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**Item No. 12.3.1**  
**Transportation Standing Committee**  
**September 28, 2017**

**TO:** Chair and Members of Transportation Standing Committee

**SUBMITTED BY:** Original signed by  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Ben Buckwold, Chair, Active Transportation Advisory Committee

**DATE:** June 23, 2017

**SUBJECT:** LeMarchant St. Thomas Drop-off Loop

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**ORIGIN**

Presentation to the May 18, 2017 meeting of the Active Transportation Advisory Committee.  
Motion by the Active Transportation Advisory Committee at the June 15, 2017 meeting.

**LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

Terms of Reference of the Active Transportation Advisory Committee – ‘The mandate of the Active Transportation Advisory Committee is to advise the Transportation Standing Committee on all matters relating to active transportation in Halifax Regional Municipality, using the Active Transportation Plan as a guide’.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Active Transportation Advisory Committee recommends the Transportation Standing Committee review the presentation by the Ecology Action Centre regarding the LeMarchant-St. Thomas Elementary School proposed drop-off loop. The Active Transportation Advisory Committee is concerned that the proposed drop-off loop reduces the potential for students to safely access the school through active transit modes.

## **BACKGROUND**

At the May 18, 2017 meeting of the Active Transportation Advisory Committee, the Committee received a presentation by Natalia Diaz-Insense, Youth Active Transportation Coordinator with the Ecology Action Centre in regard to safety and health concerns with the LeMarchant St. Thomas School, in particular, a proposed drop-off loop.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Committee was sympathetic to Natalia Diaz-Insense position that the siting of the drop-off loop in plans for the development of the LeMarchant St. Thomas School property could impact the safety of active transportation access to the school. The Committee agreed that the location of the drop-off loop, near the school's main entrance, could create conflict by increasing vehicular traffic at the primary access point for students. Natalia Diaz-Insense also felt that a drop-off loop was unnecessary at Le Marchant St. Thomas and that vehicular drop-offs should be discouraged in favour of promoting active transportation modes. Although the Committee was sympathetic to this view, discussion concluded likelihood of eliminating motor vehicle drop-offs was very low and that it was important to safely manage drop-off traffic with the site plan. The Committee agreed that identifying an alternative drop-off location, away from the main entrance, would improve the safety of students accessing the school through active transportation modes.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Financial implications have not been identified. Any financial implications associated with this request would have to be identified in a future staff report.

## **RISK CONSIDERATION**

Risk considerations have not been identified. Any risk considerations associated with this request would have to be identified in a future staff report.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The Active Transportation Advisory Committee is comprised of four members at large, a member representing a walkability group in the region, and one representative from the following organizations: Halifax Regional Trails Association, Halifax Cycling Coalition, Province of Nova Scotia, Bicycle Nova Scotia, Ecology Action Centre, Advisory Committee on Accessibility in HRM. Three Councillors also sit on the Committee. Active Transportation Advisory Committee meetings are open to the public and agendas and minutes can be viewed online at [www.Halifax.ca](http://www.Halifax.ca).

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

None associated with this report.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

The Committee did not provide alternatives.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1: Presentation submitted to the Active Transportation Advisory Committee by Natalia Diaz-Insense, Youth Active Transportation Coordinator, Ecology Action Centre

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by:       Sheilagh Edmonds, Legislative Assistant, Municipal Clerk's Office, 902.490.6520  
Ben Buckwold, Chair, Active Transportation Advisory Committee

