

Healthy Growth for HRM

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

August 2003

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Now is the time to plan our future

Halifax Regional Municipality is at a turning point. Thirty years ago our region was characterized by a very compact metro area, surrounded by pristine rural landscapes and picturesque seashore communities. Our economy was largely dependent on the military, the public sector and natural resource industries.

In the past few decades, however, we have come of age. Both our economy and our population have grown and diversified. In general, our personal wealth has increased, and with it our ability to build and travel when and where we want.

Our region has now become a more typical, dispersed North American metropolitan area. This brings both opportunities and challenges.

We need to make some choices about what we would like to become over the next 25 years. Our economic success and our attractiveness as a place to live and work can't be taken for granted.

In fact, some of our current trends are causing us to rethink our approach to growth. For example, nearly 40,000 more motor vehicle trips were made between the Halifax Mainland and the Peninsula every weekday in 2001 than in 1981. If this trend continues, we will see more and more traffic congestion in the urban core.

Another trend is that our population is becoming more and more dispersed. As a result, our settlement pattern has become increasingly costly to service with roads, transit and waste collection. Many residents in outlying areas rely on individual wells and septic systems, which can malfunction.

HRM's Regional Council has charged the Regional Planning Committee and staff with identifying these and other issues.

The Regional Plan will determine the best approaches for dealing with them, so we avoid losing what we value most, capitalize on our strengths, and build an environmentally and economically sustainable future.

The Plan will concentrate first on five major themes: economy, settlement patterns, environment, transportation and Halifax Harbour. The focus of the Regional Plan will be on how these themes relate to each other and will address the following questions:

What locations are regionally significant to support economic expansion?

Where should we encourage settlement areas over the next 25 years?

What type of transportation investment do we want to support our desired form of growth?

How do we protect our environmental assets?

How can we maximize the benefits of the existing and potential uses of Halifax Harbour?

Before we can answer these questions, we need to consider a number of facts, opportunities and challenges. The next few pages give an overview of some of the most important issues HRM is facing in each of the theme areas.

They don't attempt to cover all the issues, but instead point out a few of the things we need to think about as we develop the Regional Plan. September's newsletter will provide even more detail and other opportunities and challenges for each of the themes.





Economy

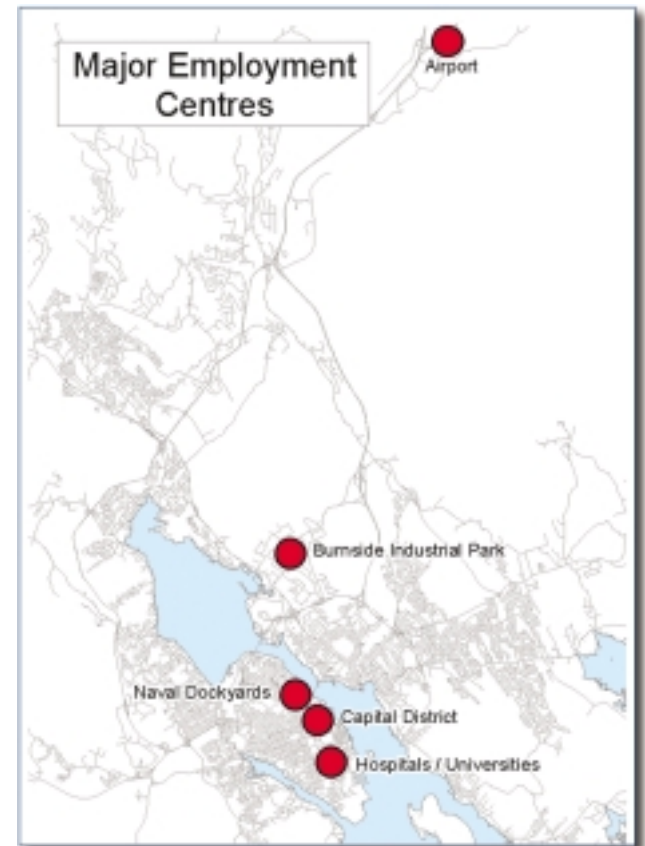
What locations are regionally significant to support economic expansion?

Our economy is growing and will continue to grow, with the strongest growth expected in the service sector, including management, professional services, retailing, education and health professionals. This sector currently encompasses 88% of jobs in HRM.

