavation costs related to the removal of pyritic rock.

During the ensuing discussion, Council requested staff provide a copy of the architecture drawings for both the original design and proposed changes to the Dartmouth Bridge Terminal for Council's review on February 1<sup>st</sup>. If Council directs, a presentation will be given at the Harbour East Community Council on February 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**MOVED by Councillor Outhit, seconded by Councillor Uteck, that Halifax Regional Council direct staff to cap the cost of the Dartmouth Transit Terminal budget at \$9.1 million and report back with a proposed plan.**

A brief discussion was held.

**MOTION PUT AND DEFEATED.**

### **Community Transit**

This matter was discussed later in the meeting, see page 9.

### **Access-a-Bus Strategic Plan**

Mr. Edward Robar, Manager, Planning and Product Development, Transportation and Public Works, delivered a presentation to Council.

Mr. Dave Raege, Coordinator, Project Planning, Metro Transit - Service Development, Transportation and Public Works, noted the following points:

- presently the advanced booking requirement for access-a-bus is eight days, reduced from fourteen days a few years ago
- staff recommend a phased approach to bring bookings within the industry standard (24 hour booking window); the first step would be to go to a 48 hour (2 day booking) window as of July 2011, then phase into a 24 hour booking window in July 2012
- improvements to the internal process include:
  - increase training of scheduling software

- use of booking windows (drop off 15 minutes earlier/later than scheduled time); increases flexibility and utilization of vehicles

In response to a question raised by His Worship respecting appointments that do not have flexible drop off times, Mr. Raege indicated that the individual would advise the dispatcher of the specific drop off time at the time of their booking. The pickup would be scheduled for the specified time; however, it may be a bit earlier as opposed to later.

Mr. Raege further indicated that the present system is tied to the conventional system, as well as the community transit system. Residents within a 610 metre buffer of an existing route are eligible to use Access-a-Bus. Staff is recommending this buffer be increased to 1,000 metres, which is consistent with the buffer for the local transit taxation area.

Councillor Rankin referenced the letter received from Jen Powley of the Ecology Action Centre dated November 27, 2010 regarding the supplementary reports on Metro Transit ferry and access-a-bus services; as distributed to Council during their December 7, 2010 session.

**MOVED by Councillor Rankin, seconded by Councillor Watts, that Halifax Regional Council approve in principle, subject to further consultation with end user, the Access-a-Bus Strategic Plan and direct staff to use the plan on a go-forward basis as guidance in the planning and operation of the Access-a-Bus system.**

In response to a concern raised by Councillor Rankin regarding the public consultation, Mr. Raege indicated that notices were provided to all access-a-bus clients, posted on all access-a-buses, as well as through HRM's regular advertisement methods. He further noted that staff received varying feedback during the public consultation, which shaped the final outcome of the study.

Mr. Raege noted that with respect to grandfathering, staff are recommending a voluntary approach with existing clients. Encouraging and educating people so that they feel comfortable with using conventional transit.

Councillor Sloane suggested the option of partnering with the taxi industry.

Councillor Blumenthal noted the following:

- concerned with the taxi industry's quality of service with respect to persons with disabilities
- as residents age and their health declines the use of accessible service will be required
- concerned with grandfathering; many residents if properly trained/educated could use Metro Transit's low floor buses
- additional dispatching staffing will be required with respect to booking within the 48 hour (2 day) time period

- consider the option of having Metro Transit staff go to the client's home and interview them to determine the level of assistance needed

Councillor Hendsbee entered the meeting at 11:55 p.m.

Council recessed at 11:58 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 1:07 p.m. with Council continuing its discussion on the Access-a-Bus Strategic Plan and staff responding to questions.

In response to a request for clarification on the motion, Councillor Rankin stated his motion should read as follows:

**MOVED by Councillor Rankin, seconded by Councillor Watts that Halifax Regional Council approve in principle the Access-a-Bus Strategic Plan and direct staff to use the Plan on a go-forward basis as guidance in the planning and operation of the Access-a-Bus system, subject to further consultation to review two (2) points: grandfathering & suitability of partnership with the taxi industry.**

Mr. Ken Reashor, Director, Transportation and Public Works advised that today staff was only seeking direction from Council on a five-year strategy and it did not include any commitment to spend specific money.