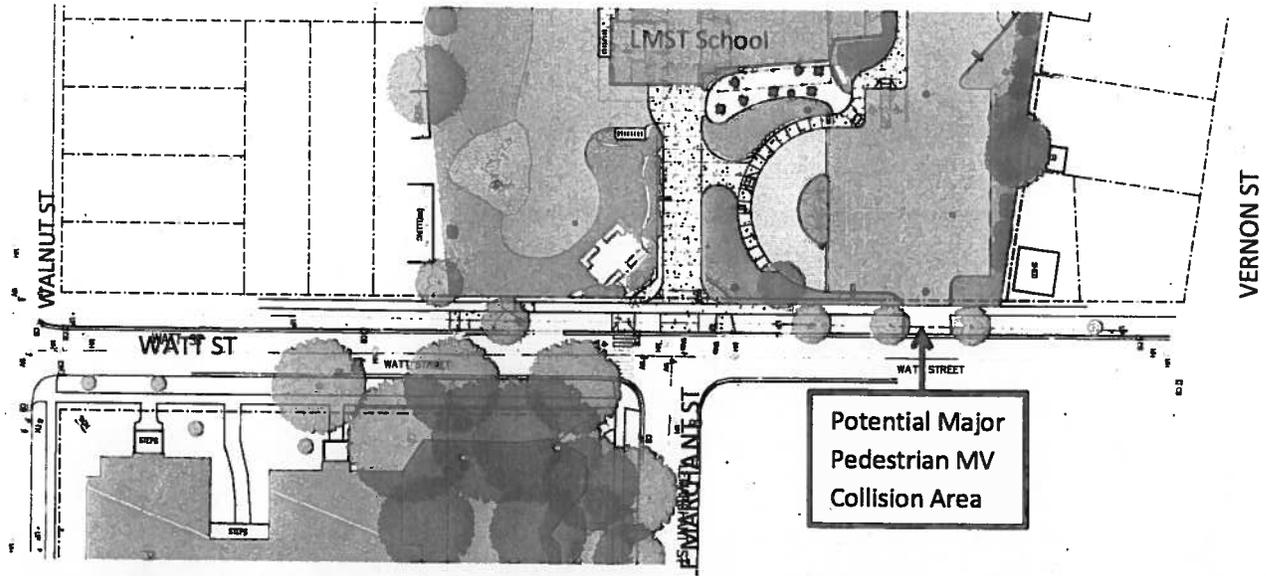
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## Safety & Health concerns with LeMarchant-St Thomas Elementary School

presented to HRM's Active Transportation Advisory Committee  
by Natalia Diaz-Insense, Youth Active Transportation Coordinator (Ecology Action Centre)

### 1. LMST Proposed Drop-Off Loop

[http://www.hrsb.ca/sites/default/files/hrsb/peninsula\\_south\\_site\\_plan.pdf](http://www.hrsb.ca/sites/default/files/hrsb/peninsula_south_site_plan.pdf)



### 2. Health & Safety risks caused by this particular loop at LMST

It is not a bus loop, it a drop off loop for cars. It is an **open invitation for parents to drive and drop off kids in front of the school** (door to door service) as opposed to getting the kids to walk & be active. This loop was proposed to alleviate traffic congestion, but will instead trigger more congestion and become a safety and health hazard to children who attend LMST.

It does not follow the recommendations made by the **Canadian Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE)** according to which passenger pick-up and drop-off areas should (1) be placed at the **rear or side entrances** or buildings and **away from main entrance**, (2) not pass in front of main entrances, (3) **not cross major sidewalks or other pedestrian facilities**, and (4) be located downstream of the building entrance –cf. *Promoting Sustainable Transportation Through Site Design Manual*, p. 24.

- Increased **traffic volume** in the neighbourhood.
- Increased **amounts of air pollution** around the school and neighbourhood
- Increased **traffic congestion** in front of and around the school due to cars having to cross the sidewalk to access the drop-off area, and waiting to get to the drop-off area
- Increased **risk of short term health problems** such as **allergen sensitization**, worsening **asthma** and **decreased lung function** due to the fact that children breath 50% more air per pound of body weight than adults (Salvi, 2007) –let alone all the **long term health risks** associated with inactivity (e.g. early onset of heart disease, osteoporosis, Type II diabetes, and high blood pressure)
- Increased **dangerous driving behaviour** associated with higher traffic congestion within 300 m. of the school (Rothman et al. 2016)
- Increased **risk of injury to children** due to the loop: each dangerous driving behaviour during school drop-off period was associated with 45% increase in collision rates (Rothman et al. 2016)



