

Multiparty body deals effectively with transportation issues

I want to tell Chamber members about a productive multi-party body dealing with regional transportation issues called the Strategic Joint Regional Transportation Committee (SJRTC). Eight years ago, the Chamber's Transportation Strategy proposed a Regional Transportation Authority. While the organization didn't come about exactly as envisioned, the SJRTC has become a significant forum for the city and province to compare and coordinate transportation planning. The committee is co-chaired by HRM Chief Administrative Officer Dan English and the province's Deputy Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, David Darrow. Other committee members are the Halifax-Dartmouth Bridge Commission's General Manager and CEO Steve Snider, the Greater Halifax Partnership's President and CEO Stephen Dempsey and the Halifax Chamber of Commerce. As Transportation Committee Chair, I have the honour of representing the Chamber.

We tackle important issues and get much valuable work done in our quarterly meetings. Here are some recent developments:

Crosswalk Safety Task Force Report

Since the report was tabled in early 2008, the city's transportation department and the provincial Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal (NS TIR) have been implementing its regulations. NS TIR has already begun a pilot project to investigate the effectiveness of lower, shoulder-height flashing amber beacons. NS TIR has also developed a three year program to cost share with towns upgrading flashing amber beacons to larger, more visible ones. They are also helping the provincial Health Promotion and Protection department create messages about crosswalk safety. Finally, the Department of Justice and NS TIR are working together in developing recommendations to improve enforcement.

Update on Transportation Master Plan

The committee appointed a study team to examine issues in HRM's Transportation Master Plan including active transportation, regional parking, the Highway 107(Burnside-Sackville) corridor study, the five-year transit plan and many others. A report is due back to the SJRTC in April 2009.

Metro Transit funding

After amalgamation, provincial funding of Metro Transit was passed to HRM from the province in a cost-swapping agreement. At the time of writing, the Province was standing by its previous agreement with the city not to fund MetroTransit. However, provincial officials have recently admitted that new concerns (such as climate change) may require reconsideration of this funding arrangement.

High speed ferry

HRM Transportation is preparing a business case for the proposed high-speed ferry between several points on the harbour, starting with Bedford and the downtown area. It will be presented to HRM Council in February or March 2009.

Integrated Transportation Corridor ('rail cut') Study

Consultants from McCormick Rankin Corp., selected by the Nova Scotia Gateway Initiative, are studying the feasibility of an Integrated Transportation Corridor in Halifax. This study will consider environmental impacts of diverting traffic from downtown; total costs of the proposed project; whether the corridor can enhance public transit and whether it can incorporate greenway features, such as bike paths and hiking trails. The report is due to be finished on January 30, 2009.

Conclusion

Like many others, I had initial reservations about the value of a Committee instead of the Chamber's proposed authority. However, I have found work on the SJRTC to be productive and useful. It is gratifying to work with senior partners who share the same goal - creating one of the best, most efficient municipal transportation systems in Canada.

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