

Re: Item No. 15.5.4

HALIFAX

Rural Active Transportation Program

Regional Council
February 8, 2022

Overview

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 - Origins
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 - Program Development
- Summary of Proposed Program Elements
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Background: Origins (1)

Integrated Mobility Plan

- **Action 71:** *Update the criteria for selecting new active transportation projects to better respond to equity considerations, demand, future development, coverage and other factors.*
- **Action 81:** *Continue to work with other orders of government to implement the rural active transportation network, including along provincial roads.*
- **Action 82:** *Establish a rural pedestrian program, including: a **financing mechanism** which recognizes that rural pedestrian safety is affected by regional traffic; criteria to **prioritize development in village centres, hamlets, or other rural areas of concentrated pedestrian activity**; and opportunities for **cost sharing** with other orders of government.*

Active Transportation Priorities Plan

- **Recommendation #5:** *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;*

Background: Origins (2)

Item 15.1 Rural Pedestrian Realm Program - December 12, 2019

Transportation Standing Committee request a staff report regarding potential to establish **a program to improve pedestrian safety in HRM's rural communities**. This report shall discuss how actions A71, A81 and A82 within the Integrated Mobility Plan, related to active transportation are being implemented.

Specifically, the report should **focus on areas of concentrated pedestrian activity**, including consideration of services in historically underserved areas, and address how immediate responses to resident concerns can be addressed through tactics including but not limited to paved shoulders, sidewalks, crosswalks, pedestrian islands of refuge, and greenways.

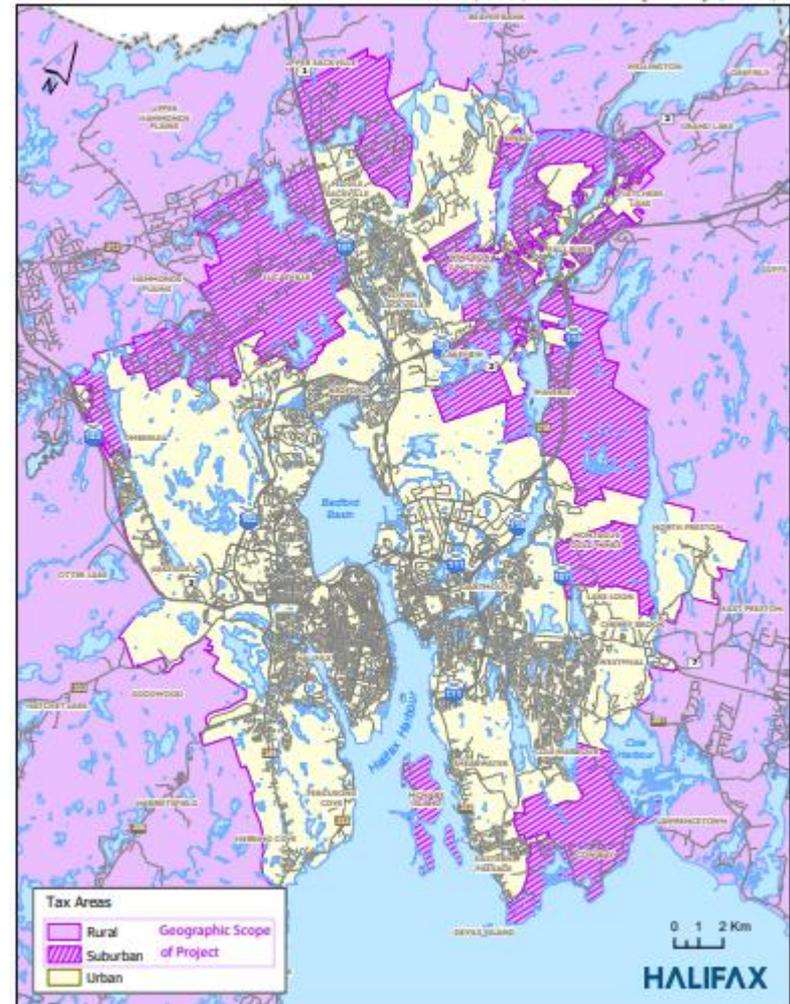
The report should also include **recommendations on opportunities to present a submission to the Provincial and Federal governments** for appropriate funding programs.

