

HALIFAX

P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. 9

Halifax Regional Council
May 4, 2021

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed
Jane Fraser, CFO, Executive Director of Finance, Asset Management & ICT

Original Signed by 

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: March 25, 2021

SUBJECT: Public WiFi Implementation Update

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

April 2, 2019 Regional Council motion (item No. 15.1.4 iii):

MOVED by Councillor Nicoll, seconded by Councillor Mason,

THAT Halifax Regional Council request a supplemental staff report regarding the redeployment of remaining resources, including consideration of transit terminals, and any contractual matters.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

and

April 2, 2019 Regional Council motion (item No. 15.3.1 ii):

MOVED by Councillor Nicoll, seconded by Councillor Whitman,

THAT Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to: ii. In partnership with Halifax Public Libraries, begin a pilot program (lasting no longer than 12 months) to trial existing mobile library hotspots on up to 20 transit buses to gauge rider interest and understand support implications, subject to the successful negotiation and execution of relevant contract documents and purchase orders with HRM's service provider(s).

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Under the HRM Charter, Section 79A, Halifax Regional Council may expend money for municipal purposes.

Under Appendix B of Administrative Order No. 2016-005-ADM, the Procurement Policy, contract amendments of various amounts may be approved by the listed authorities as long as the purchase comes from available and sufficient funds, (ii) results in a corresponding change in the scope of work, (iii) meets the conditions for a sole source purchase, and (iv) is in the best interests of the Municipality.

The following report conforms to the above Policy and the HRM Charter.

BACKGROUND

The public Wi-Fi service has been a long-standing desire of Halifax Regional Council to achieve a public service which is free for public use and delivered at a minimal cost to the Municipality with no increase to internal resources. It stems from a February 11, 2014, Halifax Regional Council approval of a recommendation by the Community Planning and Economic Advisory Standing Committee to endorse the Public Realm Improvement Project List which included free public Wi-Fi in the municipality's urban core as one of the project candidates. Subsequently, on July 10, 2014, staff from Finance, Asset Management and Information, Communication & Technology (FAM/ICT) issued a Request for Information (# E14-069) to gauge the interest and capabilities of service providers in the marketplace.

The following three strategic outcomes were identified as being enabled by an implementation of public Wi-Fi in Halifax:

1. **Economic Development** – Other jurisdictions have experienced increased interest from businesses and developers to operate inside areas where public Wi-Fi is available, and it provides a platform for delivering valuable experiences to residents, students, visitors and local business resulting in increased economic activity.
2. **“Smarter City” service delivery** – public Wi-Fi builds on the municipality's existing fiber network to permit the municipality to capitalize on connected technologies in the delivery of the next generation of municipal services. Current projects like the LED Streetlight Conversion; Traffic Signal Control Solution; and new Parking solutions could benefit from the existence of Public Wi-Fi as a means of facilitating network connectivity. In the absence of this digital infrastructure, a heavier reliance on cellular services will be necessary.
3. **Closing the Digital Divide** – The internet has become a necessity in our daily lives. Providing free public access to the internet helps close the divide and provide opportunities to succeed in a knowledge economy.

With these goals and the information gathered from the marketplace, on October 21, 2014, staff from FAM/ICT recommended and received approval from the Halifax Regional Council authorize the CAO to issue a solicitation for Request for Proposals (RFP) to select a service provider to partner with Halifax to provide a fully managed public Wi-Fi service.

An RFP, incorporating input from key stakeholders including Waterfront Development Corporation and the Business Improvement Districts within the urban core was issued on December 16, 2014. Subsequently, on February 7, 2017 ([link](#)), Regional Council awarded the RFP for Public Wi-Fi to Bell Aliant and directed the CAO to execute an amendment to the existing master services agreement.

Since award, staff have worked with Bell to implement a total of 9 Public Wi-Fi sites.

On April 2, 2019, Regional Council requested a supplemental report to understand the redeployment strategy for the remaining WiFi resources. In addition, Regional Council directed staff to conduct a pilot program for mobile public WiFi on Transit buses. Outlined below is the confirmed plan for next phase of deployment as well as considerations for future deployments.

DISCUSSION

Staff reviewed locations for installations of public WiFi. Through the review there were several possible locations, staff narrowed the locations using the following analysis:

- Was the location an area that offers substantial public congregation year-round where people are waiting and having access to public WiFi would be a beneficial service?
- Did the location offer opportunity to enhance the lives of those who most need access to public WiFi?
- Is there other Public WiFi service, such as Halifax Library, within the vicinity of the location?
- The feasibility to install the required infrastructure within existing infrastructure (electrical, connectivity, building and poles for access points).

The locations outlined below leverage the above criteria and have also been evaluated by Bell Aliant for the feasibility of providing WiFi to the public and costs to deploy and operate.

