

HALIFAX

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Item No. 11.1.8
Halifax Regional Council
July 7, 2020

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed by 

SUBMITTED BY: Kelly Denty, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: June 10, 2020

SUBJECT: Infrastructure Funding Application – Active Transportation Enhancements – Mineville Road

ORIGIN

At the June 9, 2020, Regional Council meeting, Councillor Hendsbee moved: "That Halifax Regional Council request a staff report regarding submitting an Infrastructure Funding Application to the Province of Nova Scotia for Active Transportation enhancements to the Mineville Road."

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

HRM Charter, subsection 73(a): The Municipality may enter into and carry out agreements for highway construction, improvement and maintenance and other purposes pursuant to the Public Highways Act.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council direct the CAO to submit an application for infrastructure funding to the Province of Nova Scotia for a minimum two-thirds funding contribution toward two active transportation projects: 1) trail facilities in East Preston along Trunk Highway No. 7; and, 2) the paving of gravel shoulders on Mineville Road between Trunk Highway No. 7 and Candy Mountain Road, as outlined in the Discussion section of this report.

BACKGROUND

Both projects that are proposed to be submitted for infrastructure funding are in rural HRM.

The Community of East Preston (located in District 2) has worked with a range of partners to develop a plan to improve safety and promote physical activity in their community. Elements of that plan have recently been added to the HRM Active Transportation (AT) Priorities Plan (approved by Regional Council on June 23, 2020). The Community has secured funding, and has hired an engineering firm to develop the detailed design of one priority segment along Trunk Highway No. 7. This design appears to be nearing completion, but requires additional time to finalize and review. This priority segment is a proposed 1.5m wide asphalt trail that is approximately 1.26 kilometers in length (refer to Plan No. 2). It links key community destinations, and separates community members from motor vehicles on the busy Trunk Highway No. 7. Based on HRM staff's review of the design, the estimate to construct this proposed trail is \$1.2M (Class D estimate), and does not include the cost for land acquisition (unknown at this time).

Mineville Road is located in Mineville (between Lawrencetown and East Preston, District 2), and extends from Trunk Highway No. 7 to Highway No. 207. The length of Mineville Road is approximately 7.05 kms, and the road is owned and maintained by the Nova Scotia Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal (NSTIR). Based on discussions with NSTIR, the road is classified as a collector and has a maximum posted speed of 70km/hr. The road cross section includes 2-way asphalt travel lanes (width unknown at the time of this report) with gravel shoulders on both sides.

NSTIR recently issued a tender under their Road Maintenance Program to upgrade the asphalt surface from Trunk Highway No. 7 to Highway No. 207. Under this program, only one lift of asphalt is considered with no funding allocated for the paving of shoulders. This tender has been awarded and is awaiting the startup of construction. There is interest to pave the gravel shoulders as a means to enhance AT along Mineville Road.

The use of paved shoulders for AT in HRM is informed by both the Active Transportation Priorities Plan and the Integrated Mobility Plan.

Recommendation #26 of the Active Transportation Priorities Plan states:

"The municipality should work with rural communities and the Province to identify good candidate routes for paved shoulders that provide AT connections to local destinations. Halifax should also work with the Province and Bicycle Nova Scotia to identify preferred routes through the municipality to be followed by the Nova Scotia Blue Route. Council should consider amendments to Maps 2A, B, and C as needed, resulting from this process."

In recent years, HRM has added paved shoulders to AT Plan candidate routes such as Hammonds Plains Road, Lawrencetown Road (Trunk 207) and First Lake Drive. The Province has added paved shoulders to routes such as Trunk 2 and the Sambro Loop (e.g. Trunk 349). There has never been a cost-sharing arrangement between HRM and the Province on paved shoulders, though there has been ongoing work with the Province to integrate the Blue Route into the HRM AT network. As a note, Mineville Road is not identified in the Active Transportation Priorities Plan as a candidate route, nor has it been identified by the Province as part of the Blue Route.

There are two key Integrated Mobility Plan recommendations related to rural active transportation:

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 of pedestrian infrastructure in village centres, hamlets or other rural areas of concentrated pedestrian activity; opportunities for cost sharing with other orders of government.

Most work under Action 81 has been on a range of items, including Blue Route planning and collaboration on the rails to trails network. Work on Action 82 is underway, and a report to Council is currently scheduled for late 2020 with recommendations to have a more planned approach to addressing rural AT needs.

Typically, any HRM capital project involving an infrastructure application and integration with the Province would be initiated at least 12 months in advance of construction to allow proper time for evaluation against other AT priorities, funding applications, project design, and other issues related to project integration.

DISCUSSION

Both of these projects offer opportunities to improve safety and connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists in more rural HRM communities. The East Preston proposed AT facility is nearing completion of design, and the paving of Mineville Road is scheduled to be paved in the coming weeks.

East Preston AT Facility

The proposed AT trail along Trunk Highway No. 7 in East Preston has significant community benefits, and meets HRM AT and Integrated Mobility Plan objectives. Since the segment was added to the AT Plan on June 23, 2020, HRM staff would assume responsibility for completing design and implementation. It is noted that HRM staff would review the merits of the current design (1.5m wide asphalt trail) relative to a multi-use pathway (minimum 3.0m wide asphalt facility), and determine in consultation with the community the best solution for this segment of road. If the multi-use pathway is the better option the costs are estimated to be \$1.5M (Class D) plus land acquisition (to be determined).

