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Item No. 4
Halifax Regional Council
March 19, 2024

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed

SUBMITTED BY:

Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: December 10, 2023

SUBJECT: **Beaver Bank Bypass Project**

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

March 7, 2023 Halifax Regional Council motion (Item No. 15.5.2):

MOVED by Councillor Blackburn, seconded by Councillor Deagle Gammon:

THAT Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to provide a staff information report on the Beaver Bank Bypass project including a history of the provincial project, what HRM's involvement was (including our financial commitments at the time) and what our possible future involvement with provincial and federal partners could look like.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39:

Highway, housing and trails agreements

73 *The Municipality may enter into and carry out agreements*

(a) for highway construction, improvement and maintenance and other purposes pursuant to the Public Highways Act;

...

Street related powers

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

BACKGROUND

The Beaver Bank Bypass is a proposed roadway that has been contemplated by both the Provincial and Municipal levels of government in various forms since at least the early 1990's. Portions of the envisioned roadway have been built, but generally the project has not been advanced at a corridor level to the extent originally envisioned.

Provincial Project – The Beaver Bank Bypass

Early in the 1990's, the Provincial Transportation Department developed a conceptual alignment for a limited access highway that would connect Highway 102 (at the Aerotech Interchange) and Highway 103 (via Hammonds Plains Road), passing through Wellington and around Fall River, Kinsac, and Beaver Bank (see Figure 1). The portion of this overall highway alignment running generally parallel to Beaver Bank Road was referred to as the "Beaver Bank Bypass". The corridor also included the Wellington Connector (currently under construction). The province completed some conceptual design work, environmental assessment, and public consultation focused on the Beaver Bank Bypass section, and published an [Environmental Assessment](#) in 1999.

The province's objective in pursuing the Beaver Bank Bypass was to accommodate increasing traffic demands in the area. The roadway was recommended as part of previously completed traffic studies including the *Sackville Transportation Study* (1996) and the *Regional GoPlan Study* (1996). The proposed roadway, approximately 10km in length, would be a four-lane divided arterial with controlled access and a posted speed of 80km/h. The estimated cost in 1999 was approximately \$20 million.

