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Item No. 12.1.2
Transportation Standing Committee
November 23, 2017

TO: Chair and Members of the Transportation Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed
Bruce Zvaniga, P.Eng., Director of Transportation and Public Works

DATE: September 11, 2017

SUBJECT: Pedestrian Connection, St. Margaret's Bay

ORIGIN

Item 15.5, Regional Council, May 24, 2016, MOVED by Deputy Mayor Whitman, seconded by Councillor Walker THAT Halifax Regional Council request a staff report to explore a pedestrian connection from St. Margaret's Bay Elementary to the St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails and the HRM ball field, playground and Bay waterfront access.

Item 15.1 Regional Council, November 8, 2016 MOVED by Councillor Whitman, seconded by Councillor Hendsbee THAT Halifax Regional Council request an addition to the motion approved by Council on May 24, 2016 as follows:

"THAT Halifax Regional Council request a staff report to explore a pedestrian connection from St. Margaret's Bay Elementary to the St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails and the HRM ball field, playground and Bay waterfront access." *to stipulate that the requested staff report also consider private road ownership and connection to the Old Chester Road and budgetary implications.*

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, clause 79 (1)(aa): "The Council may expend money required by the Municipality for (aa) streets, culverts, retaining walls, sidewalks, curbs and gutters;"

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, subsection 61 (1): "The Municipality may acquire and own property granted or conveyed to the Municipality either absolutely or in trust for a public or charitable purpose."

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, clause 79 (1)(ah): "The Council may expend money required by the Municipality for: (ah) playgrounds, trails...bicycle paths, swimming pools, ice arenas and other recreational facilities;" Administrative Order One, the Procedures of Council Administrative Order, Schedule 7, Transportation Standing Committee Terms of Reference, clause 7(b) which states: "The Transportation Standing Committee shall...(b) promote and encourage the Municipality's Active Transportation corridor initiatives which supports the overall Transportation Strategy as outlined in the Regional Plan".

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RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Transportation Standing Committee recommend that Regional Council direct staff to continue planning pedestrian connections from St. Margaret's Bay Elementary to the St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails and the HRM ball field, playground and Bay waterfront access as identified in the Discussion section of this report, and report back to the Transportation Standing Committee with a proposed pedestrian connection.

BACKGROUND

The St. Margaret's Bay Area Rails to Trails is a 33 km multi-use pathway that extends from Hubley to Hubbards. It is part of a longer segment of former rail corridor extending from Halifax (Joseph Howe Drive) to Lunenburg. The St. Margaret's Bay Area Rails to Trails corridor is owned by the provincial government and is operated and maintained by the St. Margaret's Bay Area Rails to Trails Association, a volunteer community group, under a license agreement with the Province.

The trail is considered part of the active transportation network in HRM. HRM provides annual maintenance funding to the association of about \$10,000 per year. Also, in the past two years, HRM has provided a total of \$100,000 to the association to assist with recapitalizing the facility. It is anticipated that further AT funding will be requested by the Association to complete recapitalization plans in 2018-19. While the executive of that Association is supportive of improving connectivity to the trail, their priority is the recapitalization and ongoing maintenance of their 33 km facility. Assisting this group with their recapitalization plans has been the main HRM AT priority in this area.

St. Margaret's Bay Elementary School serves approximately 390 students in Primary through Grade 6. It is located on Ridgewood Dr., just off St. Margaret's Bay Road (Trunk 3). There are no dedicated pedestrian facilities linking the school to the adjacent community.

The ballfield and playground referenced in the above motion are part of R.S. Allen Memorial Park and are owned by HRM. They are located on St. Margaret's Bay Road, opposite the intersection with Ridgewood Dr. There are no dedicated pedestrian connections to the ballfield or playground. There is no pedestrian crossing of St. Margaret's Bay Road in this area.