### 3. Rationale given to date for this particular drop-off loop at LMST

- **School Steering Team meeting Minutes (Nov 2016)**

[http://www.hrsb.ca/sites/default/files/hrsb/hspes\\_sst\\_minutes\\_8-nov-2016.pdf](http://www.hrsb.ca/sites/default/files/hrsb/hspes_sst_minutes_8-nov-2016.pdf)

DM (TIR): Drop off lane is 20 feet wide. Just wide enough for two cars. It is not wide enough for a car to park while the driver runs inside the school, nor is it a bus loop. There is one school bus and it would drop off and pick up out on the street.

Other general relevant comments by SST members:

Do we need the drop-off loop? Eliminating it would create more green space.

Some people park on the street and walk their children to the school

Some parents drop their child off right at the school

**The drop off loop is essential for student safety**

- **School Steering Team meeting Minutes (March 2017)**

[http://www.hrsb.ca/sites/default/files/hrsb/hspes\\_sst\\_minutes\\_27-mar-2017.pdf](http://www.hrsb.ca/sites/default/files/hrsb/hspes_sst_minutes_27-mar-2017.pdf)

DJ (LMST-SAC): Do we have to have the "kiss and go" loop?

DM (TIR): At a **previous stakeholders meeting people wanted to fix the congestion on Watt Street. The loop will calm congestion.**

JS (MLA): **Many of the LeMarchat/St Thomas students do not walk to the school. The school neighbours want better traffic flow by their houses.** A complaint from parents is that the traffic congestion decreases safety for their children. **The "kiss and go" lane decreases congestion and makes things safer for the children.**

JO (LMST-SAC): It appears from the drawing that the "kiss and go" lane has been moved a little further to the right of the entrance away from the walkway up to the school. Darrell confirmed that this is actually the case and a **positive result of the hybrid approach** [to the parking problem].

Endnote: New School Parking Information Session will be held on Tuesday, April 4 at 6:30 am at Gorsebrook School.

- **Public meeting (April 4, 2017)**

Very limited-no discussion about the loop. LMST VP provided anecdotal evidence regarding the benefits of a drop-off loop in another school.

- **NSTIR & NSEECD (April 19 2017) - Letter to TIR & EECD Deputy Ministers** (attached)

PL: Considerable input along similar lines. A number of passionate individuals argue against the drop off loop for similar reasons, but a large number of parents and educators are interested in it. Note on ITR: They are not the decision makers, just the **project designers**, and will soon be construction managers.

- **HRSB (May 1, 2017) - Letter to HRSB Superintendent** (attached)

### 4. Request to HRM-ATAC

To weigh in on the health & safety concerns the proposed drop-off loop at LMST will have on traffic congestion, air pollution and other modes of transportation (level of service), given recommended best practices and existing or on-going municipal AT standards, strategies and plans such as:

- Halifax 2014-19 Active Transportation Priorities Plan
- Halifax Regional Plan 2014 & Integrated Mobility Plan (in progress)

To demand that TIR/HRSB/EECD provide *non-anecdotal evidence* regarding the claim that the loop will calm traffic congestion and make things safer, since all expert evidence will have on the effects of such a loop contradicts this claim –cf. attached references (Rothman et al. 2016)





### 3.4.2 Passenger Pick-Up and Drop-Off Areas

**OBJECTIVE** To make buildings safer to enter and more accessible by minimizing conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians and minimizing walking distances.

**GUIDELINES** Pick-Up and Drop-Off Area Location and Access

- Locate passenger pick-up and drop-off areas at side or rear entrances of buildings and away from the main entrance. The appropriate location, type and size of passenger pick-up and drop-off facilities will vary by size and type of development. Maximum walking distance to entrances should be no greater than 30 m.
- Ensure vehicle circulation routes to and from pick-up and drop-off areas do not pass in front of main entrances and where possible, do not cross major sidewalks or other pedestrian facilities.
- Mark and illuminate pedestrian routes to building entrances from the pick-up and drop-off area. Routes should be clearly defined and uninterrupted.

