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Item No. 4
Transportation Standing Committee
September 14, 2022

TO: Chair and Members of Transportation Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY:



Caroline Blair-Smith, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: September 9, 2022

SUBJECT: Spring Garden Road Transit-Only Pilot Project

ORIGIN

At the December 7, 2021 meeting of Regional Council, the following motions were put and passed:

THAT Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to:

- 1. Proceed with a year-long daytime transit priority corridor pilot project on Spring Garden Road between South Park Street and Queen Street during the hours of 7a.m. – 8 p.m., starting June 2022, subject to the approval of HRM's Traffic Authority; and*
- 2. Monitor the operation of the pilot project and return to the Transportation Standing Committee with an update on the first 6 months of data after the commencement of the pilot project, and then return to Halifax Regional Council with a final recommendation of the configuration of the street upon completion of the pilot project.*

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, subsection 318(2): "In so far as is consistent with their use by the public, the Council has full control over the streets in the Municipality."

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, subsection 321(2): "The Council may, by policy, appoint a traffic authority for all or part of the Municipality."

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, subsection 321(8): "The traffic authority for the Municipality has, with respect to highways in the Municipality, excluding those for which the Provincial Traffic Authority has authority, the powers conferred upon a traffic authority by or pursuant to the Motor Vehicle Act."

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, subsection 322(1): "The Council may design, lay out, open, expand, construct, maintain, improve, alter, repair, light, water, clean, and clear streets in the Municipality."

Nova Scotia Motor Vehicle Act, subsection 90 (5) which states that "The traffic authority may (c) exclude from traffic on specified streets or specified portions of streets vehicles other than public transit vehicles or vehicles specified by the traffic authority".

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Transportation Standing Committee recommend that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Rescind Regional Council's approved resolution from December 7, 2021 directing the Chief Administrative Officer to "*proceed with a year-long daytime transit priority corridor pilot project on Spring Garden Road between South Park Street and Queen Street during the hours of 7a.m. – 8 p.m., starting June 2022*"; and
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to complete an operational review to investigate additional traffic control measures and other operational needs that are required to operate a transit priority corridor pilot project on Spring Garden Road between South Park Street and Queen Street and return to the Transportation Standing Committee with a recommended implementation approach for the pilot project.

BACKGROUND

On December 7, 2022, Regional Council directed staff to implement a pilot project that would close the section of Spring Garden Road between Queen Street and South Park Street to vehicular traffic (except buses) between 7a.m. and 8p.m. for a one-year period starting in June 2022. Council also directed staff to monitor operation of the pilot and return to the Transportation Standing Committee with a check-in after six months and a final recommendation after the one-year pilot period.

The Spring Garden Road pilot project, initially delayed due to ongoing construction in the area, was initiated on July 4, 2022. The project experienced immediate challenges, with many drivers continuing to use the section of the street closed to general purpose traffic. Although traffic signage was updated at all area intersections to reflect the updated regulations and a communications campaign was conducted to spread public awareness, a lack of compliance with the traffic restrictions persisted through much of the operational period. Police enforcement of the project, intended to play a key role in its initiation and ongoing operation, was challenged by a lack of available staff resources. Ongoing construction in the area also impacted available routing options and likely increased confusion. On July 8, 2022, after five days in operation, the project was paused to allow staff to review options to improve operations and compliance.

Since the project was paused, staff have been evaluating a range of options aimed at better communicating the traffic restrictions associated with the pilot project. Through this review and experience during the week of July 4, it has become evident that the time-based, mode-selective nature of the regulations is more difficult to operationalize than previously envisioned, and that a different approach to communicate and implement the traffic restrictions to drivers will be required for the project to be successful.

DISCUSSION

The primary objective of the Spring Garden Road transit-only pilot is to gain a better understanding of how the removal of general-purpose traffic can enhance the street's potential as a pedestrian-oriented street while continuing to serve its important function in the regional transit network. As a temporary project, cost-effectiveness is an important consideration. Ideally, the project should demonstrate the functionality of a traffic-free street with as little infrastructure investment as possible. For the Spring Garden Road pilot, which represents a significant change in operation, striking an effective balance between functionality and implementation cost is a challenge.

It is evident that additional traffic control measures that more clearly communicate the new traffic regulations are necessary for the project to operate as intended. There are complicating factors that make traffic

regulations relatively challenging to administer for the Spring Garden Road pilot. Firstly, since the street must continue to allow access by buses (and bicycles) during the period when general purpose traffic is prohibited, the street must remain physically open to vehicular traffic. This limits the ability to use traffic barriers to block the street. Secondly, the time-of-day change in regulations (traffic prohibited 7a.m. to 8p.m., traffic permitted 8p.m. to 7a.m.) requires that all vehicles be accommodated on the street for approximately half of the day. This further reinforces the limitations on the use of traffic barriers as an option and introduces complexity that can be confusing for drivers.