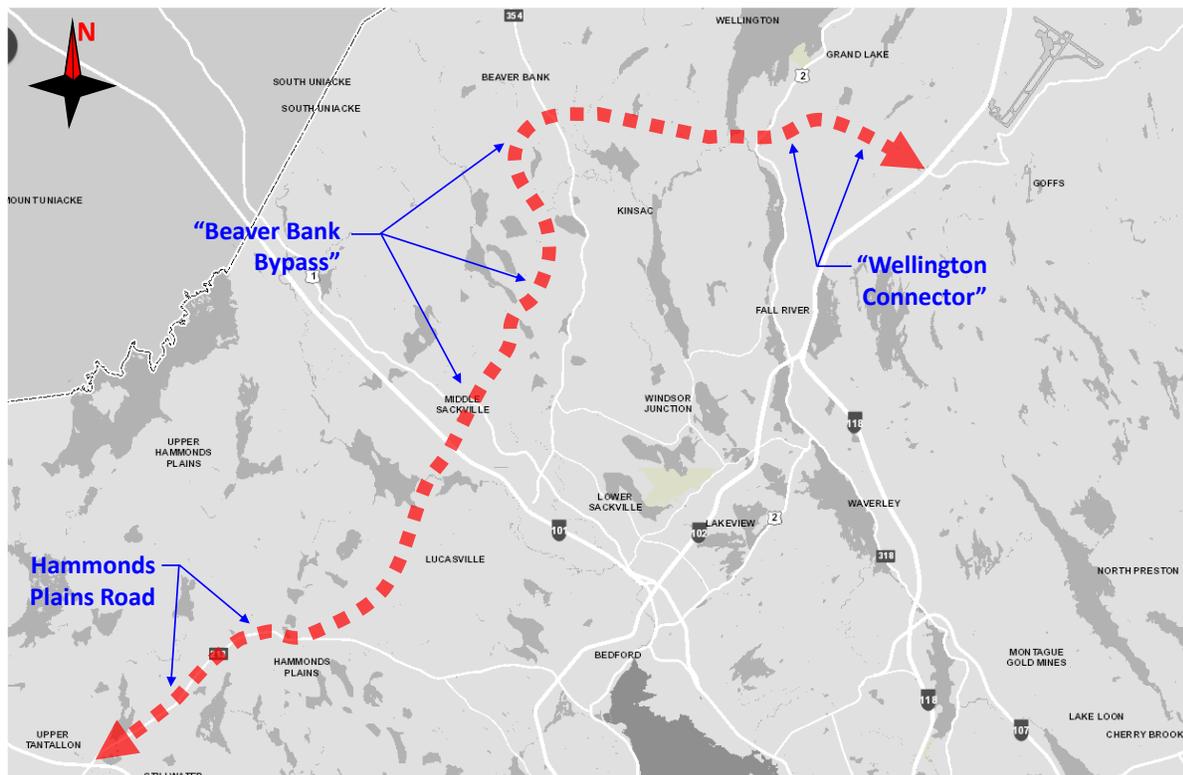


Figure 1: General Provincial Highway Alignment Under Consideration (early 1990's)

Transfer of Responsibility to HRM

In 2002, the province advised HRM that it had discontinued its interest in implementing the project and was transferring responsibility to HRM, except for the portion of the corridor between Highway 101 and Trunk 1. HRM subsequently adopted a shortened version of the corridor and reclassified it as a collector road

rather than a regional highway. HRM identified the future potential need for an east-west collector road extending from the Beaver Bank Bypass – referred to as “Maroon Drive” – that would provide access to developing lands in Middle and Upper Sackville. HRM also established plans for a connection between Highway 101 and residential developments south of the highway, referred to as the “Westpoint Drive Connection” (see Figure 2). The 2006 Regional Plan identified these roadway corridors as part of its Transportation Plan.

