

March 30, 2015

Halifax Regional Council

City Hall

1841 Argyle Street, Main Floor

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Dear Mayor Savage and Councilors of the Halifax Regional Municipality,

The Chamber has read the Moving Forward Together plan with great interest. Transit is an important issue for Halifax businesses, and it is critical for the system to function as effectively as possible. Transit is necessary for commuters going to work and for consumers looking to reach our members. Even for those that do not use transit, an efficient system helps reduce the traffic congestion that drivers face every day. We have supported a redesigned bus network in our last two municipal pre-budget submissions and have high hopes for this process.

Compared to the system we have today, the Moving Forward Together plan is an undeniable improvement. Its simplified routes should result in faster, more consistent service that better reflects our city's needs. We also believe that the plan's proposal to classify most buses as corridor, link, or local routes is a sensible way to organize the system.

While there will be people who will be negatively affected by certain changes in service we strongly believe that taken as a whole, this plan will bring major benefits to Halifax. The new link service in particular should provide many more residents with access to a high quality commuting service. Due to Halifax's geography, there are limited opportunities to improve road access to the downtown. As our city grows, it will be very important for transit be a viable option for a wide variety of commuters.

In the current network, congestion and overlapping routes are a major problem in the downtown core. We understand that Halifax's geography is restrictive but it is not entirely clear how much better downtown congestion will be under the new plan. At the very least, greater clarification from Halifax Transit on this issue would be welcome.

We were also hoping to see more details on potential transit priority measures. As we noted in our pre-budget submission, Halifax Transit has used these measures on the current Metro Link routes and they have helped improve reliability without seriously affecting traffic. While the implementation of transit priority measures certainly needs careful study, we would support a more aggressive implementation schedule. As a whole, it will take many years to fully implement this plan. We had hoped to see a faster rollout to avoid the risk that municipal priorities could change mid-way through the plan.

In our pre-budget submission, we also called on Halifax Transit to implement these changes within its current funding structure and we were very pleased to see that fares and taxes will remain the same

under this plan. It will be important for Halifax Transit and Council to hold to the plan's performance measures and make changes accordingly. Maximizing the effectiveness of our transit resources is an important part of keeping future costs under control.

We understand that this is a complicated proposal but we will be looking for any changes to this plan to represent the best interests of Halifax as a whole. This is the first serious proposal to overhaul Halifax's transit system in decades and we are looking forward to the results.

Kind Regards,

Nancy Conrad,
Senior Vice-President, Policy