Background: Current Situation

- **Existing Rural AT Approach:**
 1. Grant support for multi-use pathways implemented by community associations on Provincial land (e.g. rails to trails)
 2. Ad hoc sidewalks (e.g. Upper Tantallon, Sheet Harbour, Porter's Lake)
 3. Some provincial and HRM paved shoulders (e.g. Hammonds Plains Road, Sambro)
- No formal program for community centre sidewalks. Most relevant example of current process is the Sheet Harbour sidewalk, funded 100% via area rate and other orders of government
- Consistent requests from various rural communities for sidewalks/AT facilities
- Province is key for implementation: NS Public Works, Communities, Culture and Heritage, Natural Resources and Renewables

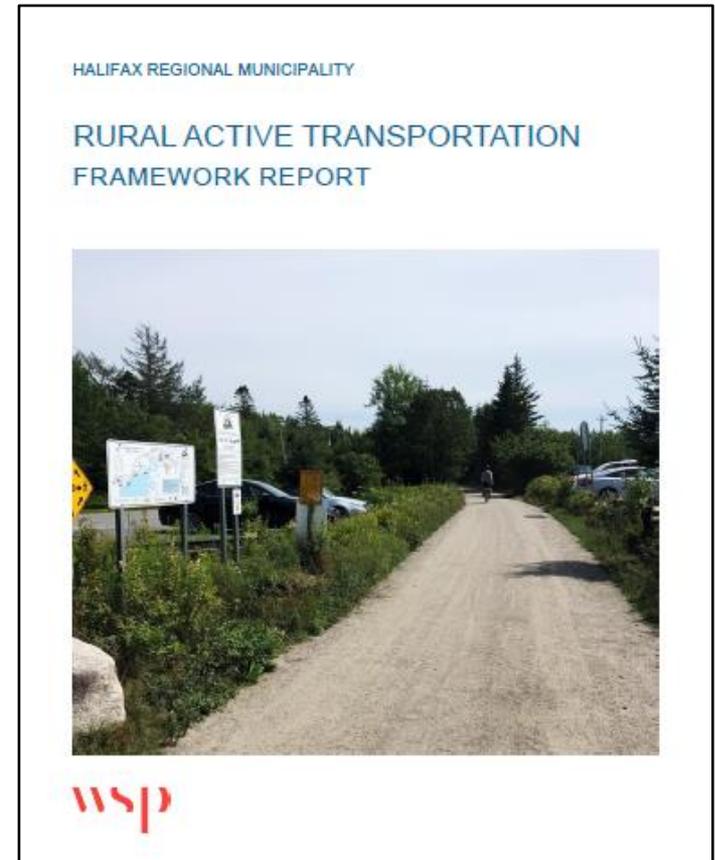
Background: What is Rural?

- HRM has multiple definitions of “rural”:
 1. Generalized Future Land Use designations in Regional Plan
 2. Urban Service Area
 3. Urban Transit Service Boundary
 4. **Tax Policy**
- Sidewalks are the only municipal service covered by the Urban general tax rate (\$0.667) that are not covered by the Suburban/Rural rate (\$0.634)
- Suburban and Rural tax areas are geographic scope of proposed Rural AT Program



