



## **Big projects miss the bigger picture**

By TIM CRABTREE and STEPHANIE SODERO  
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Two recent announcements proposed major infrastructure projects in the Halifax Regional Municipality: a new harbour crossing and the construction of a truckway in the Halifax railcut. Unfortunately, the scale of these projects is not matched by a similar degree of visionary thinking.

Building a new bridge or tunnel to ease congestion on the existing bridges can only serve to bring more vehicles and congestion onto the peninsula as well as generate more greenhouse gas emissions through encouraging use of private vehicles. The Halifax-Dartmouth Bridge Commission report uses HRM regional plan figures on projected shifts to transit, and shows that the bridges would only reach capacity in 2036 assuming no further increase in the proportion of trips made by transit between 2026 and 2036. Transit can play a key role in preventing the need for a new harbour crossing; one fully loaded bus can carry as many people as two lanes of driver-only cars on the Macdonald Bridge.

Other types of transportation can shift traffic away from the bridges. The bridge commission report does not take into account the impact of new waterborne transportation modes. Last week, a \$13-million investment was announced for the fast ferry.

As well, the report does not consider time-of-day pricing as an incentive in spreading out the demand for the bridge; nor does the report consider the role congestion charges, like the one in London, could play in encouraging a shift to transit.

The provincial Conservatives recently suggested paving a substantial portion of the rail corridor through Halifax to utilize as a truckway. However, the economic, safety and environmental advantages of rail over road for freight are substantial.

The truckway would effectively subsidize the trucking industry and would serve to reduce the competitiveness of rail. As well, according to a report by the World Watch

Institute, one 80,000-pound truck causes the same amount of wear and tear to a road as 10,000 cars. Truck traffic significantly increases the strain on public funds needed for road maintenance and repair.

Trucking poses a major safety concern for provincial highways, whereas rail freight travels on a separate, privately maintained right-of-way. Environmentally, rail is a more sustainable mode of freight transportation than trucking. According to the Railway Association of Canada, rail is responsible for only three per cent of transportation greenhouse gas emissions, despite accounting for a 64 per cent share of surface freight activity. Trucks account for 22 per cent of emissions against a 36 per cent total activity share.

The provincial Conservative announcement noted that the truckway would provide environmental benefits as it would "reduce greenhouse gas emissions from trucks idling at lights." However, to generate substantial emissions reductions and meet its commitments under the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act, the provincial government needs to shift freight away from roads and onto rails.

Paving the railcut would permanently remove the possibility of twinning the rails here. Losing this option would be detrimental to the possibilities of expanding rail freight service, and to any potential for expanding passenger service.

HRM has recognized the benefits of using rail for transporting containers out of the downtown core and is currently completing a study on the potential to develop an inland container terminal served by rail. This rail shuttle model would reduce the need for trucks to travel through peninsular Halifax. It is a step in the right direction towards revitalizing rail infrastructure.

Rail is a resource for the future, not a relic of the past. The truckway announcement shows the provincial government does not yet have a full understanding of how to incorporate economic development and environmental protection. Nova Scotia needs a co-ordinated approach to transportation energy efficiency and an integrated provincial transportation policy.

The mandate of the Halifax-Dartmouth Bridge Commission – a provincially chartered agency – is to "construct, maintain and operate" bridges and other crossings. The responsibility for identifying what infrastructure and service are needed should be part of a larger organization, such as HRM Regional Transportation in close collaboration with HRM Regional and Community Planning, that takes an integrated approach to transportation and has a goal of reducing emissions from transportation.

All transportation projects need to be evaluated in terms of the impact they will have on greenhouse gas emissions. Key steps that the province can take are incorporating strong transportation elements in the revised provincial energy strategy, creating a provincial transportation policy, reassessing the role of the bridge commission and increasing investment in public transit.

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## COMMENTS

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Quiet Comment wrote:

Well here is another shining example of the new folks in town suggesting that there should be a second rail line in the "CUT". If memory serves me correctly there was a second rail that CN removed as it was not economically viable to run two lines to Halifax. The wisdom in taking this line up eludes me but it was done. The recent problems that lead to CAT moving their shipping to Virginia was due to problems with the rail system here. Suggesting that rail is the end all be all for the shipping problems is to simplistic. Halifax Peninsula will always have traffic no matter what the Ecology Action Center dreams of so lets learn to deal with it and not sit around pretending it will go away if you put another bus on the road. By the way the buses get caught in traffic too....amazing.

Keith P. wrote:

As usual the Ecology Action Center uses their position to spout anti-business positions and oppose any progress. I fail to understand why this newspaper continues to give them space for things like this -- make them buy an ad like everyone else. The article fails to offer any viable alternatives to what has been proposed and instead continues to promote a dream world in which everyone going downtown can ride a nonexistent and financially non-viable public transit system. You can't put a shipping container on a bus.

annmarie wrote:

Didn't they pull up numerous rails to make the Cross Canada Trail for biking, walking, etc.? Also, it would be very difficult to get passengers for the buses when sometimes buses don't show up, they don't connect with other buses to get you to your destination, they don't go to your destination, make you wait 15-20 minutes between connections, high fares for the service, 1-2 hours getting to your destination, etc. On the other hand, you can just jump in your car and drive to your destination with no missed connections, no waiting in the snow, cold, rain, and arrive at your destination 15 minutes later.

David fm CH wrote:

I believe that a fast ferry from Bedford to Downtown will be under-utilized and most folks will continue to drive. I'm thinking large, free, park and ride lots outside of the city and more LINK buses will work. The LINK buses from Cole Harbour are very popular.