Employment locations in HRM remain fairly centralized. The map to the right shows the top five employment centres. They are primarily in and around HRM's Capital District or Halifax Harbour and are expected to remain there in the foreseeable future.

We have one of the best educated work forces in Canada. In fact, Metro Halifax ranks second only to Ottawa for the proportion of population with a university degree.

HRM has many nationally and globally significant assets. We have the second largest ice-free harbour in the world; offshore petroleum prospects; and a wide range of academic and medical professionals. We're a major gateway between North America and Europe; we have a diverse urban and rural environment; our workforce is well educated and we have a high quality of life.



Opportunities

One of the Regional Planning principles is to **support appropriate roles for the Halifax/Dartmouth central business district and local business districts as a focus for economic, cultural and residential activities.** Another principle is to **support development patterns that promote a vigorous regional economy.**

To make this happen, we need to explore:

- **Innovative land use.** We need to identify and reserve strategic sites for industry, like harbour frontage for our Port and offshore development, and enough general industrial land in suburban and rural business parks.
- **Strategic economic growth.** HRM's diverse economy gives the region stability, but we need to understand the implications, good and bad, of growth in a variety of industries.
- **Investment in both the Capital District and local centres.** The Capital District offers an attractive lifestyle and a variety of employment choices, while local business centres, like Spryfield and Sheet Harbour, also offer important employment and commercial areas.

Challenges

Enhancing global competitiveness. We must find ways to continue to grow our transportation networks, our knowledge base and our quality of life to enhance HRM's global competitiveness.

Balancing Halifax Harbour interests. We have to find a balance that maximizes the opportunities afforded by our Harbour - in shipping, offshore, and marine industrial growth; tourism; national defense; transportation; housing and recreation.

Capitalizing on both the Capital District and local business centres. Our Capital District offers a sense of heritage, safety and vibrancy that attracts a professional workforce. HRM's local business centres are also critical to the region's economic success. Each needs to be further developed, without negatively affecting the other.

Positioning rural communities for economic growth. While some traditional resource industries have declined, opportunities such as eco-tourism and internet-based business are emerging. These are ideally suited for rural areas, but will require improved telecommunications and transportation networks.

Did you know?

There are an estimated **182,000 jobs in HRM.** Over half of these are in the urban core, including 70,000 in or adjacent to the Capital District.

HRM's suburbs provide 62,250 jobs, of which nearly 20,300 are in Burnside. The rural commutershed provides 15,000 jobs, with 5,700 at the airport. The rural areas provide 2,400 jobs, primarily in resource industries.

HRM's Capital District generates \$80 million in taxes and \$613 million in tourism revenue. The Capital District belongs to every resident of HRM, and is the regional and provincial centre for government, finance, culture, entertainment and business.

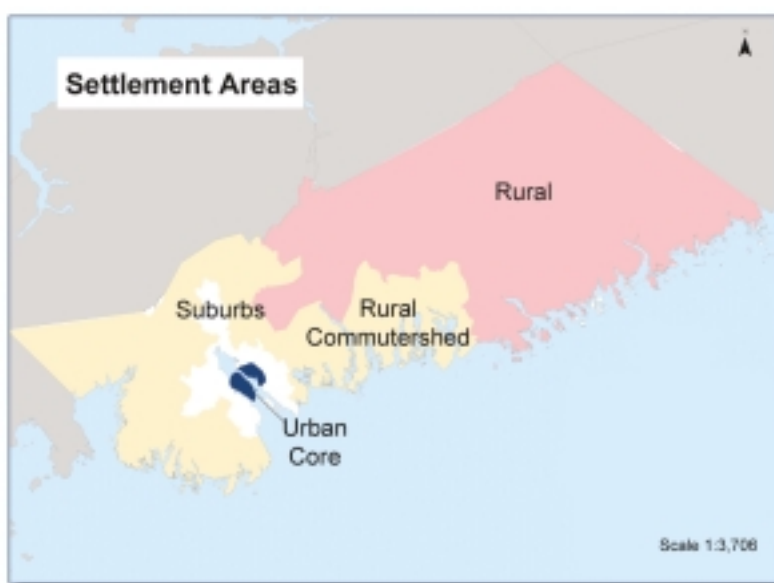
About 40% of Nova Scotia's population and 15% of Atlantic Canada's population lives in HRM. We enjoy one of the lowest unemployment rates in Atlantic Canada and are one of the top seven Canadian cities for labour force participation.