Background: Program Development

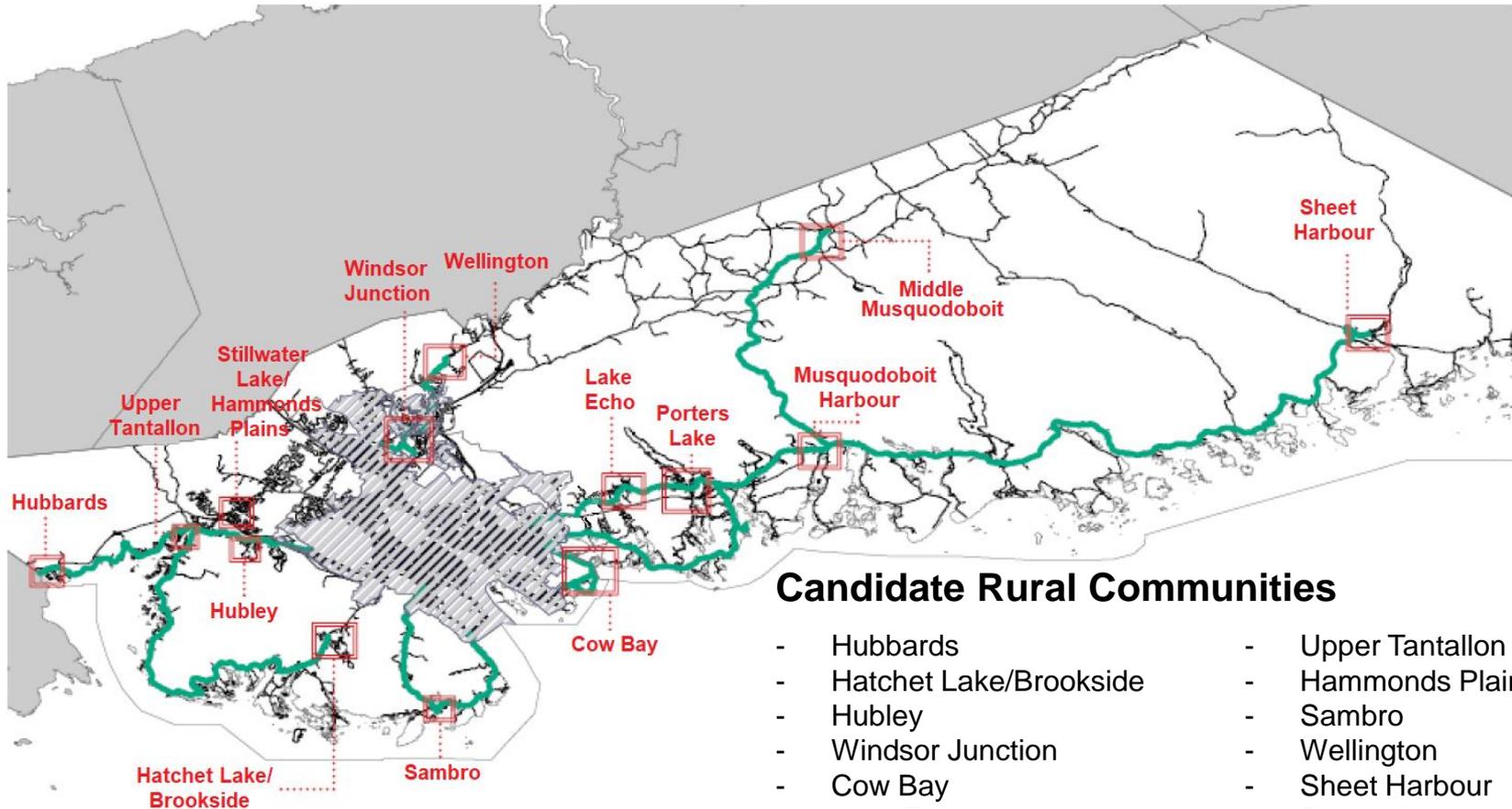
- WSP hired in late 2019. They compiled:
 - **Baseline Report for Rural Active Transportation in HRM**
 - Best practice research
 - Review of HRM policy and current processes
 - Internal and external stakeholder engagement
 - **Framework and Tools**
 - Developed a framework and scoring tool for project prioritization
 - Facilitated internal workshops for review of toolkit and implementation plan
- Following WSP work, HRM staff completed further evaluation of implementation approaches, especially how to fund



Summary of Proposed Program Elements

- 1. Sidewalks in rural centres.** The report outlines a prioritization and planning approach and recommends an area rate funding mechanism to help pay for construction and maintenance. Such sidewalks could be built as wider multi-use pathways to also enable use by bicycles. Program target is to build five rural centre sidewalks in ten years. Paved shoulders would not be considered.
- 2. Longer “spine” connections** between rural centres. These are not proposed as priorities, but rather as options to pursue and fund if opportunities for project integration arise or specific Council direction is provided. The report does not recommend a new funding approach. Facilities could include paved shoulders or multi-use pathways depending on context.
- 3. Continued support for community-led multi-use pathway** construction, operation, and maintenance in rural areas through HRM’s Active Transportation Grant Program.

New Proposed Candidate Rural Communities & Spines



Candidate Rural Communities

- Hubbards
- Hatcher Lake/Brookside
- Hubley
- Windsor Junction
- Cow Bay
- Lake Echo
- Musquodoboit Harbour
- Upper Tantallon
- Hammonds Plains
- Sambro
- Wellington
- Sheet Harbour
- Porters Lake
- Middle Musquodoboit

*Lucasville and East Preston have already been added to the ATPP

Preliminary Cost Estimates

- Rural Centre Sidewalks
 - to complete 5 rural centre sidewalks in 10 years (proposed program target)

Estimated Cost/km	Estimated # of km for 5 Community Sidewalks	Estimated Cost Total (low)	Estimated Cost (high)
Ranges \$1.5 - \$3 million	9.5 km	\$14.25 million	\$28.5 million

