



P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. Info Item 3
Transportation Standing Committee
August 24, 2023

TO: Chair and Members of Transportation Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: **Original Signed**

Denise Schofield, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: June 4, 2023

SUBJECT: **Free Transit During Car Free Day**

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

April 27, 2023, Transportation Standing Committee motion (Item No 12.2.1.):

MOVED by Councillor Cuttell, seconded by Councillor Cleary

THAT the Transportation Standing Committee direct the Chief Administrative Officer to prepare a staff report on providing free transit during Car Free Day.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Administrative Order One, *the Procedures of the Council Administrative Order*, Schedule 7, Transportation Standing Committee Terms of Reference:

4. The Transportation Standing Committee shall oversee and review of the Municipality's Regional Transportation Plans and initiatives, as follows:
 - (b) overseeing and reviewing the Regional Transportation policies, bylaws and functional plans;

6. The Transportation Standing Committee shall:
 - (a) review and oversee policy direction and long-term funding approach to promote and encourage Transit alternatives as outlined in the Regional Plan;

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, SNS 2008, c 39:

- 7A** The purposes of the Municipality are to
- (a) provide good government;
 - (b) provide services, facilities, and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; and
 - (c) develop and maintain safe and viable communities.
- 69** (1) The Municipality may provide a public transportation service by
- (a) the purchase of vehicles or vessels and operation of the service;
 - (b) providing financial assistance to a person who will undertake to provide the service; or
 - (c) a combination of these methods.
- 79A** (1) Subject to subsections (2) to (4), the Municipality may only spend money for municipal purposes if
- (a) the expenditure is included in the Municipality's operating budget or capital budget or is otherwise authorized by the Municipality;
 - (b) the expenditure is in respect of an emergency under the *Emergency Management Act*; or
 - (c) the expenditure is legally required to be paid.

102 Subject to the approval of the Board for those services that are subject to the Public Utilities Act, the 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.

Halifax Regional Municipality By-Law Number U-100 – Respecting User Charges, Schedule 1, Halifax Transit User Charges:

- 4** (1) Council, by resolution, or the CAO, may waive, in whole or in part, 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;

BACKGROUND

On September 22, 2023, cities around the world will take part in initiatives to recognize Car Free Day.

Originally launched as a global campaign in 2000 by the World Carfree Network, Car Free Day helps build awareness of the need to protect the environment for future generations and encourages citizens to consider alternative modes of transportation. It is also a strategic opportunity to promote transit as a convenient, affordable option and a way for everyone to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Car free days and events take place in many countries around the world including Colombia, China, Belgium, France, Hong Kong, Indonesia, India, Italy, Malaysia, and the USA. In Canada, municipalities and transit agencies have actively participated in Car Free Day, and some have developed longer term campaigns to encourage alternative modes of transportation and to build transit ridership.

In the past, an Earth Day Car Free Day challenge was issued in April 2002 by former Mayor Peter Kelly to residents of the Halifax Regional Municipality and other major centers in the Atlantic Region; Fredericton and Corner Brook accepted the challenge. To support the initiative, Halifax Transit fares were reduced to \$1.00 during off-peak hours (9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. and after 6 p.m.). Since the 2002 Car Free Day challenge, the municipality has not initiated or actively participated in any Car Free Day campaigns or communications initiatives.

At the April 27, 2023 Transportation Standing Committee meeting, a motion was put forth and approved to prepare a staff report on providing free transit during Car Free Day.

DISCUSSION

Providing free transit is one of numerous options to consider in support of Car Free Day. The following information contextualizes options and informs of the relative costs, benefits, and potential challenges of providing free transit on Car Free Day.

Jurisdictional Scan

An online jurisdictional scan was conducted to explore how other municipalities and transit agencies across Canada have recognized and celebrated Car Free Day, as well as longer term car free day initiatives.