Settlement Patterns

Where should we encourage settlement areas over the next 25 years?

The number of residences in HRM is growing at twice the rate of our population. For a variety of reasons, our average household is getting smaller. More people are choosing to live alone or in small families and as a result, we need more land to house the same number of people. As our population continues to grow, we will need more and more land to live on.

The population of HRM's suburbs and rural commutershed area has doubled since 1970. The rural commutershed is the area close enough to the metro area to live in the country but still easily drive to work in Halifax or Dartmouth. (Suburban areas are shown in white and the rural commutershed is shown in yellow on the map to the right.)



The population of our rural areas has remained stable over the same amount of time. The rural areas are located beyond a convenient commuting distance and have traditionally depended on forestry, fishing or agriculture for employment. (Rural areas are shown in pink on the above map.)

For the first time in 30 years, our urban core population has also grown. The urban core (shown in dark blue) includes the Halifax Peninsula and the portion of Dartmouth lying inside the Circumferential Highway. This turnaround in population growth has occurred since 1996.

Opportunities

According to the Regional Planning principles, the Plan will identify ways to *manage development that makes effective use of land, energy, infrastructure, public services and facilities, and considers healthy lifestyles.*

It will also *provide a framework that leads to predictable, fair, cost effective decision making* and will *support development patterns that promote a vigorous regional economy.*

To make this happen, we need to explore:

- **Affordable locations for encouraging new suburban development**, in terms of piped services, sewage treatment capacity, transportation costs and environmental impacts.
- **'Transit villages' around suburban bus terminals**, providing convenient retail, clustered housing and attractive parks.
- **Innovative forms of development for urban areas**, such as mixing housing, shops, cafes and plazas to provide amenities within walking distance for residents, while continuing to protect the character of our neighbourhoods.

Challenges

Ensuring efficient municipal services for new developments. While there is currently a strong market for very large lots in our rural commutershed, they are expensive to serve in terms of road construction and maintenance, transit services and waste collection. We need to find innovative ways to satisfy this market, and other emerging markets, while ensuring that services remain affordable to residents.

Using existing infrastructure and public facilities. Urban schools have been closed and new ones built in outlying areas. New roads are being proposed, while parallel rail lines remain underused. Bus route extensions have been required to serve new, low density subdivisions at considerable cost, placing a strain on the transit budget and service level for existing services. We need to better use what we already have, while recognizing the need to offer services in a variety of housing markets.

Finding appropriate locations for higher density housing and commercial uses. Some separation of housing and commercial development is important, but we need to consider the possibility of innovative design approaches that create village-style centres with services like shopping, banking and daycare accessible within walking distance of homes.

Did you know?

We could house over half of our projected population growth on vacant lands in areas where services are already provided, close to existing employment, transit and piped services. Developing these lands helps keep taxes at a reasonable level, while maintaining a good level of service.

By the year 2021, nearly twice as many of us will be over 65 years old, but much of our zoning limits housing options for seniors, such as home apartments or townhouses.

Nearly half of HRM residents (49%) live in the suburbs. Almost one third (27%) live in the urban core, while just over a fifth (21%) live in the rural commutershed. The remaining 3% live in the rural areas.



Environment

How do we protect our environmental assets?

Among the key environmental concerns caused by housing development is the quality and quantity of our ground water supply and the potential damage caused by overloaded independent septic systems.

Some rural subdivisions are experiencing water shortages. Houses today are more likely to have multiple bathrooms, hot tubs and dishwashers. These all consume large quantities of water, so homeowners are using more municipal water, drilling deeper and deeper wells or looking for other sources.

Rural subdivisions with piped water but no piped sewer can have problems with septic systems overloading. Most individual septic systems are not designed to absorb the large quantities of water supplied by piped service.

HRM is undertaking a Water Resource Management Study to address issues related to groundwater supply and waste water disposal for unserved development. The outcome of this work and related discussions will be available soon. See page 7 for more detail on the progress of this study.