- Spines
 - To complete entire network of rural spines (not a program priority)

Estimated Cost/km	# of km	Estimated Cost Total (low)	Estimated Cost (high)
\$800,000	194 km	\$155.2 million	\$155.2 million

Funding Approaches Considered for Rural Centre Sidewalks

Options	Who Pays	Equity	Approvals & Administration
1) Communities with sidewalks pay full cost via area rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Property owners in communities with sidewalks are likely to pay a rate between 3.1 and 10.2 cents per \$100 of assessed property value (depending on cost sharing and cost of infrastructure) - \$87 to \$283/year based on average single-family home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Same area rate is applied to all communities with sidewalks - With few properties paying, area rate is relatively high - Extending the community area rate boundary would reduce tax burden 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Already enabled funding mechanism for rural sidewalks - Completely funds each project - Requires consistent approach to geographic area rate boundaries - Rates may require adjustments as new sidewalks are built
2) Suburban and rural rate increases to pay full cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All suburban and rural property owners are likely to pay a rate between 0.4 and 1.3 cents per \$100 of assessed property value (depending on cost sharing and cost of infrastructure) - \$11 to \$35/year based on average single-family home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More ratepayers creates lower costs per ratepayer - Many communities would pay rate and not have their own sidewalks, similar to Urban tax area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Completely funds each project - Simple to implement, no area rate boundaries required - Rates will incrementally increase as new sidewalks are built, e.g. > 0.4 to 1.3 cents for 5 sidewalks, > 0.8 to 2.6 cents for 10 sidewalks
3) Communities with sidewalks pay area rate that makes them equal to Urban tax rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Property owners in communities with sidewalks would pay a rate of 3.3 cents per \$100 of assessed property value - \$91/year based on average single-family home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All ratepayers charged same rate of 3.3 cents per \$100 of assessed property value, creating predictability - Rate reflects equivalent of urban general tax rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rate not based on project costs and is not expected to fully fund most projects. Projects will likely require general revenue funding and be incorporated into capital budget - Requires amendment to Community Area Rates Administrative Order 2019-005-ADM

Recommended Funding Approach for Rural Centre Sidewalks

Option 3: A 3.3 cent area rate applied to all suburban and rural communities with sidewalk

Pros	Cons
<p><u>Equity:</u> Although revenues collected from rate would vary depending on each community's property tax base, each AT facility would be designed to meet community needs</p> <p><u>Predictability:</u> Area rate would not change depending on facility type, site conditions, or cost-sharing available</p> <p><u>Consistency:</u> Area rate would not require adjustments as new sidewalks are built</p> <p><u>Transparency:</u> Easy to communicate to ratepayers</p>	<p><u>Non-dedicated funding:</u> Rural sidewalk projects would have to be prioritized against other candidate projects for capital funding unless AT Capital budget is increased to reflect new rural AT objectives. Likely that General Tax Rate would have to supplement additional funds raised by 3.3 cent area rate. If funding not increased, project implementation timelines for may have to be extended.</p> <p><u>Community boundaries:</u> a consistent method for applying community area rate boundaries will need to be developed for fairness</p>

Recommendations

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to create a program to establish a Rural Active Transportation Program that focusses on rural community centre sidewalks and incorporates a prioritization framework, a funding strategy, a ten-year target and an approach for operations and maintenance, as described in the Discussion section on this report;
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to prepare amendments to the Active Transportation Priorities Plan as discussed in the Discussion section of this report to include a list of “Candidate Rural Communities and Spines” to help prioritize rural active transportation infrastructure expansion and return to Council for consideration of the resulting amendments;
3. Direct staff to pursue funding option three (as described in the Discussion section) to cover HRM’s cost of rural sidewalks and, in support of this, return to Council with recommended amendments to the Community Area Rates Administrative Order 2019-005-ADM to allow an area rate to be levied on suburban and rural areas for rural sidewalks (on the entire community). The proposed area rate would not be based on the full operating and capital costs of the proposed project, but rather the difference between the urban general tax rate and the suburban/rural general tax rate; any remaining balance would be funded through the general tax rate;

It is further recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Commission a letter from the Mayor to other orders of government advising of the new Rural Active Transportation Program and requesting opportunities for cost-sharing; and,
2. Authorize the Chief Administrative Officer, or their designate, to negotiate and enter into one or more agreements, and any amendments to those agreements, with the Province of Nova Scotia respecting the construction, operation, and maintenance of AT facilities in the provincial right-of-way.

Thank You