**On-Street Pick-Up and Drop-Off Areas**

- Locate on-street drop-off and pick-up areas downstream of the building entrance and out of transit stop areas. This ensures that drivers passing by an entrance have an unobstructed view of key pedestrian areas.

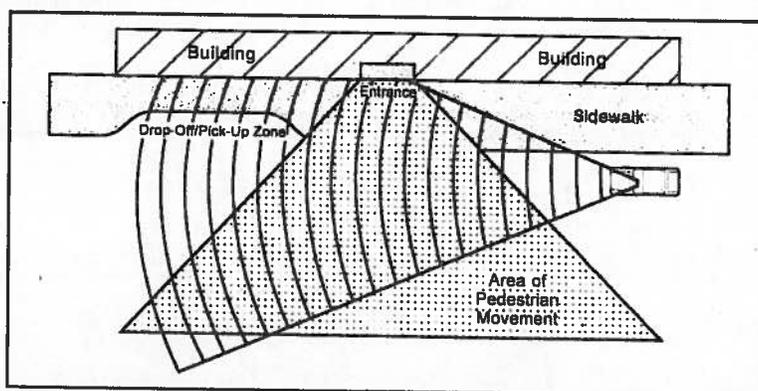


Figure 3-10. Schematic illustration of proper pick-up and drop-off area location. Drivers have an unobstructed view of key pedestrian routes.

Source: ITE. Transportation and Land Development. 2002. pg. 8-30.

- Provide recessed pick-up and drop-off areas to improve visibility and prevent waiting cars from interrupting the flow of traffic. These areas should be designed to ensure demand does not exceed supply, and access and egress is safe and efficient.

**RELATED TOPICS**

Guide Signing (3.5.3), Waiting Areas and Transit Shelters (3.6.1)

**RELATED RESOURCES**

□ Institute of Transportation Engineers. *Transportation and Land Development*, 2nd Edition. Washington, DC: ITE, 2002.



April 19, 2017

Paul T. LaFleche  
Deputy Minister, TIR  
1672 Granville St., 2nd Floor  
Johnston Building  
Halifax, NS B3J 3Z8

Sandra McKenzie  
Deputy Minister, EECD  
2021 Brunswick St. 4th Floor  
Brunswick Place  
Halifax, NS B3K 2Y5

Dear Mr. LaFleche and Mrs. McKenzie,

I am the Youth Active Transportation (AT) Coordinator for Mainland NS, and I am writing to you with regards to the new school being built in the south end of Halifax to replace LeMarchant-St Thomas Elementary School (LMST), and, specifically, to express deep concerns about the drop-off loop that has been proposed for that school, according to the March minutes posted on the HRSB website and the public information meeting I attended earlier this month.

I have been promoting AT programs for several years, and worked closely with many school communities across NS to help them address traffic congestion, air pollution, and effectively increase the number of students who are active on the way to/from school. The traffic congestion that exists at LMST is not unique. Like so many other places in Canada and the US, it is due to the fact that many parents/guardians are reluctant to let their kids walk or wheel to school because of perceived and actual traffic dangers during student arrival and dismissal. Ironically, by choosing to drive their kids to school, these parents are creating additional traffic problems and unsafe conditions for others to walk.

Drop-off loops are indeed built in schools with the idea that they help reduce traffic congestion or create safer traffic conditions. While these infrastructure (or engineering) solutions are known to work in certain locations such as suburban schools, they are actually known to trigger the opposite effect in urban neighbourhoods. Recent research on the subject of Pedestrian Motor Vehicle Collisions (PMVC) around schools in the city of Toronto has demonstrated that dangerous driver behavior, which takes place within 300m. of the school during the morning rush, is associated with 45% increase in collision rates, but is less common at schools with less traffic congestion, designated drop off areas, and school crossing guards (Rothman et al. 2016).

