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Item No. Info 2
Transportation Standing Committee
May 23, 2019

TO: Chair and Members of Transportation Standing Committee

Original Signed

SUBMITTED BY:

Brad Anguish, Director, Transportation & Public Works

Original Signed

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: April 12, 2019

SUBJECT: Variable Message Signs on the Eastern Region of the Municipality

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

September 11, 2018 meeting of Halifax Regional Council, Motion 14.2.2; That Halifax Regional Council request a staff report on advancing and expanding the network of Variable Message Signs on primary truck routes into Metro Halifax on the Eastern region of the Municipality for Highway 7, 107, 207 and 111 with consideration given to cost sharing with Halifax Harbour Bridges, as has been done in the past.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

HRM Charter section 74 (1) states: "The Municipality may agree with one or more municipalities, villages, service commissions, the Government of the Province or of Canada or a department or agency of either of them or a band council pursuant to the Indian Act (Canada) to provide or administer municipal or village services."

BACKGROUND

There are currently eleven Variable Message Signs (VMS) over roadways in HRM; five of them are over HRM owned roads, five are over provincially owned roads, and one sign over a Halifax Harbour Bridges (HHB) road. A map showing the existing locations is provided as Attachment A to this report.

The first six signs were installed by HHB in 2010. They are the smaller dots on the attached map, grouped around the approaches to the A. Murray MacKay (AMM) Bridge; three on the Halifax side, and three on the Dartmouth side. These sign locations were selected by HHB, and installed at HHB's cost. These locations were chosen as they are the last decision points that motorists and commercial truck drivers can receive a message on the sign about a condition on the AMM Bridge and choose to take an alternate route.

HRM and HHB entered into a cost sharing agreement for the next set of five signs, which were installed in 2015. The agreement included provisions for both Capital and Operating costs of the signs. HRM and HHB selected the locations together. Four of these signs are on 100-series Provincial highways, and one is located on Barrington Street just south of the fly-over ramp to the Angus L. MacDonald (ALM) Bridge. The focus was again to provide motorists an opportunity to get bridge and other road condition information at decision points from which they can choose to take a more direct route to one bridge or the other, or even by-pass the bridges altogether by taking alternate routes.

DISCUSSION

The Integrated Mobility Plan (IMP) includes an action which refers to Variable Message Signs:

Action 126: Develop an implementation plan that stipulates when and how variable messaging signs should be used by the municipality and identifies the communication protocol with Halifax Harbour Bridges and NSTIR required to facilitate these activities.

In support of this IMP action, staff are actively working on completing the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to formalize the operation of the existing network. This would allow HRM and HHB to use the current network to its fullest potential.

Initial conversations with HHB staff indicate that they have no short-term plans to expand the sign network. Notwithstanding HHB current plans, the HHB board could consider an HRM proposal to expand the network. Before considering any presentation to the HHB Board regarding cost sharing, HRM Staff would require clear direction from Council regarding (1) the objective and intent of any proposed expansion of the sign network, and (2) to enter negotiations with the HHB Board regarding possible cost-sharing opportunities.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no cost implications anticipated by completing the MOU with HHB.

There would be cost implications to expanding the network. The cost to install a single sign is over \$400,000. This estimate is based on the previous cost-shared sign expansion. Assuming 50/50 cost-sharing, the estimated cost to HRM would be \$200,000 per sign. Actual costs vary based on variables such as sign base design, structure width (varies with road width), and proximity to a suitable power connection.

The operating cost to HRM is estimated at \$4,000 per sign per year, based on the current cost-share agreement.

Neither the capital cost of \$200,000 per sign, nor the annual operating cost of \$4,000 per sign is included in any current or future capital or operating budgets.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There was no community engagement undertaken for this report.

ATTACHMENT

Attachment A - Map of existing Variable Message Sign locations

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.

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Attachment A – Map of existing Variable Message Sign locations