Opportunities

Two of the Regional Planning principles are to **preserve and promote the sustainability of cultural, historic and natural assets** and **ensure opportunities for the protection of open space, wilderness, natural beauty and sensitive environmental areas.**

To make this happen, we need to explore:

- **Public education**, which can help prevent the failure of septic systems and depletion of groundwater. Many people aren't aware of their reliance on either or both of these for waste water disposal or water supply, or of how to use and maintain private, on-site systems. Contact the Nova Scotia Department of the Environment and Labour at 902 424-7773 for more information.
- **Shared septic systems** and small treatment plants, which can reduce the size of lots required in rural areas by eliminating individual septic fields. Legislation establishing wastewater management districts could help ensure these systems are properly maintained.
- **Our current water supply**, which has the capacity for another 128,000 people. The Halifax Harbour Cleanup sewage treatment will also include capacity for new development. But each year, approximately 40% of new housing units in HRM rely on wells and septic systems.

Challenges

Understanding the quality and quantity of well water. Citizens expect good well water when piped services aren't available. However, there is limited information on, and no regulation to monitor, either the quality or the quantity of well water. Data on this issue is also very limited and not easily accessible. Piped water accompanied by sewers is preferable for new developments and is available if we develop in strategic locations.

Addressing overloaded septic systems. We need to find ways to minimize the risk of septic system failure where piped water is supplied. Piped water invites people to use more, which in turn can cause septic systems to fail if they are not properly maintained.

Coordinating water supply and wastewater regulations. The Halifax Regional Water Commission provides piped water, but doesn't have jurisdiction over septic systems. We need to find ways to improve the coordination between central water supply and wastewater disposal.

Future editions of the Regional Planning newsletter will address other important aspects of the environment, including the effects of development on wildlife, natural resources and open spaces.

Did you know?

One third of our population draw their water from individual wells. New houses have more bathrooms and appliances than traditional rural houses, resulting in consumption that can lower the water table and overload septic systems.

45% of respondents in a 2002 Regional Planning Survey hadn't had their septic tanks pumped in the past three years.

Approximately 75% of HRM groundwater requires some form of treatment and home water filters aren't regulated. Contaminants may include iron, manganese, gypsum, salt, arsenic, uranium or septic pathogens.

Approximately 20% of our shoreline has been closed to shellfish harvesting, either periodically or permanently. While natural toxins account for some of these closures, many are caused by contaminated run-off from rivers and streams.

Transportation

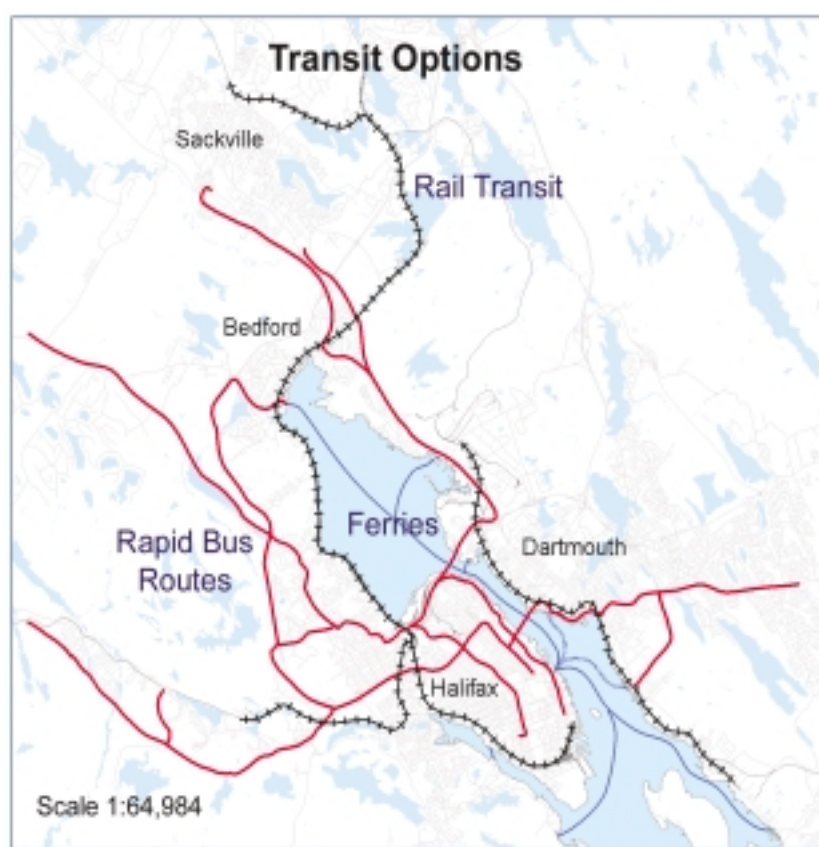
What type of transportation investment do we want to support our desired form of growth?

