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Item No. 13.1.1
Transportation Standing Committee
November 23, 2023

TO: Chair and Members of Transportation Standing

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed

Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: November 6, 2023

SUBJECT: **Active School Travel Plan**

ORIGIN

Transportation Standing Committee, August 24, 2023 (Item 12.2.2)

MOVED by Councillor Cuttell, seconded by Councillor Mason

THAT the Transportation Standing Committee direct the Chief Administrative Officer to prepare a staff report on HRM developing and adopting an Active School Travel (AST) policy and plan, including considerations of partnering with other stakeholder agencies and allocating funding for necessary education and infrastructure.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

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

Motor Vehicle Act, subsection 90 (3) "The traffic authority may also mark lanes for traffic on street pavements at such places as they may deem advisable, consistent with this Act and may erect traffic signals consistent with this Act to control the use of lanes for traffic."

Administrative Order One, the Procedures of Council Administrative Order, Schedule 7, Transportation Standing Committee Terms of Reference, clause 7(b) which states: "The Transportation Standing Committee shall... (b) promote and encourage the Municipality's Active Transportation corridor initiatives which supports the overall Transportation Strategy as outlined in the Regional Plan."

RECOMMENDATION

The Transportation Standing Committee recommends that Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to initiate an HRM-led program to facilitate active and safer transportation for school-based trips that includes:

- 1) Assessment of all schools in HRM by an external consultant to establish a list of schools sorted by priority where active school travel is most feasible and beneficial and that recommends safer school

- travel routes and priority infrastructure improvements,
- 2) Establishing a collaborative program between the Halifax Regional Municipality, the Halifax Regional Centre for Education, and sector stakeholders/service providers to develop and deliver an Active School Travel education and promotion program, and,
 - 3) Funding to be considered as part of the 2025/26 budget process

BACKGROUND

Active school travel programs in cities are initiatives designed to encourage and facilitate students to use active modes of transportation, such as walking, skateboarding, scootering, or cycling, to get to and from school. These programs are implemented with the goal of promoting physical activity, reducing traffic congestion, improving air quality, and fostering healthier, more sustainable urban environments.

Active school travel (AST) programs often involve various components, such as:

1. **Safe Routes to School:** These programs aim to create safe and accessible pathways for students to walk or bike to school. This might involve infrastructure improvements, like adding sidewalks, crosswalks, or bike lanes, to enhance safety.
2. **Education and Awareness:** Schools and communities often collaborate to educate students and parents about the benefits of active travel, safety rules, and the environmental impact of their transportation choices.
3. **Incentives and Rewards:** Some programs offer incentives, like prizes or recognition, to motivate students and their families to choose active transportation options.
4. **Community Engagement:** Engaging the community and local authorities is crucial to the success of these programs. Cooperation between schools, parents, local government, and transportation agencies is often necessary to implement and sustain active school travel initiatives.
5. **Data Collection and Evaluation:** Many programs collect data to measure the impact of these initiatives on factors such as traffic patterns, air quality, and student health.

A Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) survey found that 30% of drivers reported witnessing a near miss or collision in a school zone and that 49% of parents were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with road safety around schools (CAA - School Travel Study, 2022).

The 2022 OSTA Transportation Survey Report summarizes data about how families from the Ottawa Carleton District School Board and the Ottawa Catholic School Board travel to school. Survey results show that 32% of respondents from schools that have graduated from or are currently engaged in the School Active Transportation (SAT) program walked all the way to school compared to 15% of respondents from schools that have never participated in the SAT program.

Active school travel programs in cities can result in several benefits, including reducing car congestion around schools, promoting physical fitness among students, improving air quality, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and fostering a stronger sense of community. These initiatives align with the broader goals of making urban areas more livable and sustainable while prioritizing the well-being of young people. The program is extremely popular across Canada and the United States. Green Communities Canada plays a pivotal role in providing guidance and research on the success of programs in Canada. In 2017, Green Communities Canada was provided a substantial grant from the Ontario government to implement the program province-wide.

Current and past HRM projects to facilitate safer active transportation with young people include:

- Hiring the Ecology Action Centre to deliver community-based bicycle safety, repair and encouragement workshops and events across the municipality.
- Support for "Bike to School" days during previous Bike Weeks.

- Addition of speed management measures in school zones
- Construction of new sidewalks to improve pedestrian connectivity at schools.
- Staff participation in past safe and active school programming.