LMST is a walking school, i.e. a school whose students should be able to get to by walking, biking or other forms of sustainable transportation other than cars. A drop off loop such as the one proposed for LMST as a solution to traffic congestion will not reduce traffic, but rather encourage everyone to drive to the front of the school, create more congestion, and become a safety hazard (and even a potential liability) for the school.

If driving is unavoidable for parents, other solutions such as designated drop off areas away from the school entrance or Park & Walk locations 5-10 min. away from the school are much more effective and safer than the proposed drop off loop. Park & Walk locations encourage students and parents to walk part way to school, receiving the benefits to their wellness that come with daily physical activity. Walking to school also fosters a sense of community and connectedness that is lost from driving to school.

Aside from the potential safety issues associated with increased traffic near the school, the proposed drop-off loop is a clear step in the wrong direction, as it sets up students to expect door-to-door service from a very young age. The number of students who are physically active on the way to/from school has dropped steadily over the last 30 years. We have reached a point where a serious effort needs to be made by all



levels of government, transportation authorities, health care professionals, educators, non-government agencies, and employers, to reverse the trend.

In 2010 LMST joined the School Travel Planning (STP) program, a comprehensive community based best practice approach that is currently used in Canada and other parts of the world to increase the number of students choosing active transportation modes to get to and from school by working together with all relevant community stakeholders to identify physical and attitudinal barriers to active transportation, and to develop and implement an action plan tailored to the needs of each school, which is updated every 3-5 years (see School Travel Plan attached).

Given all the evidence we have about drop off loops and the traffic concerns that currently exist and were already reported by the parents at the school back in 2010 (see attached summary), a drop-off loop such as the one recommended for LMST as a solution to traffic congestion is bound to make the problem worse. According to survey data collected recently in HRSB, 12-22% of parents who regularly drive their kids to school state that they would let them walk if there were safer/improved routes to school, and 30-38% of them report that would too if they didn't walk alone. Based on data collected in NS and other parts of Canada for encouragement programs such as Walk or Wheel to School (WOW), rates of students walking to school can be as high as 80%. Engaging the school community and other key stakeholders in devising a long-term strategy to effectively reduce traffic congestion and ensure a safe environment for students at LMST to walk is the goal of STP, and the best approach.

I am aware that the final decision on this matter rests with you. I hope that you will give serious consideration to the safety issues I have raised in this letter about the loop, and that the relevance of the STP approach as a safer and healthier alternative to the traffic congestion will prevail. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I am cc-ing here some of the School Steering Team members and HRM/HRSB staff who have participated in the process to keep them in the loop, and also let them know that we will be very happy to work with the school community to make walking and wheeling to school the norm, not only for the sake of student's safety, but also the academic, physical and mental health benefits that children and youth can derive from it, and the health and livelihood of the community overall.

Sincerely,

Natalia Diaz-Insense

Youth Active Transportation Coordinator (Mainland NS)

2705 Fern Lane, Halifax, NS B3K 4L3

Tel. 902.442.0209

cc: Darrell MacDonald, TIR  
Waye Mason, HRM Councillor - District 7  
Elwin LeRoux, HRSB Superintendent  
Ron Heiman, HRSB Operations  
Karyn Cooling, HRSB School Administration Supervisor  
Cindy Littlefair, HRSB Board Member - District 4  
Jeanne Boudreau, LMST Principal  
Monica Soilov, LMST VP  
Dave Jakeman, LMST SAC Chair  
Judi Obersi, SAC LMST Vice Chair



May 1, 2017

Elwin LeRoux  
Superintendent  
Halifax Regional School Board  
33 Spectacle Lake Drive  
Dartmouth, NS B3B 1C7

Dear Mr. LeRoux,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Ecology Action Centre with regards to the new school being built in the south end of Halifax to replace LeMarchant St Thomas Elementary School (LMST) to express my concerns about the proposed drop-off loop. Specifically, I want to stress the fact that building a drop-off loop in front of LMST school will not resolve traffic congestion, but make traffic congestion worse, increase pollution around the school, and not only encourage unhealthy habits, but become a safety hazard for the students who attend LMST, and a liability for the school board.