HRM is among the top five Canadian metro areas with the lowest proportion of people driving to work. Only 68% of our commuters drive to work, compared to the national average of 71%. We're less dependent on driving than St. John's, Saint John, Winnipeg, Calgary or Vancouver.

Roads leading to four of the top employment locations are near or over their capacity during peak hours. Congestion is especially notable on the Bedford Highway, Chebucto and Quinpool Roads, Portland Street and Magazine Hill - Windmill Road.

Ten percent of HRM residents take public transit to work. This is significantly higher than either St. John's (3%) or Saint John (4%) and is comparable to Victoria, BC.

Eighty-six percent of people who live in the rural commutershed drive to work. This is primarily because transit is not readily available in this area, homes are widely dispersed and many families have to balance daycare, work, shopping and after-school activities. Operating one car places an estimated cost of \$8,000 per year on the family budget.



Opportunities

The Regional Plan will *develop integrated transportation systems in conjunction with the other regional planning principles.*

To make this happen, we need to explore:

- **Integrated planning**, including ways to plan settlement patterns, economic growth locations and transportation infrastructure together.
- **Our success with high levels of walking, cycling and transit use in the Capital District**, where concentrated employment centres are close to attractive residential areas, universities and hospitals.
- **Alternative access points to the Halifax Peninsula, our main employment centre.** Our existing ferry service has room to expand, while new ferry routes could potentially be added across the North West Arm and from Bedford Basin. Our rail infrastructure is also underused and we could develop more express bus routes. See the map above for some possible options.

Challenges

Dealing with limited access roads leading into the Halifax Peninsula, where the majority of HRM residents travel to work. The two bridges, Fairview Interchange, Armdale Rotary, Bayers Road and Mumford Road are the only ways cars can enter this area. Expanding capacity at these locations would be expensive and intrusive on existing neighbourhoods. A strong regional centre is important to our economic strength, but we need to find ways to deal with the increased travel demand onto the Peninsula.

Making public transit more accessible through a balanced approach to funding and taxation for public transit. We need to find new ways to fund public transit, as existing policies at all levels of government tend to favour automobile commuting. For example, income tax deductions could include transit passes provided by employers as well as the existing employee parking benefits.

Providing for people with disabilities. Access-A-Bus service often involves long lead times. Our ferries are accessible to wheelchairs. New low-floor buses also accept wheelchairs, but have limited seating for other passengers. We need to find ways to enable better seating in these vehicles without compromising wheelchair users.

Did you know?

Each year, it costs an average of \$7,500 per year to maintain one kilometre of two-lane paved roadway. This does not include snow and ice control.

We would need to spend over \$150 million to satisfy the demand for new or expanded roads by an estimated population of 400,000 by 2028. This is well over one hundred times as much as we now invest in transportation in a single year. We need to balance the supply and demand for roads, reduce our need to travel and improve public transit.

Older neighbourhoods, street trees and pedestrian safety in HRM will be at risk if we invest only in roads and neglect public transit, walking and cycling. Relieving traffic congestion at the edges of the Halifax Peninsula and Downtown Dartmouth will shift the problem to streets within these areas. As well, more cars will mean more parking problems.



Halifax Harbour

How can we maximize the benefits of the existing and potential uses of Halifax Harbour?

Halifax Harbour is one of our region's most important assets. It shapes our sense of place and image, and is an integral symbol of our civic pride and identity. The Harbour is experiencing strong growth in marine based and offshore industry, tourism, recreation, residential and commercial sectors. There is also increased interest and concern about the environmental sustainability of the Harbour.

With these many, often competing interests and a finite amount of water and harbourfront land available, Halifax Harbour needs a long term vision and strategy for its future development.

Halifax's 'working harbour' makes HRM a globally competitive seaport. It's a critical component of our local and regional economy. It houses two world class container terminals, general cargo wharfage, offshore oil and gas supply bases and ship building and repair facilities. It is the east coast headquarters for our Navy and Coast Guard, and a renowned marine scientific research facility - the Bedford Institute of Oceanography.