Based on this scan, five major cities, including Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto (GTA), and Quebec City, actively promote Car Free Day by closing certain main streets to vehicles. Ottawa does not close streets but promotes the day by publicly asking residents to leave their cars at home for the day. In the past, Montreal organized a highly publicized Car Free Day for 11 years before cancelling the event in 2014 due to financial and staffing challenges. None of the cities provide free transit for the day. For the results of this scan, please see Attachment 1: Jurisdictional Scan of Car Free Day Initiatives in other Canadian Municipalities.

In addition to the jurisdictional scan of municipally led initiatives, an online audit was conducted to determine how other Transit agencies across the country support Car Free Day and longer-term car free initiatives. Only one agency – TransLink, South Coast British Columbia's Transportation agency – actively manages a significant car free initiative.

In June 2022, TransLink launched the Ride and Shine Ridership program, a summer campaign to encourage people to go car free for the summer and take transit to explore the region. The campaign includes sponsorships of various community festivals, promotional partnerships with local businesses, and increased transit service to popular summer destinations. In addition, TransLink also sponsors several Car Free Days of Summer events to encourage communities to experience their neighbourhoods using transit and other means of transportation. During these days, some main streets are closed to vehicle traffic¹.

Recent Halifax Transit Free Fares Initiatives

In the past year, Halifax residents have benefitted from successful free fares initiatives, including the following.

Free Fares Summer Campaign – Summer 2022

- In the summer of 2022, in support of municipal COVID-19 recovery efforts, all Halifax Transit services were provided free of charge on Fridays, and ferry service was free on Saturdays throughout the months of July and August. The program was well received and the campaign successfully increased ridership during the summer months. During Fridays in July and August, bus boardings increased by approximately 7,000 daily (9%), and ferry boardings increased approximately 2,700 daily (31%). On Saturdays, ferry boardings grew by approximately 970 boardings daily (10%) compared to Saturdays in 2019. There was a total of 770,000 free boardings during the summer. Ridership growth has continued since that time; however, there are numerous

¹ TransLink (June 29, 2022). *TransLink to promote a Car-Free Summer*. Accessed June 8, 2023 from: <https://www.translink.ca/news/2022/june/translink%20to%20promote%20a%20car-free%20summer>

external factors that have contributed to these gains and we cannot conclude what percentage was due to this campaign.

- As approved by Regional Council, the estimated cost of the 2022 Free Fares Summer program resulting from lost revenue was \$1,096,396. While the campaign was well received with positive public uptake, its success was due in large part to the fact that it was one piece of a larger, municipal-wide COVID-19 recovery plan. In addition, the program was promoted by a robust and well-funded marketing and communications plan with a budget of approximately \$60,000.

NSLC Cheers to Good Choices Free Fares Partnership – December 2022

- In December 2022, Halifax Transit successfully negotiated a \$39,000 agreement with the NSLC to provide free rides on all Halifax Transit services after 6 p.m. on Friday, December 2 and Saturday, December 3. The free transit rides, offered during the peak timeframe for corporate holiday staff events, supported NSLC's "Cheers to Good Choices" program, which encourages planning ahead for a safe way home. The campaign was well received publicly and is a good example of how the cost of free fare campaigns can be offset by strategic corporate sponsorships and partnerships.

Alignment with other Promotions

As an alternative to providing free fares, there may be opportunities to promote Car Free Day and support increased transit ridership through alignment with other initiatives this fall. These may include:

Transit Fleet Electrification Project – Arrival of First Flagship Bus

- The delivery of Halifax Transit's first flagship electric bus is currently scheduled to arrive in September of 2023. A public awareness and engagement campaign is planned to build excitement for the arrival of the first bus and key messaging can also reference Car Free Day.

Mobile Fare Payment App Launch

- Halifax Transit is preparing to launch its new mobile fare payment app in fall 2023. A public marketing and education campaign is planned to launch the app. Car Free Day could be a vehicle to highlight this added functionality in advance of the rollout.

In addition to these projects, there are numerous relevant and complimentary initiatives planned in the coming months that offer exciting opportunities for collaborative, inter-departmental efforts to promote active transportation, integrated mobility, and transit ridership. Strategically leveraging budgets and staff resources effectively can successfully help to build longer term and sustained momentum for public awareness and support for the municipality's goals and objectives.