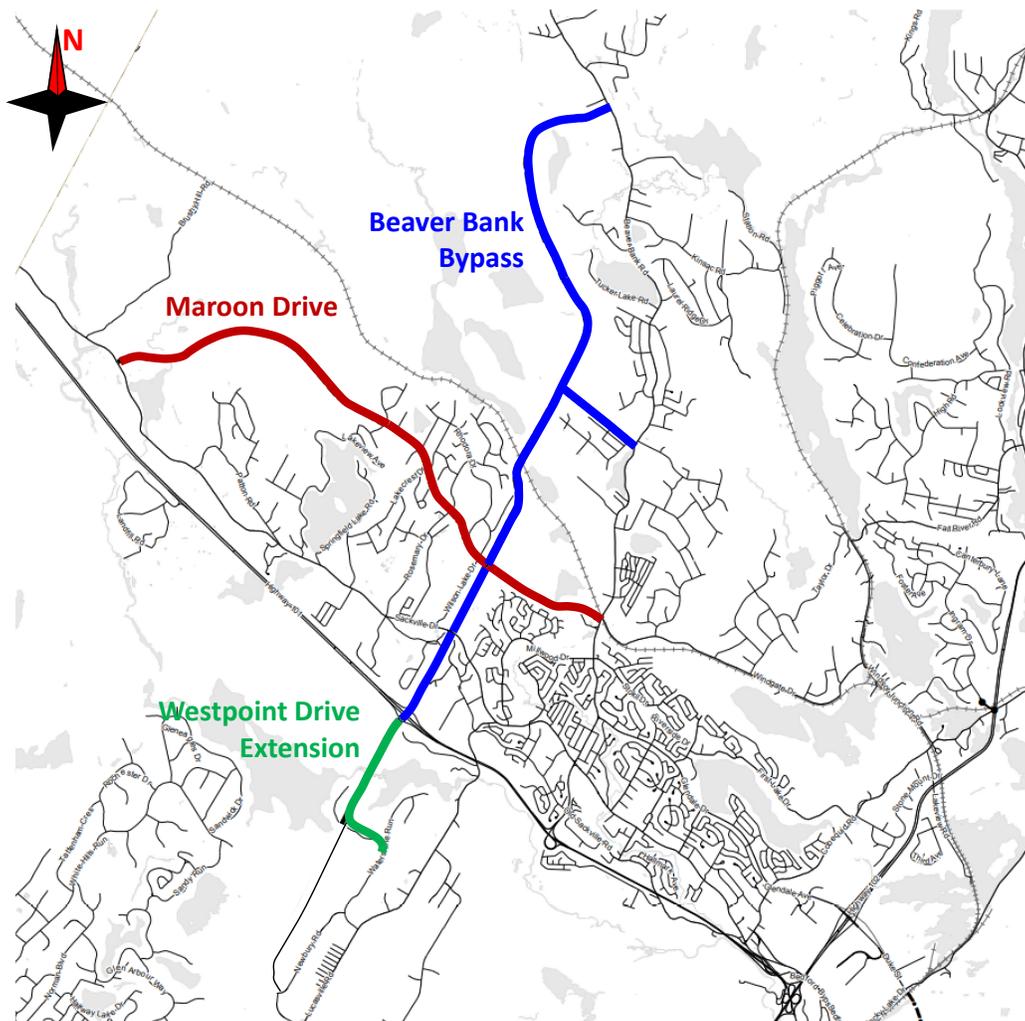


Figure 2: HRM's Proposed Area Roadway Network following Provincial Abandonment (2005)

Construction of the Highway 101 Interchange and Margeson Drive

In 2010, the portion of the Beaver Bank Bypass between Highway 101 and Trunk 1 (renamed Margeson Drive), including a new interchange to Highway 101, was constructed. The interchange was cost shared between the federal, provincial, and municipal levels of government, while the section of Margeson Drive between Highway 101 and Trunk 1 was funded by the federal and provincial governments only. A [cost sharing agreement](#) for the interchange signed in 2009 committed HRM to provide \$2.5 million toward the estimated total project cost of \$7.5 million. The final cost of the interchange exceeded \$14 million, including a contribution of approximately \$5.6 million by HRM.

Halifax Transit Park & Ride

In 2006, a Park & Ride facility was contemplated at the then proposed Highway 101 – Margeson Drive interchange. At the time, this was part of the implementation of a broader rollout of a regional express

network, which saw the completion of facilities in Tantallon, Sheldrake Lake, Fall River, and Porters Lake, staggered over several years. During construction of the nearby Margeson Drive interchange in 2010, fill that was made available by the earthworks was added to the site for future grading. Conceptual design was completed as part of a suite of designs tied to the larger project. The Porters Lake Park & Ride opened in 2013, and Margeson Drive was intended to proceed shortly thereafter, however has not progressed to date.

The *Moving Forward Together Plan* (2016) again proposed the introduction of a new regional express service that would serve the Middle Sackville Area. The proposed Route 310 “Middle Sackville Regional Express” is proposed to run between Margeson Drive and Downtown Halifax and be served by a 500-space Park & Ride facility located in the southeast quadrant of the Highway 101 – Margeson Drive interchange. In the *Moving Forward Together Plan*, the Park & Ride was slated for construction in the 2019/2020 Fiscal Year, with service to begin in 2020/2021. As of 2024, the Park & Ride and express route have yet to be implemented; however, they remain a part of Halifax Transit’s service plan and are projected to occur within an approximate 5-year timeframe.

