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Item No. 4
Transportation Standing Committee
May 24, 2018

TO: Chair and Members of Transportation Standing Committee

Original Signed

SUBMITTED BY:

Dave Reage, MCIP, LPP, Director, Halifax Transit

Original Signed

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: May 4, 2018

SUBJECT: Ferry Service during Special Events

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

This report originates from the following motion passed at the August 1, 2017 Regional Council Meeting:

That Halifax Regional Council request a staff report on options for providing additional ferry service during special events and holidays starting in the 2018/2019 fiscal year.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Section 69(1) of the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter provides the legislative authority for the municipality to provide a public transportation service. Section 79(1)(o) provides the authority for Council to expend money required by the municipality for public transportation services.

BACKGROUND

To meet high ridership demand, in the past, Halifax Transit has provided an increased level of service on the Alderney ferry service during special events and on certain holidays. As the attendance at the multiple events has grown over the years, there is now a greater need to provide increased ferry service to move people effectively.

However, there have been operational challenges encountered in providing additional service because of the relatively small number of available employees to work extra shifts. In the summer of 2017, temporary staff were hired in part to allow for additional service, however, this did not resolve the challenges and in some instances, the increased levels of service could not be provided. As a result, passengers experienced delays in crossings.

On August 1, 2017 Regional Council requested a staff report on options, including financial and staffing costs, for providing additional ferry service during special events and on holidays starting in the 2018/2019 fiscal year.

DISCUSSION

Halifax Transit provides increased service for special events and holidays both in the form of increased frequency and/or extended span of service depending on the nature of the event. This can include holidays such as Canada Day and Natal Day, and special events such as Nocturne, Pride, Parade of Lights, Moosehead playoffs, New Years Eve and Tall Ships.

Halifax Transit ferry service operates under the strict regulations of Transport Canada to ensure the safety of passengers and the crew. To operate a ferry, it must be staffed by a fully qualified crew. When operating under normal conditions and carrying up to a maximum of 300 passengers, a ferry crew of four is required. This includes a captain, a mate, a deckhand and an engineer/deckhand. The addition of a fifth crew member is required when loads exceed 300 to a maximum of up to 390 passengers. These numbers are not absolute and can depend on a number of factors such as the presence of two wheeled devices, strollers etc., which can reduce overall capacity.

Halifax Transit Ferry service currently operates eight crews of four staff, using an eight-week rotation. Historically, there have also been two Relief Mates that fill in for absent crew members, including those on vacation or sick. Under this existing arrangement, providing additional ferry service relies on finding staff available for overtime shifts. For any given special event, only a portion of the existing staff are eligible for overtime, depending on their shift, because there are contractual rest periods required. In addition, special events often occur during peak vacation times (as laid out in the Amalgamated Transit Union collective agreement), so less staff are available, and relief mates are often already assigned to shifts and do not provide additional flexibility. As such it can be difficult to ensure in advance that all four unique positions can be filled, and the additional service can be provided. Even in instances where there appear to be sufficient staff available to provide the additional service, there is a risk associated with publicly promoting that service too far in advance, as resources are often maximized such that any unexpected illness or injury would prevent the service from operating. Halifax Transit is currently in the process of hiring three additional Relief Mates. This growth is important to the operation of the ferry service, and an added benefit is that these positions will provide additional capacity to staff special events. Provided that the hiring and training processes proceed in a timely manner, the addition of these three staff may be sufficient to provide increased Alderney ferry service during special events for the 2018/19 summer season.

In the summer of 2017, Halifax Transit was in a unique position to partner with Waterfront Development Corporation Limited to hire an additional, temporary, ferry crew for the summer festival period. It was anticipated that with the additional crew in place, there would be sufficient resources to operate service to George's Island, and provide additional flexibility to increase service during special events. However, in reality, the additional crew members did not improve the flexibility of the service. This was due in part to the

extensive training required for the temporary employees prior to operating the ferries, and was further impacted by holidays falling on days with lower service levels (Canada Day was a Saturday in 2017), and rules around hours/day of work limited the availability of staff.

Below is a discussion of five potential alternatives to providing increased ferry service during special events. The costs below are all based on the assumption that additional service will continue to be run during special events, as it has in the past, as a result, costs associated with fuel and maintenance have not been included as they are already provided for in the Halifax Transit budget. The costs presented below include the direct compensation (labour) costs of the option to allow for comparison purposes, as well as overall budget impact of each option. The calculation of the overall budget impact assumes that service is provided during special events with crew paid at regular time, and illustrates the cost in excess of this base cost.

Option 1 – Increase Service Using Existing Resources

Summary: Halifax Transit would continue to use existing ferry staff and would rely on finding staff available to work overtime to increase service levels for special events. This is the past/current model, however, beginning in 2018/19, there will be three additional Relief Mates in place, providing increased capacity. However, it is possible that in some cases, the ability to provide increased service could still not be confirmed until days before the special event.

Risks: Halifax Transit could not commit to or promote the additional service until staff were secured, or there would be a risk of the service not being provided. The inability to provide adequate crews could be due to a number of factors, and is impacted by the day of the week the holiday falls on, required days of rest for staff, sicknesses, etc. This would not meet the public's expectations for the service.

Direct Compensation Costs: Approximately \$11,000 - \$15,000 per year (depending on the number of special events)

Overall Budget Impact: Approximately \$1,000 - \$1,600 per year (depending on the number of special events)

Option 2 – Retain “Big Lift” Service Levels

Summary: Four additional full time ferry staff were hired to provide a higher level of service during “The Big Lift”. The permanent retention of these staff, and higher service levels, would provide a larger number of employees to draw on for overtime shifts associated with special events. In addition, some events, particularly those on weekdays or Sundays, would benefit from having the additional service in place.

