

It's More Than Buses

Transit is about access, mobility and a better city!

Join the conversation about the future of public transportation in Halifax.

An Open Letter to Halifax Regional Municipality's Transportation Standing Committee

Transportation Standing Committee
c/o Office of the Municipal Clerk
City Hall
1841 Argyle Street, Main Floor
PO Box 1749
Halifax, NS B3J 3A5

January 5, 2012

Dear Committee Members:

As members of the *It's More Than Buses* organizing team, we are writing to respond to Metro Transit's *Five Big Moves for Transit* as described in the November 24, 2011 Information Report. First, we would like to commend the Transportation Standing Committee (TSC) for its efforts to improve public transit service in HRM through calling for the Five Big Moves. We also commend Metro Transit for proposing Five Big Moves that would, if implemented, result in significant improvements to HRM's public transit system.

It's More Than Buses (IMTB) is committed to implementation of a set of Guiding Principles developed by citizens at three public forums (see: www.pdcentre.ca). While implementation of Metro Transit's Five Big Moves would represent significant progress, we feel there are critical elements missing from the proposals that need to be addressed to ensure transit becomes a viable and attractive alternative to travel by car within HRM. We describe these elements below.

Address Priority for Transit along High-Frequency Corridors

Big Move #1 - High Frequency Corridors fails to address the importance of protecting transit vehicles from traffic congestion along the high-frequency corridors. Protecting transit from congestion results in improved reliability of service and shorter trip times that are more competitive with travel by car. Eliminating or reducing delays due to congestion would address the "scheduling adherence" issue described in *Big Move #2 - Investing in Service Quality and Reliability*. Protecting transit from congestion also translates into fewer transit vehicles being needed to maintain frequent service along corridors.

HRM's *Halifax Peninsula Transit Corridor* study is investigating opportunities to provide priority to transit along a single corridor (Highway 102/Northwest Arm Drive Interchange to the Scotia Square terminal). This study will result in recommendations on how to protect transit from congestion through this key entry point to the peninsula, but will not address transit priority across a cohesive network of high-frequency corridors serving the urban core.

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Identify the High-Frequency Transit Network

The “Five Big Moves” identifies “potential” frequent service corridors, but lacks a clear plan for a high-frequency network connecting high-density residential, commercial, institutional and employment centres within the urban core. Clear identification of the high-frequency network would make it obvious to everyone what HRM and Metro Transit are working toward. A clearly articulated plan for the high-frequency network is also necessary for consideration of future development and is particularly timely given the ongoing five-year review of the Regional Plan. Without a clear plan for the high-frequency network, improvements to service risk being piecemeal and even inconsistent with the larger, long-term vision and goals of HRM and its citizens.

Simplify the Transit Network

While *Big Move #1 - High Frequency Corridors* mentions branding of certain corridors as “Frequent Service” in order to improve consistency of service, we recommend a much stronger commitment to rationalization of routes and simplification of the network. Participants at our three forums repeatedly described this as a top priority: HRM citizens want a transit network that is easy to understand and convenient to use.

Develop a Framework to Guide Siting and Design of Transit Terminals

HRM’s Regional Plan contains several policies in support of “transit-oriented centres,” but does not offer a clear policy framework for their design and implementation. *Big Move #2 - Investing in Service Quality and Reliability* describes the importance of replacing the existing Lacewood terminal to ensure a positive experience for transit riders. The current lack of clear policies to define the role of transit terminals within the regional transit system and to guide the siting and design of terminals likely contributed to the negative reaction from the community to the proposed Willett St. site, and may result in the selection of a less-than-optimal site for the new terminal in Clayton Park.

HRM staff have already initiated a process to “consider amending the Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy and the Halifax Mainland Land Use By-law to create a new zone to regulate the development of transit facilities” (Case 16029, Report to Council, March 29, 2011). This presents an opportunity to engage the public in developing policies to regulate the siting and design of new transit terminals, and the appropriate form of development around existing and future terminals.

Now is the Time to Invest in Public Transit

We encourage the TSC to be bold as it considers how to move forward from the proposed Five Big Moves. Given the new shipbuilding contract, the five-year review of the Regional Plan and the initiation of the next phase of HRM by Design, HRM is at a turning point with respect to the future mobility of its citizens and their quality of life. The *It's More Than Buses* team advocates **transformational investments in public transit** to reinforce growth in the Regional Centre, improve service for the 90,000 users currently riding Metro Transit on a daily basis, encourage increased transit ridership, and reduce congestion for those who need to use their private vehicles. As former City of Toronto Chief Planner and IMTB Session 3 speaker Paul Bedford recently said about funding the GTA’s “Big Move” transit plan, “if we want to do this we can afford to do it, but we have to bite the bullet.”

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Thank you for your careful consideration of our response to the proposed Five Big Moves. We applaud the efforts of the TSC and Metro Transit to improve the quality of HRM's public transit system and look forward to continuing our dialogue on this important topic over the coming weeks.

Sincerely,



Mark Nener



Kaitlin Pianosi



Douglas Wallace



Sarah Metherall

on behalf of the *It's More Than Buses* organizing team

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or call: 902.494.3678