Planning for the Extension of Margeson Drive South of Highway 101

Following construction of the Highway 101 interchange, HRM proceeded with planning and design for the extension of Margeson Drive to the south. Previously known as the ‘Westpoint Drive Extension’, the proposed alignment for the connection was shifted due to environmental constraints associated with a required crossing of the Sackville River. As a result, the revised alignment no longer connected to Westpoint Drive, instead crossing the river 150m downstream and traversing undeveloped lands for approximately 1km before crossing Stonewick Cross and continuing south approximately 2.6km south to connect to Lucasville Road (via a short section of Cranley Road). The proposed alignment is illustrated in Figure 3. Staff’s expectation at the time was that creating a more direct connection to Highway 101 and the proposed Park & Ride facility for residents in the Waterstone Area would help to reduce traffic loading on Lucasville Road and Hammonds Plains Road as well as encourage greater transit use into the Regional Centre.

McCabe Lake North (now called Indigo Shores), a residential subdivision southwest of the new Highway 101 interchange, was in early stages of development in 2012. At the time, HRM and the subdivision developer agreed that it was in the best interest of both parties to have the subdivision’s planned crossing of the Sackville River be incorporated into the Margeson Drive extension. In 2015, the 350m extension of Margeson Drive south to Magenta Drive (its current southern terminus) was built by the developer; the responsibility for the future construction of the bridge is the responsibility of HRM.