Opportunities

To identify the right balance, we need to explore:

- **Transportation infrastructure**, which is a critically important element of the working harbour, and holds potential for public transit.
- **Tourism**, which accounts for hundreds of thousands of visitors on our harbourfront each year.
- **Recreation**, with extensive park space along the Harbour's shores, including Point Pleasant Park, the Dingle, Horseshoe Park, the waterfronts, Seaview Park, Fishermen's Cove, McNabs Island and Georges Island.
- **Residential opportunities**, with our changing demographics, segments of our population are seeking to live downtown along our waterfront.
- **The environment**, as the Halifax Harbour inlet, aside from the development that has occurred on its shores, is an environmental ecosystem, supporting diverse marine habitat (plant and animal). Human activities have deteriorated this habitat, through wastewater and stormwater discharge, erosion and sedimentation, infill activity and other pollution. But we can take steps to ensure that Halifax Harbour is maintained and enhanced as a sustainable environmental resource.

Challenges

Defining the balance among uses, by determining the appropriate amount, type and location of land uses around the shores of our Harbour. Should certain uses take precedence over others? How do we protect and improve the environmental integrity of the Harbour while allowing further growth to occur?

Protecting and enhancing critical land-side transportation infrastructure and service. Some rail lines are being removed, and the frequency of freight trains has been reduced. For those who rely on trucking, urban streets provide the only connection between the South End docks and the freeway system. Both our rail and truck routes involve some transportation of hazardous materials. How can we ensure the long-term future of our rail infrastructure and service? How might we alleviate truck traffic on downtown streets? How can we minimize the risk involving hazardous goods?

Improving governance and management. How can we improve on the governance, management and administration of our Harbour? The three levels of government, landowners, non-government organizations and other stakeholders work independently when it comes to Harbour activity and harbourfront development. We need a coordinating body to lead in directing, coordinating, regulating and implementing a vision for Halifax Harbour.

Did you know?

524,336 container units passed through the Port of Halifax in 2002. Other eastern seaboard ports are investing in superterminals to serve large "Post-Panamax" container ships.

65% of the containers shipped via the Port of Halifax depend on rail service to Central Canada and the US, while another 10% are transferred to other boats. About 25% move by truck through our existing street system, the only trucking link between the South End docks and the highways.

Halifax Harbour is not HRM's only port. We also have a dock and bulk loading facility at Sheet Harbour, although without rail or highway access. We need to think about potential roles for this port.

Between 1980 and 2001, there have been approximately 125 infill projects in Halifax Harbour and the North West Arm. A large number of private water lots remain from prior to Confederation, which may result in further infilling of saltwater frontage.

Projects in Motion

The Regional Planning team isn't waiting for the Plan to be complete before taking action. There are many exciting projects already in progress. Here are some examples.

Capital District, Urban Design

The Capital District Urban Design Study is close to completion after nine months of extensive research and public consultation. The study provides guidelines for improving public property and detailed streetscape plans for the main commercial streets in the Capital District, including Portland Street & Alderney Drive, Barrington Street, Spring Garden Road, Gottingen Street and Quinpool Road.

When the study is complete, HRM will have a plan for improved public amenities like benches, litter baskets, bike racks and transit shelters, as well as a new directional signage system in the Capital District. Look for improvements starting this fall!

A Capital District Urban Design public open house is scheduled for Wednesday, August 27. For information, contact Lesley at lesley@griffithsmuecke.com or 423-8629.



Bus Rapid Transit Showcase

The Urban Transportation Showcase Program, designed by Transport Canada, showcases and offers funding to transportation projects that reduce greenhouse gases. Up to \$40 million will be granted to municipalities that demonstrate the best transit solution, including integration of techniques, land use, and public outreach.

Transport Canada received a total of 48 applications for the program, and HRM is one of 15 cities that have been short-listed. As a result, we received \$30,000 to research and write our detailed proposals. The recipients of the funding will be announced in early September.

HRM's proposal includes two bus rapid transit routes (BRT). Bus rapid transit is a limited stop express service with special measures to avoid traffic congestion. The proposed routes originate in Cole Harbour and in Sackville. Both offer service to the downtown core, while the Sackville route would also serve Burnside.