Traffic Control Options

Staff have considered a range of traffic control options for potential use in the Spring Garden Road pilot project, including the following:

- an updated signage and pavement marking plan to more effectively convey the regulations; however, signage and pavement markings alone are not expected to be sufficient.
- the potential use of temporary physical measures (e.g., traffic barriers) to physically block or narrow entry lanes onto Spring Garden Road. Although this alternative would likely be effective, there are operational factors (i.e., daily setup, removal, and monitoring) that limit its potential for use over an extended period of time.
- the potential modification of the traffic signal configuration at the Queen Street and South Park Street intersections to convey the traffic regulations using transit and bicycle signal phases, however, the costs to carry out such a change would be excessive for a temporary installation.
- the potential to use an automated gate system that can allow authorized vehicles (e.g., buses, emergency vehicles) to enter the street while blocking access for all other vehicles. This would be similar to the gate system employed by Halifax Transit at the Highfield Terminal, which buses operate using a MacPass. A similar solution has been implemented by the Town of Banff, Alberta as part of its [Banff Avenue Pedestrian Zone](#) project, which has closed the Town's main commercial street to vehicular traffic (except buses) between May and October each year since 2020. An automated gate system appears to be a promising solution for the Spring Garden Road pilot project at this stage; however, there are several details that need to be further considered, most notably including determination of (i) the mechanism by which a wireless gate would be operated by authorized vehicles and (ii) the physical installation parameters on-street that are necessary to enable traffic operations throughout the day.

To fully assess the potential to implement a suitable traffic control system for the Spring Garden Road pilot project, staff will need to complete further investigation. This will require additional time, which will delay the pilot project until at least spring 2023. The infrastructure required to implement this type of system will also be more expensive than originally was anticipated for the pilot project; however, staff are optimistic that a cost-effective solution can be identified.

Other Considerations

Other factors that are being considered as part of a re-start to the Spring Garden Road pilot include the following:

- Implementation Date: Staff are proposing that re-initiation of the pilot project be delayed until at least spring 2023 to provide additional time to plan for the implementation of a more suitable traffic control solution. This timeline will also be beneficial in reducing potential construction-related impacts and capitalizing on the beginning of the warmer weather months.
- Operational Period: The operational period that has been approved by Council is between the hours of 7a.m. – 8 p.m. The intent of this operational period was to provide the benefits of a traffic-free street during the daytime when pedestrian traffic is busiest and transit can benefit the most from a lack of traffic congestion, while allowing vehicles back on the street during the remaining hours to increase activity on the street during slower periods. It is expected that the time-based change in regulations increases driver confusion. Consideration could be given to extending the operational period to 24-hours, which would simplify regulations and likely improve compliance. However,

further engagement with area stakeholders would be required to understand impacts to deliveries and other business-related activities.

Next Steps

The following are the proposed next steps to carry out the Spring Garden Road Pilot Project:

- **Operational Review:** Staff will complete an Operational Review to determine the preferred traffic control configuration for the project. The review will focus on developing a better understanding of how a suitable traffic control system can be implemented, particularly in terms of the technology required and the physical design parameters. Staff will also engage with key area stakeholders to review the potential to extend the operational period for the pilot to 24-hours.
- **Recommendation to Transportation Standing Committee:** Following completion of the operational review, staff will return to the Transportation Standing Committee with a recommendation for consideration on next steps for the pilot project. The recommendation will identify the preferred traffic control option for the pilot project and the resources, costs, and operational impacts required for implementation. It will also identify a proposed implementation date, operational period, and pilot project duration. It is anticipated that Staff's recommendation to the Transportation Standing Committee will be made by February 2023.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

At this time there are no additional costs expected to complete the Operational Review. However, it is anticipated that re-initiation of the pilot project will have financial implications. The estimated cost to implement a suitable traffic control system is uncertain at this stage; these costs will be identified as part of the Operational Review.

RISK CONSIDERATION

There is a risk that staff may not identify a feasible solution that meets project timelines or that is suitable based on cost and resources for use as part of a pilot project. This is considered a medium risk but deemed acceptable since the outcome will better inform the viability of the project (regardless of the result).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Engagement was completed in 2018 and 2019 as part of the Spring Garden Road streetscaping project. At that time, there was significant support from the general public for a transit-only street.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

This project supports the Council Priority Outcome of building healthy, livable communities, as it aims to make it more convenient for residents to choose sustainable transportation options for everyday transportation purposes. While the segment of the street under consideration for this project is only 400m long, its prominence as a transit and pedestrian-focused corridor in the heart of the city will demonstrate Halifax's commitment to climate action under HalifACT.

ALTERNATIVES

The Transportation Standing Committee may recommend that Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to:

1. Re-start the pilot project following the completion of ongoing construction activities in the area, relying on the updated signage plan, physical measures (traffic barrels), and police enforcement. Under this configuration, a shortened pilot duration period (e.g., one month) should be considered due to operational costs, resource requirements, and impending winter weather conditions. This alternative is not recommended as it is not expected to operate effectively and is not a sustainable solution.
2. Indefinitely postpone or cancel the pilot project. This is not recommended as it does not capitalize on an opportunity to explore Spring Garden Road's potential as a pedestrian-oriented street with transit priority.

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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