Considerations

- The following considerations are presented to assist in the review of free transit fares as an option to support Car Free Day. The online jurisdictional scan conducted for this report indicates that in the past, considerable momentum was achieved for Car Free Day in other Canadian cities through the promotion and implementation of Car Free Day initiatives; however, in more recent years, this momentum has waned in terms of media coverage and promotion, which may be in part related to COVID-19 recovery challenges.
- It is anticipated that the benefit of providing free transit fares for Car Free Day would be the amplification of promotion of the event, but it is unlikely to result in a significant reduction in car trips on that day.

As outlined in the jurisdictional scan, no other Canadian municipalities or transit agencies have offered free transit for Car Free day. Instead, they have opted for multipronged approaches for both Car Free Day as well as longer term Car Free initiatives that include the closing of main streets to vehicles, supporting festivals and events, and long-term promotions that build awareness of the benefits of transit. Should Halifax Regional Council wish to proceed with free transit on Car Free Day in September 2023, consideration should be given to an ongoing yearly commitment which would include broader municipal collaboration with other departments to acknowledge the day.

- The jurisdictional scan also highlighted the importance of engaging business stakeholders in the process of developing car free initiatives; considering potential sponsorship opportunities in the future to offset revenue losses for free transit fares on Car Free Day could be considered as an option.
- The Free Fares summer campaign implemented in 2022 was a great success; however, it was an eight-week initiative supported by a well-funded marketing and communications campaign. A budget would be required to promote free transit on Car Free Day, an estimate for which has been included in the financial implications section of this report.
- As outlined in this report, numerous initiatives are converging in late summer and into September 2023 which complement each other with respect to active transportation, integrated mobility, and transit ridership. Integrating these initiatives into a longer-term campaign over the month of September and beyond, rather than a one-off free fares campaign for Car Free Day, may leverage budgets and staff resources more effectively, create a bigger impact, and would require no additional budget requirements or loss of revenue.
- The lead time to operationalize and promote free fares for Car Free Day is minimal and feasible but would require a motion by Halifax Regional Council prior to September 22 to approve a loss of revenue and a budget for marketing and communications for the one-day event. The total estimated loss of revenue for providing free fares for Car Free Day for conventional bus, ferry, and Access-A-Bus service is \$47,500, and the estimated cost of an integrated marketing and communications campaign is \$10,000. The total financial implications for implementing free fares for Car Free Day is estimated to be \$57,500.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications currently.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was undertaken in the development of this report.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Jurisdictional Scan of Car Free Day Initiatives in Other Canadian Municipalities.

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: Cheryl Chappel, Manager, Programs & Engagement, Halifax Transit, 902.483.2023

Jurisdictional Scan of Car Free Day Initiatives in Other Canadian Municipalities

Municipality	Car Free Day Initiatives	Free Transit
Vancouver	Since 2008, Car Free Days and festivals take place along various main streets, with some streets closed to vehicles.	No
Calgary	Calgary has not initiated specific initiatives for Car Free Day; however, Calgary's Inglewood community has initiated car-free Sundays along its main street during the summer throughout the month of August.	No
Winnipeg	Since 2021, Winnipeg has closed several main streets traffic to recognize Car Free Day.	No
Montreal	For 11 years, the Metropolitan Transport Agency organized Car Free Day in Montreal, which included promotion, special events, and the closing of streets to vehicles. The annual event was discontinued in 2014 due to budget and staffing issues.	No
Greater Toronto Area	GTA's annual Car Free Day is managed by the Sierra Club. The City of Toronto closes some main streets to vehicles on September 22 in support of the day.	No
Ottawa	The City of Ottawa asks residents to leave their cars at home and choose alternative modes of transportation. They do not close streets to vehicles on that day.	No
Quebec City	Quebec City closes some streets in the Saint-Roch district and hosts free public concerts.	No