- Lower Sackville Terminal
- Portland Hills Terminal
- Mumford Terminal

Costs for Implementation and Maintenance of Public WiFi for Bus Terminals

Item	One Time Implementation Fees	Monthly Fees
Total implementation cost to set up infrastructure in all new areas:		
Portland Hills Bus Terminal	\$ 25,165.01	\$ 755.00
Sackville Bus Terminal	\$ 19,183.05	\$ 495.00
Mumford Bus Terminal	\$ 13,221.58	\$ 625.00
Bell Project Management Fee	\$ 13,750.00	n/a
TOTAL	\$71,319.64 + HST	\$ 1,875.00 + HST

Based on the evaluations, recommendations by Bell Aliant, and the desire from HRM to expand the public WiFi to other areas of the municipality especially in Transit locations, Information Communication & Technology (ICT) will move forward with expanding the current footprint of the Halifax Public WiFi to include the following three areas in summer (2021):

- Sackville Terminal
- Portland Hills Terminal
- Mumford Terminal

In February of 2021 a statement of work was signed by Bell Aliant and HRM relative to these expansion sites. HRM staff will leverage existing funds in the Public WiFi account (CI000021) be used to fund the above implementations. Monthly ongoing costs for the public WiFi access points will be funded from cost centre A421 - ICT Corporate Services.

These installations will leverage existing support services, as provisioned through the Municipality's current Public WiFi agreement, which would dramatically reduce the effort by HRM staff to implement the service and provide a consistent user experience to citizens moving between public spaces and transit.

By expanding the service to the key Transit terminals, the Municipality would be able to increase transit user WiFi access and align its services with those seen across other transit agencies in Canada in a cost-effective manner.

Once implemented, the Municipality will provide public WiFi service at twelve (12) locations, the three (3) new sites and the nine (9) existing sites:

- Dartmouth Waterfront Area
- Halifax Waterfront Area
- Grand Parade Square
- Alderney Landing Theatre & Ferry Terminal
- Emera Oval

- Halifax Ferry Terminal
- Public Gardens Horticultural Hall
- Lacewood Terminal
- Bridge Terminal

Future WiFi Deployment Sites

Deployment of Public WiFi services at the expanded sites will not fully deplete the available funds. Future sites that meet the criteria for Public Wifi will be evaluated by staff for consideration. Future sites evaluation will need to build in enough lead time to allow ICT and Bell time to evaluate feasibility of implementation. Additional expansion of the public WiFi service may be even more important considering the pandemic. A previous list of sites for future consideration were:

- Wanderers Grounds
- Dartmouth Common
- Woodside Ferry Terminal

WiFi on Buses Pilot Project

In April 2019 the Transportation Standing Committee recommended that Halifax Regional Council in partnership with Halifax Public Libraries, establish a pilot program to put WiFi on approximately 20 buses for a period of 12 months. This pilot would provide data to gauge rider interest and understand support implications. Based upon rider interest and findings from the pilot program, a business case would be created to provide recommendations and feasibility of onboard WiFi. In the Planning & Initiation Stage of the project for the pilot, research determined that the best option would be to engage Bell (under the current Bell contract) to provide equipment and services to deliver the pilot solution. Bell provided a cost estimate for this option, \$45,000 (equipment and setup) plus \$27,000 (services/data) for 12 months for 20 buses for a total of \$72,000. This cost is significantly more than the original estimated budget of \$12,000 (equipment and setup) (3.5x) plus \$27,000 (services/data) for 12 months for 20 buses for a total of \$40,800. The original estimate was based on 'hot spot' equipment used by Halifax Public Libraries and during the planning period it was determined to be insufficient. The core drivers for increased costs is the result of the need for a more ruggedized WiFi access point to withstand the harsh environment of the bus fleet, specifically the cleaning protocol and the capability to collect the data required to inform the business case.

As staff were working with vendors and business unit partners to secure the necessary mobile equipment, contract documents and establish the pilot objectives and measurements of enabling WiFi on buses, the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. During this period, the pilot project to install WiFi on Halifax Transit buses was and continues to be on hold due to current cost estimates as well as the impact of lower ridership as a result of COVID 19. The data from this pilot was to be used to inform and potentially develop a business case for a larger roll-out. The data that would be collected at this time would be incomplete and not provide clear evidence to inform a decision or support a business case. This project will be re-assessed at a future

date and time once the pilot can achieve the objectives requested by Council. Implementation timeline would need to be determined based on approval to proceed with this solution recommendation and Bell availability.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Funding for installation and set-up for Sackville Terminal, Portland Hills Terminal, Mumford Terminal is \$74,376 net HST included, and is available in capital account C1000021- Public WiFi.

The additional monthly charges for the three access points equals \$1,955 net HST included and will be funded from cost centre A421 - ICT Corporate Services.

Budget Summary:	<u>Project Account No. C1000021 – Public WiFi</u>	
	Cumulative Unspent Budget	\$ 196,437
	Less: Implementation cost - net HST	<u>\$ 74,376</u>
	Balance	\$ 122,061

The 4- year estimated financial implications are summarized as follows:

Fiscal Year	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Operating – A421	\$11,850	\$23,460	\$23,460	\$23,460
Capital – C1000021	\$74,376	-	-	-
OCC – A421	\$7,700	-	-	-

*Estimated date for monthly fees to begin is June 21/22 for total of \$19,550, subsequent years would be full annual amount of \$23,460.

RISK CONSIDERATION

There are no significant risks associated with this report. The risks considered are low.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement took place as part of this report; however, citizens were engaged resulting in the original motion for an RFP for Public WiFi services. Further community engagement will be conducted with the review of onboard WiFi through the transit pilot when this project re-starts.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No environmental implications were identified.

ALTERNATIVES

None.

ATTACHMENTS

None.

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Chad MacDonald, Acting Chief Information Officer 902-222-6328