HRM owns a number of parcels of waterfront property off of St. Margaret's Bay Road and residential roads adjacent to R.S. Allen Memorial Park. All but one of these parcels are undeveloped. Map 2 in Attachment 1 illustrates the location of these parcels.

St. Margaret's Bay Road in this area is owned and maintained by the Province of Nova Scotia. The St. Margaret's Bay Area Rails to Trails corridor parallels St. Margaret's Bay Road for most of its length, however, in the area of the school and ballfield, it diverts about 800 metres inland, away from the road.

Community members are interested in making a direct link between the area of the school, ballfield, playground, waterfront and the St. Margaret's Bay Area Rails to Trails. This is to provide recreational opportunities for students and to make it easier and safer to travel in this rural community as a pedestrian. There has been no overall planning for pedestrian and bicycling facilities in this community.

The provincial government owns a small parcel of land (approximately 450 metres long and about 10 metres wide) between the area of the school and the trail that was a former coach road. The Province would like to dispose of the property and has offered it to HRM. While this parcel does not make the connection from the school/ballfield to the trail, it may need to be crossed if a connector trail was built.

HRM's 2014-19 Active Transportation Priorities Plan identifies one facility in this community, the above-mentioned rails to trails corridor. There has been no further planning about where additional walking or

bicycling facilities could be added. Recommendation #31 of the Plan states that the municipality should "...continue to improve connections between existing communities and nearby greenways [trails]."

There are requests for improved walking and bicycling facilities from rural communities across the municipality. These communities typically do have clusters of services (e.g. shopping), institutions (e.g. schools) and residences within "walkable" distances. However, there are no separate facilities, and residents need to walk or bike on the shoulders of higher-speed secondary provincial highways. While the need for such facilities is justified, the costs can be a challenge. Recommendation 5 of the Active Transportation Priorities Plan states that "Halifax needs to develop a comprehensive approach to the delivery of rural active transportation facilities, including criteria for determining the most appropriate AT facility type, and consideration of the financial implications (capital and operating) of doing so." This is also likely to be part of the forthcoming Integrated Mobility Plan.

The development of a rural pedestrian strategy has been presented to the public as a potential element in the Integrated Mobility Plan, which is scheduled to be presented to Regional Council in fall 2017.

Some pedestrian facilities are developed and maintained by volunteer community associations in HRM. These are typically members of the Halifax Regional Trails Association. HRM has provided annual financial support to member groups for facilities that are part of the municipal AT Plan.

DISCUSSION

Staff has developed some potential alignments with high-level cost estimates and property implications to make an improved pedestrian connection between St. Margaret's Bay Elementary School and the trail. These were based on a site tour of the area, preliminary communications with property owners and reviews of maps. These are illustrated on Map 1 in the attachment to this report.

The options explored are as follows:

Option 1: Multi-use Pathway in Provincial Right-of-Way beside St. Margaret's Bay Road

This would be a 1.2 km, 3m wide, paved pathway for walking and bicycling, that links the intersection of Ridgewood Dr. and St. Margaret's Bay Road to the area of the Bike and Bean Café at 5401 St. Margaret's Bay Road, where the trail and the road are next to each other. This option involves filling in the ditch, installing drainage pipes, curb and building a multi-use pathway. It may impact and require relocation of utility poles.

While no formal cost estimates have been undertaken on this option, costs of previous such projects in past years have ranged from about \$1,000/m to over \$1,700/m. Such a project on this stretch could be over \$2,000,000 (Class D). Under the current process 100% of the funding would stem from local improvement charges. It would require significant co-ordination with the Province, and ongoing operation and maintenance of such a facility would have to be considered.

A benefit of this approach would be that the only property permission required would be from the Province of Nova Scotia. No formal discussions have taken place with the Province on this option. Another benefit is that it would provide access to other residential roads, stores and residences along the road.

This option could also just be a 1.5m or 1.8m concrete sidewalk for pedestrians only. A multi-use pathway, however, would provide more benefit at a similar cost.