Travel times would be shorter and the proposed buses would feature climate control and comfortable seats. There would also be amenities at stations, like retail kiosks, washrooms and bike lockers.

With limited opportunity for long, dedicated bus lanes, HRM's proposal relies on transit priority measures to shorten travel times. Innovative signal control techniques and 'queue-jumping' lanes would be used to avoid traffic congestion. These techniques would include stop lights with a special signal that allows buses to go before other traffic.

The proposal also includes funding for improved bike and pedestrian connections to stations as well as carpooling, vanpooling, and park-and-rides.

We'll keep you posted on HRM's progress!

Water Resources Management Study

The Water Resources Management Study has been completed and will help guide HRM develop municipal policies for the use and protection of streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands and important fresh and salt water areas.

The policies will affect where and how development occurs and reflect community values about water resources, including water quality and habitat protection.

The new policies will protect the shorelines of lakes, rivers and our marine coastline. They'll help HRM manage wastewater disposal, stormwater run-off and for the first time, set parameters for water quality.

An implementation strategy is currently being prepared, and will be presented to HRM Regional Council in the Fall of 2003. Many of the recommendations will be implemented through the Regional Plan.

The change could have held HRM responsible for additional costs and Regional Council was not prepared to place the citizens of HRM at increased financial risk.

The request for proposals process and the agreements signed last fall clearly required the successful proponent to assume all risks and responsibility to meet the effluent quality requirements under most circumstances.

Mayor Peter Kelly and Chief Administrative Officer, George McLellan, both stressed that HRM remains committed to moving forward with the project as previously defined, including the treatment plant number and sites, level of treatment, outfall locations and sludge treatment. They are also committed to proceeding within the timeline set for start and completion - just under different arrangements.

HRM intends to finalise a contract this summer with Dexter Construction for the collection systems and outfalls/diffusers for Halifax, Dartmouth and Herring Cove. Work will begin later this summer. HRM is considering options to advance the treatment plants and the sludge management facility, and hopes to move forward with these soon.





The Regional Planning Process

What is the Regional Planning process?

Regional Planning is more than just writing and adopting a regional municipal planning strategy. It's a process of gathering information, opinions and thoughts from the public. It's evaluating community needs, values, and goals. It's gathering the technical data and facts we need to make sound policies and decisions.

Why should you participate in the Regional Planning process?

You can influence the decisions that will help shape growth in HRM over the next 25 years. Engaging the public in meaningful participation is fundamental to the success of our Regional Plan. Residents of HRM must provide the information we need to plan effectively for our future. Regional Council needs to hear comments and ideas from those who know HRM and its unique communities best - the people who live and work here.

Public participation can help you think about the various opportunities we have for planning and land use on a regional scale. It creates an informed community, which in turn leads to a better planned community.

It's your right. Our system of government gives the public the democratic right to have a strong voice in all matters of public policy, including municipal or regional planning. Regional Council wants to hear from citizens to help make well-informed decisions.

HRM's Commitment

Regional Council is committed to addressing the needs and views of all HRM, recognizing the diversity of our citizens, community and geography. We have developed a public participation program to ensure meaningful public exchanges on a wide array of regional issues, challenges and opportunities facing HRM.

Specifically, Regional Council is committed to:

- Appointing members of the public to the Regional Planning Committee, charged with defining how the public will participate, and overseeing the public's involvement in the process
- Communicating how public input will affect decisions
- Providing the public with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way
- Clearly defining the purpose of public participation
- Identifying the segments of the public most likely to be affected by decisions (stakeholders)
- Involving the public in every step of decision making, not just the final stage
- Providing a variety of levels of participation, based upon level of interest, that reflect the diversity of HRM's population
- Providing genuine opportunities to influence decisions

Regional Planning Process and Time Frame

Step 1	Public Awareness Campaign (June to September 2003)		Step 5	Evaluation of Alternatives (June to October 2004)
Step 2	Public Consultation to Develop Goals, Objectives & Opportunities (September to December 2003)		Step 6	Recommend Alternative to Council (October to December 2004)
Step 3	Develop Alternatives (December 2003 to March 2004)		Step 7	Develop Regional Plan (December 2004 to March 2005)
Step 4	Public Consultation on the Alternatives (March to June 2004)		Step 8	Adoption of Regional Plan (approximately 4 to 6 months)



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