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Item No. 11
Halifax Regional Council
June 21, 2016

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by Director

Dave Reage, Director, Halifax Transit

DATE: June 1, 2016

SUBJECT: Free Transit on Election Day

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

At the March 22, 2016 meeting of Regional Council, the following motion was passed:

That Halifax Regional Council request a staff report regarding free transit on Election Day.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Subsection 69(1) of the *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter* provides the legislative authority for the municipality to provide a public transportation service. The following report conforms to the Charter.

Section 102 of the *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter* provides that Council may, by by-law, prescribe charges for the provision of services for persons who use or benefit from the service, on a basis to be set out in the by-law.

By-law U-100, the *User Charges By-law* (Proposed).

BACKGROUND

A municipal election will be held Saturday, October 15, 2016. Polls will be open from 8:00 am until 7:00 pm.

There will be alternative voting methods made available leading up to Election Day, both online and in-person. Voting for the municipal election will be available online from October 4 - 13. There will be in-person advance polls on Saturday October 8, 2016 and Tuesday October 11, 2016.

Voter turnout in the 2012 election was approximately 37%. Of the 110,000 votes cast in the 2012 Municipal Election, approximately 59% were through advance voting (both online and in person). Approximately 45,000 residents voted in-person on Election Day.

DISCUSSION

Provision of free transit service on Election Day is a strategy that has been applied by several other transit agencies across North America in an effort to increase voter turnout. While it is not anticipated that provision of free transit would significantly increase voter turnout in Halifax, this provision would communicate to the public that voting is important and that the Municipality is working to remove barriers to voting. This could also help foster new transit ridership by promoting transit as an option for non-commuting transportation.

Of the 69 confirmed polling locations, 44 are within 500 metres of a Halifax Transit bus stop that is serviced on Saturdays (Attachment A).

Free Transit Service on Election Day in North America

For the 2015 Canadian Federal Election free transit service was provided by several Canadian transit agencies including Prince George Transit, Saskatoon Transit, Nanaimo Regional Transit, Kelowna Regional Transit, and Victoria Regional Transit. Saskatoon Transit has also provided free transit in the past for Provincial and Municipal Elections. Although little information has been collected regarding the impact of these programs, it would seem that transit ridership and voter turnout were relatively unaffected by the provision of free transit service.

Several American transit agencies have provided free transit on Election Day for various levels of government for more than 20 years. In these cases there has been little or no evidence of increased voter turnout due to free transit.

Methods of Free Service Provision

In some of these cases transit agencies have supplied a free pass or required users to present a voter registration card in order to board without fare payment. In other cases transit was made free for all users the entire service day, regardless of the purpose of their trip. Common methods of free service provision include:

- Free service all day;
- Free service while polls are open;
- Voter Identification required for free boarding; or
- Free one day pass obtained by download or pickup at municipal facility.

The following table summarizes the options for providing free transit service on Election Day, including the operational and customer service concerns associated with each option, and the level of projected revenue loss (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing the lowest level and 5 representing the highest).

Table 1: Methods for Provision of Free Transit Service

Method	Potential Revenue Loss	Operational and Customer Service Concerns
Free service all day	5	None
Free service from 7am to 8pm	4	Time restrictions may be more difficult for operators to enforce
Voter Registration Letter in lieu of fare	2	Some potential voters who have recently moved or those who were not previously on the voters list may not receive a Voter Registration Letter, thus precluding them from accessing free transit service.
Free one day pass	2	Customers who lack internet access or access to a printer would have to visit a municipal facility to obtain a pass. Staff resources would be required to design and distribute passes.

Halifax Transit Revenue Implications

Halifax Transit collects an average of approximately \$48,000 in passenger revenue each Saturday. Approximately 47% of this revenue is generated through monthly and annual pass sales; the remaining 53% is generated through cash and ticket boardings. Assuming sales of passes would be unaffected by offering one free day of service, implementing a full Saturday of free transit service is estimated to create a potential revenue loss of approximately \$25,400.

However, scheduled to take place on this same date is the Nocturne: Art at Night Festival. This event typically causes an increase in ridership, particularly on the Alderney-Halifax Ferry where daily boardings have doubled normal levels during the event. Due to projected increases in ridership anticipated due to the Nocturne: Art at Night event, the revenue loss could increase to upwards of \$30,000.

This revenue loss could be reduced by requiring passengers to display a municipally distributed voter registration letter in order to board without paying a fare. This would provide free service to those registered voters intending to travel to and from their polling station, but would not allow unlimited use of transit by all passengers regardless of trip purpose. Passengers would be able to complete their return trip by retaining their letter for their return fare.

Revenue loss could also be limited by applying time restrictions to the free service.

Proposed User Charges By-law

The provision of free transit on Election Day would be permitted under the proposed By-law U-100, the *User Charges By-law*, Schedule 1: Halifax Transit User Charges, under clause 4(1)(b):

- 4 (1) Council, by resolution, or the CAO may waive any user charge under this Schedule:
 - (b) where, in the opinion of Council or the CAO, such a waiver would be beneficial to the Municipality;

If Council decided to provide free transit on Election Day, it may, by resolution, waive the user charges.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is potential for lost revenue from cash and ticket boardings up to an estimated maximum \$30,000. Annual revenues are based on projection, and the potential loss of revenue of up to approximately \$30,000 would fall within the projection's margin of error.

RISK CONSIDERATION

Risk related to the provision of free transit on Election Day includes potential revenue loss of up to approximately \$30,000, depending on the method of provision selected by Regional Council.

The provision of free transit may also increase the risk of vehicle capacity issues and potential overloads.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There is no community engagement associated with this information report.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - 2016 Municipal Election Polling Stations Map

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.php> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

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2016 Municipal Election Polling Stations