The connection to the ballfield, playground, and waterfront from this facility would involve crossing St. Margaret's Bay Road near Ridgewood Dr. and using residential roads.

Option 2: Develop an Active Transportation Corridor by Crossing Adjacent Private Lands

This would be an 800m to 1km corridor that would require obtaining property permissions from at least three land owners. It would involve:

- using existing private streets neighboring the school in a small sub-division. These streets do not have sidewalks, but have very low traffic volume;
- crossing an undeveloped residential lot; and,
- connecting to the rails to trails facility through Nova Scotia Power properties containing a private gravel road and hydroelectric infrastructure.

More planning is required on the potential facility types for this option. Options could include 1.8 – 3m crusher dust trail, shared use with streets and roads, asphalt 3m wide pathway, or a combination. It is difficult to provide even a high-level cost estimate for this option. Given that it is a shorter distance, and may not have as stringent standards as a facility in the right-of-way, it would probably be less expensive than Option 1. How such a facility could be funded is not clear at this time.

Contact has been made with these property owners and all are open to the possible use of their property to develop a pedestrian connection, but, have indicated that there are many issues that would have to be investigated and resolved. Easement or lease agreements may have to be negotiated.

There may be a more community-based opportunity for implementation of Option 2. While community-based trails associations typically implement projects on public land, this approach should be further explored in this context. Issues such as maintenance, insurance, enforcement and other factors would need to be addressed. HRM's role in this model would have to be further explored.

The connection to the ballfield, playground, and waterfront from this facility would involve a new pedestrian facility on Ridgewood Dr. between the school and St. Margaret's Bay Road and then crossing the St. Margaret's Bay Road.

Option 3: Alternative Corridors Crossing Private Lands

There are other alignments between the school and the trail over private lands and the provincial property discussed above (former coach road). These include the private residential roads close to the school and then into undeveloped forested land. The distance would be approximately 1km.

Other factors related to this option are similar to Option 2. Not all property owners associated with this option have been contacted.

HRM currently has an option to acquire the former old coach road from the Province. However, this may not be necessary as it has only a minor benefit for this option. The connection between the School and the trail would only require permission to cross this property.

Recommended next steps

It is recommended that staff conduct consultation and additional planning with community members and stakeholders to advance improved walking and bicycle connections in the area of St. Margaret's Bay Elementary School and report to the Transportation Standing Committee with a proposed pedestrian connection. This would involve:

- public and stakeholder engagement to understand local preferences and priorities;
- further consideration of the future use of HRM waterfront parcels;
- more detailed discussions with the Province and private landowners;
- more detailed cost estimates of options;
- further exploration of a community-based model for implementation; and,
- any other elements as directed by Transportation Standing Committee.

Such planning could take place in the 2018-19 fiscal year

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. Any further costs that would be incurred with the implementation of any options would be reflected in future proposed capital budgets, and would have to be considered in conjunction with costs of other AT priorities.

RISK CONSIDERATION

There are no significant risks associated with the recommendations in this Report. The risks considered rate Low.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Additional community engagement is a recommendation of this report. There has been an initial site visit with a community member and the District Councillor.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct environmental implication to this report. Future pedestrian facilities would support more walking.

ALTERNATIVES

Transportation Standing Committee could direct staff to wait to pursue further planning until after a potential rural AT approach is elaborated in the Integrated Mobility Plan. This is not recommended because the timeline is uncertain and there is community interest in moving forward sooner. Once the planning phase has been completed, staff will have a better understanding of the complexities and feasibility of the options.