In 2022 the organization Walk'n Roll initiated a project entitled *Building a Collaborative Agenda for Collective Action on AST*. The goal of this project was to mobilize collective action around Active School Travel (AST) and establish a formal Active School Travel Alliance/Partnership. The work included the development of a clear action plan to increase active school travel, with roles and responsibilities identified. The overall intent of the program is to reduce vehicle-oriented trips and encourage active school travel which supports the goals of HRM associated with HalifACT, the Integrated Mobility Plan, Active Transportation Priorities Plan, and the Strategic Road Safety Framework.

DISCUSSION

The Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE) currently operates 137 public schools within the HRM. Approximately 106 of those schools are at the elementary level, 22 at the junior high school level and 9 at the senior high school level. These schools exist in many different types of environments, some within urban environments that already have a strong active transportation culture and others exist in rural environments where connections to the school via active transportation routes are more difficult. The HRM will partner with the HRCE and the Ecology Action Centre (EAC) to develop the active school travel program.

There are two fundamental components to an AST program:

1. Infrastructure and route planning
2. Education, promotion, encouragement, data collection and evaluation

Infrastructure and Route Planning

The first step is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the situation at all HRM schools and to use this to prioritize and establish route plans and any infrastructure improvements to support safe active travel routes for students. Prioritization will take into consideration any historical inequities that are evident.

Given the number of schools within the HRM staff is recommending the hiring of a consultant to work with the HRM, HRCE, and the EAC to identify the infrastructure needs and present a priority list of work to the HRM. This assessment will develop a clear understanding of the actions required to help improve safety.

The infrastructure required could include new sidewalks, cycle lanes, crosswalks or raised crosswalks, bump-outs, refuge islands, crosswalk beacons or additional crossing guards. Action plans are to be developed so the HRM can prioritize as many of these interventions as possible through the annual capital plan.

In addition, the consultant will be required to identify schools where active school travel plans are feasible or not feasible. Some schools in rural areas may not have the infrastructure or the proximity to establish active school travel programs without substantial improvements. This work will be completed for all schools within the HRM.

The EAC already has an established partnership with the HRCE and has developed school route plans for 8 schools within the region which will be a foundation for this work.

Education, promotion, encouragement, data collection and evaluation

HRM will support the continuation of the promotion and education work of the *Building a Collaborative Agenda for Collective Action on AST* project. HRM will fund an organization or organizations that will collaborate with key stakeholders and especially the HRCE to develop a program that supports AST. HRM would support this work for an initial period of three years. This part of the program will only be completed

at schools that volunteer and are able to set up their own internal AST committee. The program will build on the broad assessment and include elements such as the following:

1. Set up a committee with an HRM-appointed facilitator as lead with the HRCE, the lead organization, the police and other potential stakeholder groups.
2. For schools that wish to participate, set up a school-level committee with school and parental advocates.
3. Assess local conditions at schools. This will include doing a student travel survey, traffic observation, questionnaires, and a walkabout.
4. Develop an action plan that includes, education, encouragement, and potential enforcement measures to support AST.
5. Implement the action plan.
6. Measure and reassess conditions.
7. Adjust as necessary.

Some of the AST supportive activities that could result from this work include:

- Classroom learning activities.
- Educational signage.
- Events and competitions.
- New bike racks and cycling skills training.
- Enforcement campaigns.
- Park and walk campaigns.

There would be further work to develop this initiative, establish targets and refine the implementation model.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Should Regional Council wish to proceed with this initiative, staff is requesting \$200,000 to hire a consultant to evaluate each public school within the HRM to identify and develop route maps and any engineering infrastructure that will support AST at these schools.

An annual budget of about \$125,000 would be identified to support the work of an organization or organizations to deliver education and promotion components of AST.

Any recommendations for new sidewalks would be incorporated into the existing new sidewalk capital program.

HRM will pursue other funding opportunities through a variety of grant programs that are available both at the provincial and federal levels of government.

Individual schools can apply for grants through Physical and Health Education Canada (PHE Canada) as part of their healthy, active, school programming stream. These grants are between \$500-\$2500 and be utilized to support active transportation programs.

Where there is already significant pressure on the draft 2024/25 budget, staff recommends the necessary funding be considered as part of the 2025/26 budget process.

RISK CONSIDERATION

No risk considerations were identified.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community Engagement will be undertaken as part of the Active School Travel work and will be led by the Ecology Action Centre.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The Safe School Streets would support HRM's initiatives and goals around climate change by reducing vehicle usage and encouraging citizens to utilize other modes of transportation.

ALTERNATIVES

Transportation Standing Committee may:

1. Not recommend that Halifax Regional Council approve the process for the Active School Travel Program.
2. Recommend that the Halifax Regional Council consider the funding for this initiative as an "over budget" item as part of the 2024/25 budget process.

ATTACHMENTS

None.

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: Lucas Pitts/Director of Traffic Management/Public Works