Councillor Dalrymple referred to Page 20, under the Recommended Service Standard, and advised that it states that the Access a Bus program shall accommodate 100 percent of all trips requested within the urban transit service area. Councillor Dalrymple added that he would like the wording revised to state 100 percent of routes that pay the local transit taxation.

In response Mr. Raege indicated that staff had no concern with the wording change as suggested by Councillor Dalrymple.

**MOVED by Councillor Dalrymple, seconded by Councillor Karsten that the motion be amended to reflect that the recommended Service Strategy, as outlined in the Access-a-Bus Strategy, refer to the 'Local Transit Taxation Area'. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

Councillor Blumenthal indicated that he could support the amended motion, but pointed out that in his view one piece was still missing and it was accessibility for the visually impaired.

In response to a question, Mr. Raege advised that if Council approved the motion, staff will then start exploring the taxi issue and engage in discussion with the taxi industry.

In this regard, Councillor Adams suggested that when staff begins the process of dialogue with the tax industry they first consult with Mr. Derek Mathers of Yellow Cab to

get feedback on his experience with accessible taxis. Councillor Adams explained that in the past Mr. Mathers had attempted to provide accessible service, even purchasing two vehicles specifically for this service, however, it was not successful. He added that many of the passengers were expecting to pay a bus fare rate for a taxi service.

With the discussion concluded, the Mayor called for the question on the amended motion, which reads as follows:

**MOVED by Councillor Rankin, seconded by Councillor Watts, that Halifax Regional Council approve in principle the Access-a-Bus Strategic Plan and direct staff to use the plan on a go-forward basis as guidance in the planning and operation of the Access-a-Bus system, subject to further consultation to review two (2) points: grandfathering & suitability of partnership with the taxi industry. And further, that the recommended Service Strategy, as outlined in the Access-a-Bus Strategy, to refer to the 'Local Transit Taxation Area'. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

Council recessed at 2:30 p.m.

Council reconvened at 2:45 p.m.

### **Metro Transit Strategic Ferry Operations Plan**

Mr. Dave Raege provided a staff presentation outlining the Metro Transit Strategic Ferry Operations Plan and responded to questions from Council.

In response to a question by Councillor Uteck, Mr. Raege advised that this Plan only deals with the conventional ferry system and that the Bedford Ferry was not part of this study but that more information would be coming to Council on this matter shortly.

Councillor Wile indicated that at a recent meeting of the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities a discussion was held in regard to what would occur in the event there was an emergency situation on a ferry and whether the crew were trained to handle these situations with disabled persons and those that have guide dogs. She added that another concern expressed was the limitations on board a ferry for individuals in wheelchairs. Councillor Wile suggested that these were issues that Metro Transit staff should discuss with disabled persons.

**MOVED by Councillor Barkhouse, seconded by Councillor McCluskey, that Halifax Regional Council approve in principle the Metro Transit Strategic Ferry Operations Plan and direct staff to use the plan on a go forward basis as guidance in the planning and operation of the existing Harbour Ferry system.**

Councillor Barkhouse expressed concern that the proposed recommendation may impact negatively on the implementation of the Woodside Ferry and she asked that staff clarify whether there would be an impact.



In response, Mr. Raege advised that the timelines in the regard to the Woodside Ferry have not changed, and that there was nothing in the report that would impact on this. He also noted that work has already begun on this project.

Councillor Johns suggested that the ferry system in HRM puts the Municipality in a unique situation compared to the other municipalities in the Province, and in this regard it should seek funding commitments from the other levels of government to support the ferry service improvements.

### **MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

#### **Community Transit**

Mr. Eddie Robar indicated that staff did not have a presentation today, and advised that the information report which came to Council on November 9, 2010 contained the information required by the Councillors. He added that the information report presents all the options brought forward by the Community, and staff presented the options in terms of cost, as was requested by Council. Mr. Robar advised that with this information, Council could now determine how it wished to proceed.

Councillor Blumenthal expressed his appreciation to staff for their communication work in regard to the Route 3 Manor Bus. He advised that it has resulted in more seniors now using the route.

Councillor Adams advised that last April he met with Metro Transit staff and during their discussion he misunderstood what was presented. He explained that, at the time, he thought there would be cuts across the board to transit but in fact the focus was more on the community transit component. He pointed out that had he understood this correctly, he would not have voted for the budget, or at least he would have brought this back for discussion at that point in time.