ATTACHMENTS

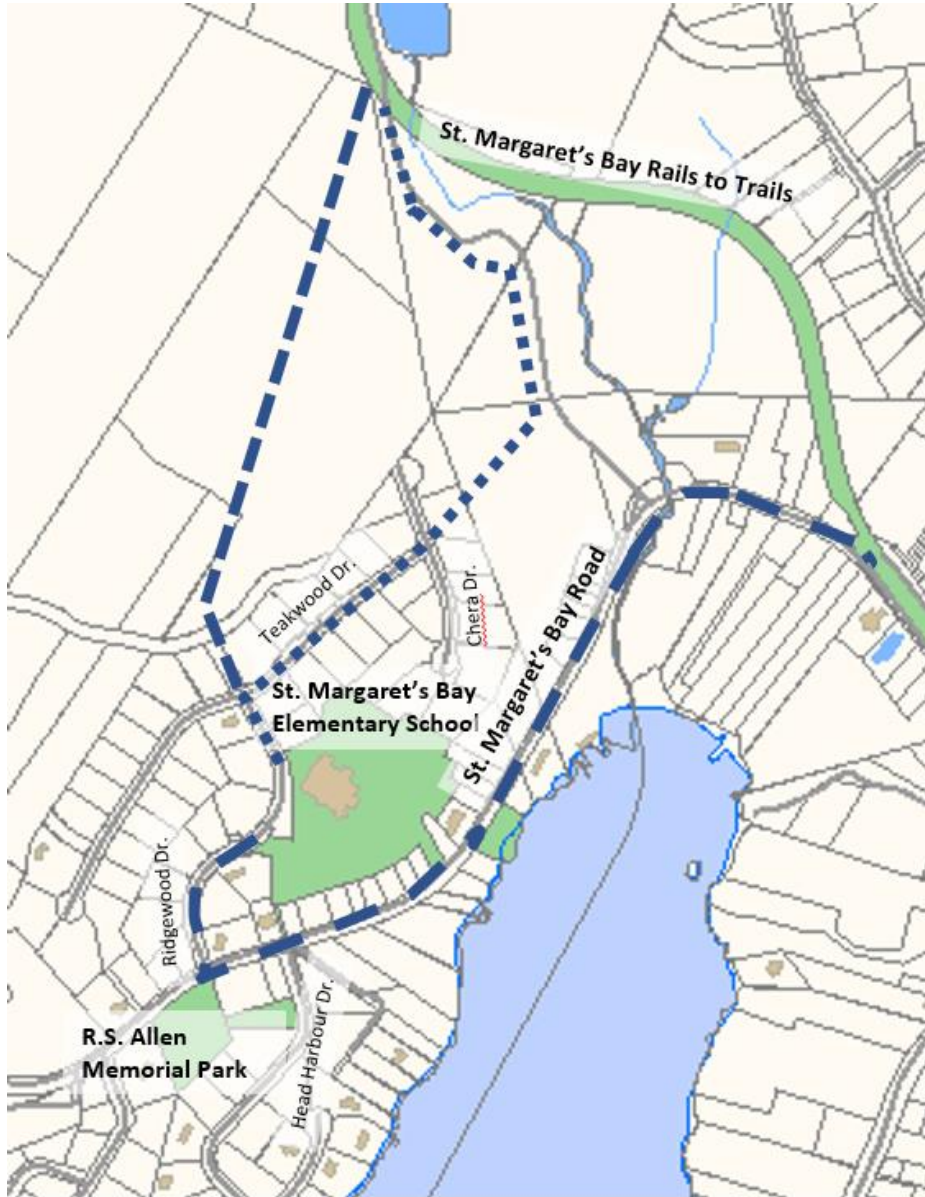
Attachment 1: Map of Subject Area with Options and Destinations

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.

Report Prepared by: David Maclsaac, Active Transportation Supervisor, 902.490.1665

Attachment 1: Map of Subject Area with Options and Destinations

Map 1: Pedestrian Connection Conceptual Alignment Options



**Conceptual Alignment Options
for Pedestrian Connections**

Option 1: — — — — —

Option 2: ······

Option 3: - - - - -

Map 2: HRM-owned waterfront parcels (circled)