Risks: Although there would be an increased opportunity to find available staff to crew the ferries for special events, similar to Option 1, the increased service would still face the same staff availability challenges, and would be impacted by required days of rest, etc. and could not be confirmed until close to the event.

Total Cost: The cost to retain the increased level of service is approximately \$550,000 per year.

Direct Compensation Costs: Approximately \$11,000 - \$15,000 per year (depending on the number of special events)

Overall Budget Impact: \$550,000 per year, plus approximately \$1,000 - \$1,600 per year (depending on the number of special events)

Option 3 – Seasonal Employees

Summary: Halifax Transit could hire seasonal employees to provide additional flexibility during the summer months when most special events occur. These seasonal employees would be hired for a period from May to September each year, to allow for sufficient training prior to Canada Day. This would require four employees to be hired, a Captain, Mate, Engineer Deckhand and Deckhand.

Risks: There is a high level of risk associated with this option, as it is anticipated that it would be challenging to attract and retain staff for seasonal employment. These positions may not be attractive for qualified persons due to the limited hours and limited benefits, and the requirement to work during peak vacations/holiday periods. In addition, this option did not provide the required flexibility in 2017 for increased service during special events. New employees would need to be trained each year, which is a significant cost. It is anticipated that there would not be sufficient work available for the seasonal employees to have 40 hours of scheduled work each week. Seasonal staff would be more prone to resigning with short notice and which would reduce the ability to provide increased service levels. This option would not resolve staffing concerns for special events that take place outside of the summer period (ie. Parade of Lights).

Direct Compensation Costs: Approximately \$100,000 per year

Overall Budget Impact: Approximately \$90,000 per year

Option 4 – Part Time Employees

Summary: This option would include hiring permanent part time employees to provide additional capacity. Part time employees have the greatest flexibility for crewing special events because they are not part of the scheduled shift rotation. These additional staff could be scheduled during special events and could also provide additional resources to address unexpected vacancies. These positions would differ from Relief Mates because of the ability to assign them outside of set shift schedules.

Risks: There is a risk associated with the ability to attract and retain qualified employees due to the limited hours, highly seasonal work, and limited benefits. Annual compensation costs would be difficult to confirm because it would depend on the hours they were scheduled. Similar to seasonal staff, part time staff would be more prone to resign with short notice which would reduce the ability to provide the desired service levels. There would be training costs associated with part time employees, but it is not anticipated that it would be a regular, annually reoccurring cost as it would be with seasonal employees.

Direct Compensation Costs: Approximately \$135,000 per year (depending on available work, could vary significantly from year to year).

Overall Budget Impact: \$0. This option does not result in any incremental costs, as part time employees would only be utilized to cover existing service. There would be no commitment to provide a minimum number of shifts/work to these employees. It is possible that the ability to staff shifts with part time employees at regular rates would reduce overall overtime costs.

Option 5 – Permanent Full Time Employees

Summary: This option would include hiring an additional crew of permanent, full time employees. Having an additional crew (4) employees in place would allow for regular, reliable service during special events.

Risks: There is not sufficient work available for an additional crew during non-special events, so there is a high risk of being overstaffed, and being required to pay employees for a minimum work week without gaining any benefit.

Direct Compensation Costs: Approximately \$295,000 per year

Overall Budget Impact: Approximately \$284,000 per year

The costs presented with the five options above do not reflect the potential increase in revenue associated with adding extra service during special events. In the past, special events with increased ferry service, particularly those with high ridership (Canada Day, Natal Day, New Years Eve), have been provided as free service. However, the increased ability to consistently provide additional service during more special events (sporting events, concerts, etc) is anticipated to increase ridership, and as a result revenue, which could partly offset the costs of the additional service.

Conclusion

The five options above have differing levels of probability that increased service could be provided for special events. There are no options that provide absolute certainty, as there is a still always a risk that multiple staff could be injured or ill; this risk is mitigated, but not removed, by having additional staff in place. A key component is the need to have four unique positions on each crew. Not all employees are qualified to fill multiple position types, which provides less flexibility, ie. the Captain position can only be filled by Captains, and is a limiting factor.

The option presented that provides the greatest assurance of service provision is Option 5, as it includes having a full crew with no regularly scheduled work, available to staff additional service. However, this is also the least cost effective option, as the crew would be paid full time salaries annually, and may only be utilized a minimal amount throughout the year.

Pursuing Option 4 would have the second highest likelihood that increased service could be provided during special events. This option differs from Option 5 in that the available staff would be part time instead of full time, so they would only be paid when the service is provided. Option 4 is what we will implement because it allows the extra part time staff to be in place to be utilized when regular crews are unavailable, without incurring additional costs during low demand periods.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no overall budget impacts associated with the recommendation as the hiring of part time employees would reduce the need to fill special event hours at overtime rates. The Halifax Transit budget does include funding for providing additional ferry service during special events.

RISK CONSIDERATION

There is a risk that attracting and retaining part time employees will be challenging, and that increased service during special events will not be provided.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was undertaken for this specific report; however, Halifax Transit has received very positive feedback in the past about the increase in special event service.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

It is anticipated that the provision of increased ferry service during special events will encourage more attendees to use public transit, thereby reducing congestion and greenhouse gas emissions.

ALTERNATIVES

The Transportation Standing Committee could recommend one of the other options presented in the discussion section of this report. Should an alternative be recommended that has budget implications, direction on funding would be required.

The Transportation Standing Committee could recommend an alternative option, not presented in the discussion section. It is likely that this would require a supplemental report and cost analysis.

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.

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