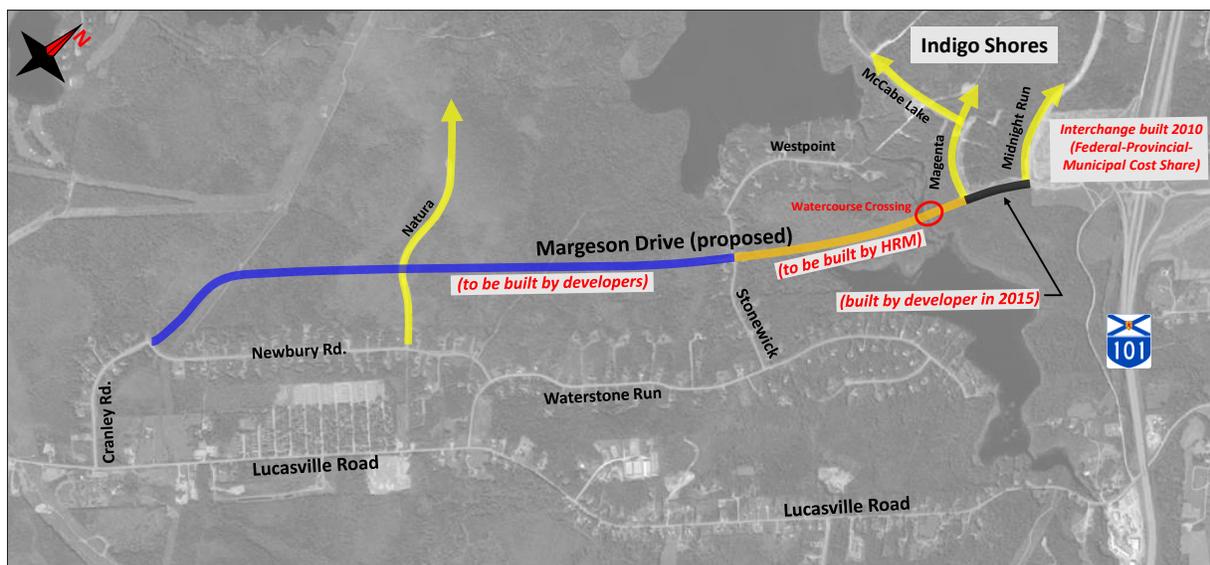


Figure 3: Proposed Margeson Drive Alignment South of Highway 101

In 2013, HRM retained a consultant (Genivar – now WSP Canada) to complete preliminary design for the roadway and bridge. As part of the planning and design process, a public open house was held in October 2013 to discuss the proposed portion of Margeson Drive between Highway 101 and Hammonds Plains Road (a summary of the findings was provided to North West Community Council (NWCC) in a December 2013 [report](#)). Feedback from the public was varied, with some residents suggesting that the connection was long overdue while others had concerns about the impacts that additional traffic would have on existing streets, particularly if it was completed in multiple phases. The approach to further extending Margeson Drive to the south that was presented to NWCC assigns responsibility for the section between Magenta Drive and Stonewick Cross to HRM, while the remaining section between Stonewick Cross and Cranley Road would be built by developers as part of the development of the abutting residential subdivision. In January 2014, Genivar submitted a preliminary design and report. The estimated cost of the bridge and road connection (Magenta Drive to Stonewick Cross) was \$3.5 million.

Regional Plan

The Municipality's planning policy and regulations have recognized infrastructure constraints in the [Beaver Bank, Hammonds Plains, Upper Sackville Plan Area](#) since 1998, when restrictions on development were introduced. The 2006 Regional Plan further restricted development within the Hammonds Plains and Beaver Bank areas by limiting residential subdivision activity in areas under "[Schedule J](#)" until transportation infrastructure capacity is increased. At the time, it was assumed that the Middle Sackville Connector and Beaver Bank Bypass were transportation upgrades that would be required to lift these growth controls in Beaver Bank. Although the Schedule J growth controls generally limit additional residential subdivision in the area, sections of the Margeson Drive extension (shown in blue in Figure 3) may be constructed as part of developments approved prior to the adoption of the 2006 Regional Plan.

The 2014 Regional Plan again identified the Beaver Bank Bypass and Margeson Drive as proposed roadway projects.

- The section of Margeson Drive between Trunk 1 and Lucasville Road, identified as the "Middle Sackville Connector", was broken down into two phases – the completed section between Highway 101 and Trunk 1 (Phase 1), and the connection from Highway 101 to Lucasville Road was identified (Phase 2). Phase 2 was designated as a "Programmed" project, meaning that it should be budgeted for within the 3-year capital budget. The project has never been advanced due to competing priorities and budgetary constraints.
- The Beaver Bank Bypass was designated as a "Future Potential" project, indicating that it was expected to be constructed beyond the 25-year horizon of the Plan.

Notwithstanding the inclusion of the Middle Sackville Connector as a Programmed project in the Regional Plan, it (along with all other planned roadway projects in the Plan) is subject to Policy T-13, which stipulates that no road project shall be approved for construction until the completion of the Roadway Network Functional Plan. The Road Network Functional Plan was required to include a public consultation process that provides rationale for the roadway projects as they relate to one another and consider factors including updated growth targets, sustainable transportation initiatives, and capital and operating costs.