Construction would be subject to Provincial approval as they own the road. Land acquisition from abutting property owners (which is not included in the estimates noted above) is likely required as is completion of detailed design and development of more formal cost estimates. If this project was to proceed exact timing for construction cannot be determined until HRM staff has the opportunity to review the project design and scope in greater detail. However, if cost-shared funding was secured, the project would become a priority. Depending on the circumstances it is anticipated the earliest tendering date would be in 2021 with construction occurring in 2022.

Mineville Road Paving of Shoulders

As indicated in the Background Section of this report, there is interest to pave the gravel shoulders as a means to enhance AT along Mineville Road. The following represents key aspects regarding this issue:

- Mineville Road is a provincially owned and maintained road (including the shoulders);
- The entire length of Mineville Road is approximately 7.05 kms (refer to Plan No. 1). The estimated cost to pave both gravel shoulders for this road is \$550,000 (Class D, to be confirmed);
- The focus of the shoulder paving relates to the section between Candy Mountain Road and Trunk Highway No. 7. This distance is approximately 4.5 kms. The estimated cost to pave both gravel shoulders for this section is \$350,000 (Class D, to be confirmed). NSTIR confirmed there is sufficient shoulder width to feasibly pave the shoulders;
- NSTIR does not consider funding the paving of gravel shoulders under their “Maintenance Paving” program;
- The paving of the gravel shoulders for Mineville is not included in HRM’s 2020/21 capital plan;
- Upon completion of paving Mineville Road, it is anticipated it will be many years before the next paving upgrade is required;
- Mineville Road is not identified as a candidate route for Active Transportation (AT) facilities in HRM’s AT Priority Plan, the Porters Lake AT Plan, nor the Province’s Blue Route Program;

- NSTIR advised HRM staff that the award of the contract was executed on June 10, 2020. The Province is awaiting the construction schedule from the contractor, and it is possible construction could begin in approximately three weeks; and,
- NSTIR indicated a decision regarding the paving of the shoulders is required prior to the startup of construction.

It is unknown at this time if infrastructure funding is available for both the East Preston AT facility and the paving of shoulders for Mineville Road. If it is available, HRM staff is recommending that the Municipality's cost shared portion for both projects does not exceed 1/3 of the total cost. Since the Mineville Road project is time sensitive HRM staff would also recommend that the Province covers the upfront cost for the 4.5km section as noted above (estimated at \$350,000). If cost sharing becomes available, the Municipality's portion would then be no more than 1/3 (or \$116,667), and the Municipality would reimburse the Province accordingly.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

If Council directs staff to prepare an infrastructure funding application, and in the event an infrastructure funding application proves successful, the cost of the paving of gravel shoulders on Mineville Road between Trunk Highway No. 7 and Candy Mountain Road in the amount of \$116,667, would be covered from Project Account No. CR200001 Active Transportation – Strategic Projects, with funding for HRM's share of the estimated \$350,000 to be provided from Reserve Q421 (General Contingency). Pursuant to the estimates identified above, HRM's cost shared amount would not exceed \$116,667.

Budget Summary:	<u>Project Account No. CR200001 Active Transportation – Strategic Projects</u>	
Cumulative Uncommitted Budget		\$2,116,421
Add: Funding from Reserve Q421		\$ 116,667
Less: AT Enhancements – Mineville Road		\$ 116,667
Balance		\$2,116,421

Budget Summary: General Contingency Reserve Q421

Projected Net Available Balance as of June 20/21	\$ 5,266,844
Less: Withdrawal as per recommendation	\$ 116,667
Net Available Balance as of March 31, 2021	\$ 5,150,177

Risk Reserve – General Contingency Reserve Q421 is to receive the annual operating surplus of the Municipality as prescribed by the Provincial Financial Accounting and Reporting Manual and can be used to fund operating costs, offset deficits, or fund new operating and/or capital expenditures. This is an unbudgeted withdrawal from the reserve.

Funding in the amount of \$500,000 for the East Preston AT Facility (currently estimated at \$1.5M plus land) would be requested in the 21/22 Capital Budget.

RISK CONSIDERATION

As noted in the Alternatives section of this report, there is financial risk to the Municipality if HRM pays for the entire amount of the Mineville Road costs upfront (assuming the outcome from the infrastructure funding application results in no cost sharing available from the other levels of government).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Community of East Preston Active Transportation Plan was initiated and guided by community members. The planning process was led by Upland Planning and Design, and included a key stakeholder meeting, engagement with seniors in the community, and a public meeting to share ideas and learn about priorities.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental implications.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Council may direct staff to not pursue infrastructure funding to assist in funding the paving of the Mineville Road gravel shoulders and/or the East Preston AT facility as noted in the Discussion section of this report. This alternative is not recommended by staff as both facilities improve safety, and promote physical activity in the rural communities. As well East Preston was recently added to HRM's AT Priorities Plan.
2. Council may direct staff to cover the entire costs for the paving of the gravel shoulders for the 4.5km section of Mineville Road as noted in the Discussion section of this report, and to reimburse the amount received from cost sharing from other levels of government. There is risk however, that limited, or no cost sharing will be available. For this reason, staff does not recommend this alternative.

ATTACHMENTS

Plan No. 1 – Mineville Road

Plan No. 2 – East Preston Proposed AT Facility

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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