#### **MOVED by Councillor Adams, seconded by Councillor Uteck that Council implement Option #4 to service the Sambro Loop.**

Councillor Adams noted that this would be a revenue neutral service based on Local Transit Taxation and fare box revenues.

Mr. Robar advised that during the annual service plan, this service was budgeted as a reduction to the budget, and the funds that were allocated for that service have been redeployed. He noted that any additional funding to keep this service in place is above and beyond their current operating budget.

In this regard, Mayor Kelly advised that if Council approves this motion, it will then have to go to staff for consideration of potential funding sources.

**MOVED by Councillor Dalrymple, seconded by Councillor Lund that Council implement Options #3 and #4 for the Beaver Bank Community Service.**

In moving his motion, Councillor Dalrymple advised Option 3 would be revenue neutral and Option 4 would be covered by the fare box.

**MOVED by Councillor Hendsbee, seconded by Councillor Streach that with regard to Porter's Lake, Council implement Option 6 with the proviso that the Seaforth Loop is included; Saturday summer service is deleted; and the Ross Road/Cole Harbour Route change be incorporated.**

The Mayor indicated that due to the budgetary implications of the motions, this matter will have to go back to staff for a report. He suggested, therefore, if anyone had other aspects of this issue that they wanted staff to address, to bring them forward now for inclusion in the report.

Councillor Karsten asked that the report provide the numbers, i.e. ridership vs. service standards for the areas proposed by Councillor Dalrymple and Councillor Hendsbee

Councillor Adams asked that Finance staff provide a response as to whether his motion is revenue neutral or if it is not.

Councillor Dalrymple referred to the Beaver Bank service and noted that the service standard says the bus route should be cut by two-thirds. He pointed out that the ridership numbers do not take into account that every day 60 to 80 elementary school children take the bus to school and home again—Metro Transit does not include them in the ridership numbers because they do not pay a transit fare. Councillor Dalrymple advised that if they were included in the ridership numbers, then the route would meet the service standard. He explained that prior to Amalgamation a private bus route was used for these children. At Amalgamation there was an agreement that the service would continue, and for the past 14 years it has been paid by an area rate. He requested that staff analyze and comment on the route performance standard with the inclusion of the students.

Councillor Dalrymple also suggested that with the cuts proposed to the Beaver Bank route resulting in only three runs in the morning and three in the late afternoon, the ridership would decline as it would not be an efficient service for transit passengers. He asked for staff comment on this point.

Councillor Smith requested that the report provide information in regard to how many cuts to service resulted from the new standards on local routes. Councillor Smith also questioned whether a transit tax is charged if the service has been cut and there is no

bus service and he asked that information be provided on the number of students receiving free transit service.

Councillor Sloane asked that the report include next year's projection for each District in regard to how much money will be used for transit.

Councillor Fisher asked that the report address the question of what would Transit look like if all the local tax went to the local area service. As an example, if a certain area collected \$235,000 then they get a minimum \$235,000 of local service, and if they cut the service back to \$187,000, then cut back the taxes by \$187,000.

Councillor Nicoll asked that the report include a schematic map illustrating the catchment areas of all the routes.

Councillor Lund asked that the report:

- provide a definition of 'local transit tax', and explain the purpose of this tax;
- address whether the transit tax can be used as a model for future growth;
- add 'farebox' revenues (to the columns table);
- address the status of HRM using smaller buses for areas that have lower ridership;
- address whether the proposal for community buses meets the current service standards;
- is the term 'community' transit the same as 'rural' transit.

Councillor Adams asked that the report address:

- how the three community transit routes were affected and what percentage was cut (e.g. Sambro – 10 trips to 4 trip – 60% reduction); and compare these with some of the other conventional transit;
- what is the amount of the subsidy provided to Transit on an annual basis;
- in reference to the money collected in the community transit catchment areas, if the amount that was collected plus the subsidy that is offered to all the other buses in HRM – what would be the amount of money available to service that particular route.

A general concern was raised by various Councillors as to whether there is a need to change the standard for 'rural' routes.

With no further points raised, the Mayor advised that the motion is for a report to come back from staff.

**MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

**5. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 4:42 p.m.

Cathy Mellett  
Municipal Clerk