As I indicated in my letter to Mr. LaFleche and Mrs. McKenzie (dated April 19) of which you also received a copy, one of the reasons a drop-off loop in front of LMST school is not suitable is that the loop is very likely to **increase traffic congestion**, and as a result, **increase pedestrian and vehicle collision rates** and the **risk of injury** among children and youth attending the school. According to recent studies on the impact that built environment has on active school transportation, higher volume of traffic alone triggers a 45% increase in poor driving behaviours around school and higher Pedestrian Motor Vehicle Collision (PMVC) rates (cf. Rothman et al., 2016). In addition, LMST's drop-off loop is not only dangerous for the increase of traffic congestion, it will trigger, but also because it **does not conform to any AT transportation recommendations**. Based on the Canadian Institute of Transportation Engineers, passenger pick-up and drop-off areas should (1) be placed at side or rear entrances or buildings and away of the main entrance, (2) not pass in front of main entrances, (3) nor cross major sidewalks or other pedestrian facilities, and (4) be located downstream of the building entrance (cf. *Promoting Sustainable Transportation Through Site Design Manual*, p 24 --attached below). Aside from the increased risk of collision, the ~~increase in traffic volume around the school will also translate into a~~ **higher risk of developing short term health problems**, such as allergen sensitization, worsening asthma and decreased lung function due to the fact that children breath 50% more air per pound of body weight than adults (Salvi, 2007) --the long term negative health risks associated with inactivity are well known and too numerous to mention here, but include early onset of heart disease, osteoporosis, Type II diabetes, and high blood pressure.

There is no simple solution to the congestion problem, but as I mentioned in my letter to Mr. LaFleche and Mrs. McKenzie, the safest and healthiest alternative to addressing the traffic congestion at LMST is to try to promote active transportation. School Travel Planning (STP) is a collaborative best practice approach that engages the whole school community in identifying physical and attitudinal barriers to active transportation, and brings all relevant stakeholders



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together to create a school specific plan to remove these barriers, and effectively increase the number of children who walk or wheel to school.

Both HRSB and the NSDEECD have recently demonstrated that active transportation plays an important role in our students' wellness and academic development by incorporating it in its revised Student Transportation Policy and Learning Outcomes Framework, respectively. These are changes that we applaud. However, choices made with regards to the schools that students attend should be consistent with that. Being physically active on the way to school is something our students need not just learn about, but be able to do safely.

As recognized by the Safe, Secure and Healthy Schools Policy (B.021, principle 1.2), it is the "right of all students to learn [...] in a safe, secure and healthy environment, free from any form of [...] confirmed environmental issue." According to this policy, it is the *responsibility* of the school board to create schools that support and sustain such an environment for learning, to the extent of its authority and ability to do so (cf. principles 1.5-1.6 and 4.2). For this reason, due diligence must be called for in the design of the school and any designated drop-off area.

Given the demonstrated safety and health risks associated with the proposed drop-off loop, the recommendations highlighted above and this policy, I believe that going ahead with such a loop in spite of it would be a case of extreme negligence, and a potential liability for HRSB. For this reason, I strongly recommend that the Halifax Regional School Board not build the proposed loop in front of LMST school.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to clarifying any questions you may have on this matter, and working with you and other partners on this or other issues that relate to active transportation in the future.

Sincerely,

Natalia Diaz-Insense  
Youth Active Transportation Coordinator (Mainland NS)

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cc: Dave Jakeman, LMST SAC Chair  
Judi Obersi, SAC LMST Vice Chair  
Jeanne Boudreau, LMST Principal  
Monica Stoilov, LMST VP  
Karyn Cooling, HRSB School Administration Supervisor  
Ron Heiman, HRSB Operations  
Cindy Littlefair, HRSB Board Member - District 4  
Waye Mason, HRM Councillor - District 7  
Darrell MacDonald, TIR  
Paul LaFleche, Deputy Minister, NSDTIR  
Sandra McKenzie, Deputy Minister, NSDEECD