

# Communique

The following is background information for the report entitled “Transit Funding Options”, to be tabled at the March 3, 2009 Committee of the Whole meeting. A copy of the report can be found at [www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/documents/090303cow3.pdf](http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/documents/090303cow3.pdf).

## TRANSIT INITIATIVES IN HRM

(March 2, 2009)

### Background

A strategic focus on transit and transportation planning has been a priority of Halifax Regional Council for many years. Recently, this priority has been enhanced by an increasing demand for service and an unprecedented growth in ridership. In the past six years, Metro Transit has experienced ridership growth of approximately 40 percent, resulting in more than 25 million passengers being served in the current year. This rate of growth continues to outpace most comparably sized operations in Canada.

Because of the continuing public demand for Metro Transit, improving transit has increasingly become a key deliverable for Council. Since the inception of Council Focus Areas (CFAs) in 2006/2007, transit has been an important piece of decision-making for Transportation and Infrastructure CFAs. This renewed focus has resulted in successful measures such as service improvements to existing routes, addition of new routes, the introduction of MetroLink and Upass, and enhancement to community transit.

In addition, transit has been and remains linked to many of the municipality’s priorities and strategies, such as the regional plan, integrated transportation plan, and five-year capital plan.

Again, in planning for the 2009/2010 budget, enhancing transit service is front-and-center in the Transportation Council Focus Area.

### Recent Service Enhancements

Over the past four years, Metro Transit service has grown more than 60 percent. Citizens in HRM would have seen some of the following service enhancement examples:

- Successful implementation of MetroLink from Cole Harbour and the Sackville Corridor;
- Transit U-Pass program at Saint Mary’s University, Dalhousie University/University of Kings College, MSVU and NSCAD;

- Enhanced Woodside ferry service to help accommodate the new NSCC campus;
- Increased Sunday Service to meet the needs of citizens for Sunday shopping;
- Temporary Satellite Garage to service Access-A-Bus and MetroLink;
- Additional bus services, such as those introduced on the # 60 Eastern Passage route;
- New routes, such as #16 Parkland; and
- New transfer options for community transit.

These new service enhancements have been offered by Metro Transit without any increased cost to passengers. In fact, Metro Transit has not introduced a fare increase since January 2005. At that time, cash fares increased from \$1.75 to \$2.00 and monthly passes increased from \$57 to \$60. This modest increase to monthly passes was intended to encourage more regular usage and reward regular customers.

### **New Service Provision**

In April 2008, Council approved a new Five Year Approach to Transit Enhancements. The integrated transit planning undertaken by Metro Transit will see an investment of more than \$150 million in new capital and a corresponding growth in service of more than 175,000 service hours. This represents a further 25 percent growth over existing service levels. Some of the strategic priorities proposed for this new investment include:

- New Transit Garage;
- Rural Express;
- Additional MetroLink service;
- Downtown Shuttle;
- Local Rural Transportation;
- Harbor Link;
- Service Expansion;
- Security Improvements;
- Improved Fare Collection; and
- New/Upgraded Terminals.

### **Costs**

The total cost of transit service in HRM is approximately \$65 million per year. Significant efforts have been undertaken on a regular basis to ensure any and all internal efficiencies have been realized. Strategic investments in technology, infrastructure and vehicles all have contributed to an efficient, effective system. The average age of HRM's fleet has improved by approximately 25 percent. Newer vehicles are more energy-efficient and reliable. Use of technology tools to develop transit schedules has ensured vehicles are used as effectively as possible to mitigate the need to acquire more vehicles.

In order to grow this service, a minimal transit fare increase is necessary. The cost of providing these new services requires a fare increase in 2009/10 of \$0.25, as well as a corresponding increase to monthly passes, which would be effective July 1, 2009 (if approved as part of the

09/10 operating budget). It is important to note that fares do not cover the total cost of transit service. As with most Canadian Transit Systems, only 53 percent of Metro Transit's operating funds are generated through fares. The balance comes from property taxes. As noted in the table below, that transit fares in HRM remain below the average for communities of a comparable size. HRM continues to examine potential revenue opportunities to offset additional fare increases.

