

M | E | T | R | O LINK

MetroLink – The Success of a Bus Rapid Transit service in Halifax Regional Municipality

Background

In 2005, Halifax Regional Municipality launched the MetroLink service funded through Transport Canada's Urban Transportation Showcase Program (UTSP). Metro Transit's UTSP project was approved to demonstrate the feasibility of operating a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service in mixed traffic on existing road corridors. Metro Transit commenced planning for the service in 2003, with the showcase program officially reaching completion in the Spring 2007. Phase I of MetroLink was introduced in Portland Hills in August 2005, with Phase II being launched in Lower Sackville six months later, in February 2006. The information collected from this program will be used to create an effective integrated greenhouse gas emissions reduction strategy for other urban centres across Canada by 2010.



Premium Service



MetroLink provides three limited stop, direct service routes to downtown

Halifax and Dartmouth from two major commuter areas. The #159 Portland Hills (introduced August 2005) and #185 Sackville (launched in February 2006) operate a full service day, Monday to Friday, while the #165 Woodside (introduced August 2005) operates during peak hours on weekdays only.

Two new terminals offer spacious, free Park & Ride lots where you can leave your vehicle while you catch the Link. Passengers can also Bike & Ride with the Link, as all of the new MetroLink buses have bike racks on the front! Passengers can bike to either terminal on one of the new bikeways designed to encourage more active transportation, and then use the bus bike racks or the bike lockers and bike racks provided at the terminals for temporary storage.

In order to promote the MetroLink as a premium service and to entice potential new transit users, special attention was paid to the bus design and layout. An award-winning, modern exterior design provided instant recognition of MetroLink as an upgraded service.

All of the MetroLink buses are accessible low floor vehicles, offering high backed upholstered seats with arm and footrests. Climate control, carpeted ceilings and walls and the absence of advertising, all add to the stress free environment. Distinctive, large shelters with solar lighting and infomasts were also designed to enhance the service. In addition, all Link buses are fuelled with biodiesel for a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.



MetroLink Jumps the Queue

At congested intersections, MetroLink travels to the head of the line by using bus-only lanes or a free-flow right turn lane. In addition, a priority signal is used to allow the bus to enter the intersection in advance of the green signal and before other vehicles. When MetroLink must remain in mixed traffic, the bus emits a signal picked up by the traffic signal controller. The controller holds the green light in that direction to allow the bus to get through. These features have been installed at over 14 intersections to allow MetroLink buses more direct progress and have played a big part in the success of the new service.

Sweet Success



Within two weeks of the introduction of Phase I at Portland Hills, Metro Transit personnel

knew the service was a hit. The Park & Ride lot, designed to accommodate 175 cars, was filled to capacity each weekday. More land had to be acquired to expand the lot to 230 spaces, which was completed in June 2006. A similar phenomenon was experienced with the opening of the Sackville Terminal Park & Ride in February 2006. That lot also filled to capacity and more land was quickly acquired to increase the available space to accommodate 315 vehicles.

Passenger counts were conducted in the Fall 2005, then again a year later to further evaluate the success of MetroLink. Results indicate total ridership in 2005, shortly following introduction of the program, of 1795 passengers per weekday. Approximately one year later that number had risen to 2683 passengers per weekday; a 49% increase!

The survey also determined that MetroLink was a large factor in the 9% increase in overall ridership that was experienced by Metro Transit during the first half of 2006. In comparison, the national average increase in ridership during this time period was approximately 3.5 percent.

As a result of the success of MetroLink, tentative plans are now in the works for expansion of MetroLink into two other large commuter areas of Clayton Park and Spryfield by 2010.

**METRO
LINK**

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For more information on MetroLink or Metro Transit's other services, contact the HRM Call Centre at 490-4000 or visit www.halifax.ca/metrotransit.