<b>2008 CUTA FARE STRUCTURE REPORT</b>			
<b>Transit System</b>	<b>Adult Cash Fare</b>	<b>Adult Multi Pass</b>	<b>Adult Monthly Pass</b>
Halifax Metro Transit	\$2.00	\$1.60	\$60.00
Hamilton (HSR) ON	\$2.40	\$1.85	\$79.00
Laval PQ	\$2.50	\$2.25	\$74.00
Victoria BC	\$2.25	\$2.03	\$73.25

### **Benefits**

Adding to existing transit provides benefits that go beyond direct service enhancements.

**Environmental Benefits** - Public transit is an important contributor to addressing climate change. On average, one person-kilometre travelled by an urban automobile produces more than three times as much CO<sub>2</sub> as one passenger-kilometre travelled on transit. Transit also reduces air pollution directly, by emitting significantly fewer pollutants per passenger-kilometre than a car, and indirectly, by helping to reduce traffic congestion in the urban core.

**Economic Benefits** - Efficient and effective public transit is essential to the movement of people and goods in an urban environment. A 2006 Government of Canada study estimated the cost of recurrent congestion in urban areas at between \$2.3 billion and \$3.7 billion per year.<sup>1</sup> Investment in transit is one of the best strategies for limiting congestion.

**Mobility Benefits** - Investment in accessible public transportation is a key to enhancing mobility for citizens. Mobility benefits include increased labour mobility for numerous economic sectors and increased personal mobility for individuals who choose not to drive or otherwise cannot reach work, school, shopping, health care, or other services by car. Ease of movement for residents is a direct contributor to citizens' standard of living and quality of life.

**Regional Planning Benefits** - Land use planning and transportation are closely linked. A significant factor in the ultimate success of HRM's Regional Plan is the development of an integrated transportation system, intended to improve traffic movements and shift the trend away from single occupant vehicles to other modes of transportation. Effective and accessible transit services is a vital piece of integrated transportation, allowing people to move

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<sup>1</sup> Transport Canada, *The Cost of Urban Congestion in Canada*, 2006.

more easily between home, work, and other destinations.

### **Community Consultation**

Metro Transit has been engaging the community in a discussion about their needs and desires with respect to transit in HRM. In January, Metro Transit sent invitations to more than 168,000 residences throughout HRM asking them to complete an on-line survey. To date, more than 8,000 respondents have completed the survey, providing vital information about travel patterns that will help to guide our future direction.

### **Chronology of Recent Transit Reports**

In April 2008, Halifax Regional Council approved a Five Year Approach to Transit Enhancements. Following is a chronology of reports to Council since that time. More information, and copies of the reports are available at [www.halifax.ca](http://www.halifax.ca).

- April 15, 2008 (deferred from April 8) - 5 Year Approach to Transit Enhancements
- April 29, 2008 - 2008/09 Budget Parking Lot Report
- May 20, 2008 - ecoMOBILITY Funding Applications
- June 17, 2008 - MGA Amendment - Dartmouth Bridge Transit Terminal
- June 24, 2008 - 2008-09 Budgets and Business Plans for Area-Rated Services
- June 24, 2008 - Taxation of Rural Express Transit
- June 24, 2008 - Metro Transit Strategic Plan Update - Terms of Reference
- September 30, 2008 - Public Transit Funding Allocation (Information Report)
- September 30, 2008 - Site Selection for Satellite Transit Garage
- October 21, 2008 - Award - RFP No. 08-130 Supply and Installation of Mobile Surveillance Equipment for Metro Transit Vehicles
- October 21, 2008 - Award - RFP No. 08-129, Consulting Services - Metro Transit Strategic Plan Update
- October 28, 2008 - RFP No. 08-098 - Supply of Rural Transit Buses
- November 18, 2008 - Five Year Transit Plan Update (Information Report)
- November 18, 2008 - COW Presentation - Transit Overview
- December 9, 2008 - Replacement of Transit Vehicles for 2009-10
- December 9, 2008 - Early Tender Transit Vehicles
- December 16, 2008 - Public Transportation and Municipal Property Taxation
- February 10, 2008 - COW Presentation - Council Focus Areas - Transportation
- February 24, 2008 - Extension of Transit Service to Russell Lake West (Information Report)
- February 24, 2008 - Extension of Transit Service to Margaret Lorne Manor (Information Report)
- March 3, 2009 - Transit Funding Options

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