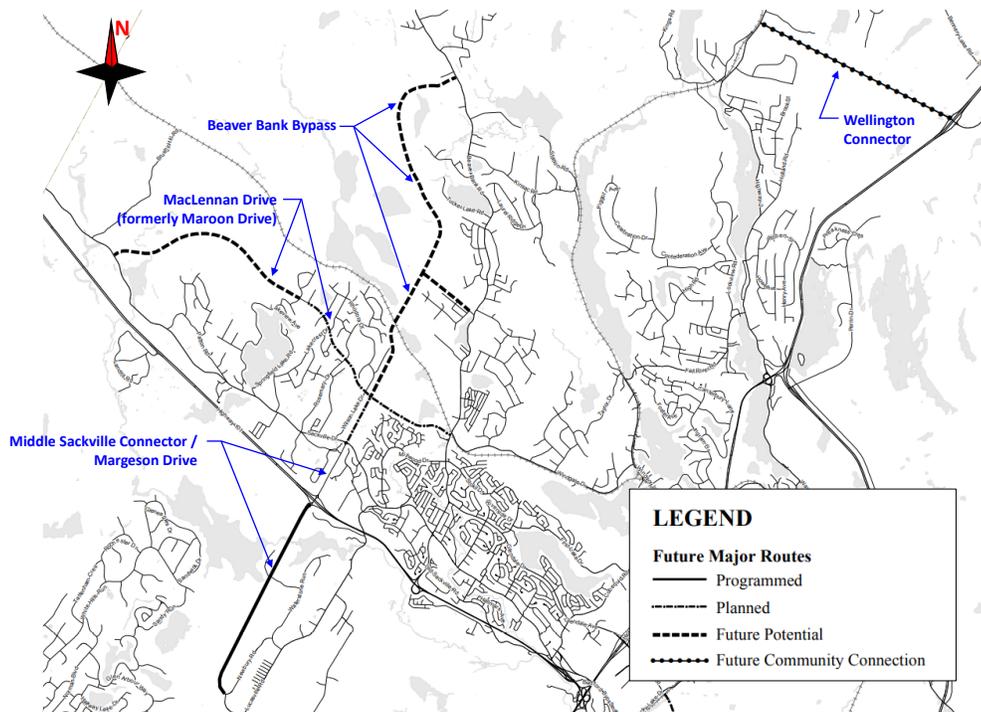


Figure 4: Future Transportation Routes (2014 Regional Plan)

The Integrated Mobility Plan (2017)

In 2016, staff initiated the planning process for the *Integrated Mobility Plan (IMP)*. The objective of the Plan was to develop a more comprehensive approach to transportation planning that more explicitly considers the relationship between mobility and land use. A key driver of the creation of the Plan was to add a stronger multimodal lens to the planning process in an effort to better align with HRM's mode share targets and make transportation more environmentally and financially sustainable.

Approved by Regional Council in December 2017, the IMP encouraged a more conservative approach to the expansion of the roadway network; this included the application of a more holistic approach to the evaluation, planning, and design of roadway projects. It also resulted in a greater emphasis being placed on improvement of existing roadway network through targeted improvements to transit, active transportation, and Transportation Demand Management (TDM). The Road Network Functional Plan was effectively supplanted by the IMP, and further policy direction related to expansion of the roadway network was deferred to the next update to the Regional Plan.

Corridor Land Acquisition

Following council direction in 2005, staff began acquiring property for the roadway corridors including the Middle Sackville Connector, Beaver Bank Bypass, and MacLennan Drive (formerly Maroon Drive). Properties acquired to date are identified in Attachment A.

No effort has been made by HRM to preserve a corridor for the originally planned section between Beaver Bank and Wellington. At present, Staff are not actively pursuing the acquisition of the lands required to complete these corridors and funds for land acquisition are not budgeted.

HRM Expenditures and Financial Commitments

HRM's expenditures and financial commitments to date are summarized below:

- Highway 101 Interchange: As previously mentioned, a [cost sharing agreement](#) for the interchange signed in 2009 committed HRM to provide \$2.5 million toward the estimated total project cost of \$7.5 million. The final cost of the interchange exceeded \$14 million, including a contribution of approximately \$5.6 million by HRM.
- Land Acquisition: HRM has purchased multiple parcels in the past to support the preservation of these corridors. Most recently, approximately \$1.17M was spent to acquire 7 parcels as part of the proposed future MacLellan Drive / Maroon Drive corridor in 2014.
- Capital Funding: In previous years, HRM's Capital Plan has identified capital funding for land acquisition and construction for Margeson Drive and MacLennan Drive; however, the 2023-24 10-year budget plan does not include funding for these projects.

DISCUSSION

The Beaver Bank Bypass was considered a long-term project in the 2006 and 2014 Regional Plans, with construction anticipated outside the 25-year horizon of either plan. The Margeson Drive extension south of Highway 101, though identified as a nearer term priority in these Plans, has been idle for the past several years as HRM has shifted priority in mobility investments away from roadway network expansion in accordance with the objectives of the IMP. However, significant growth in recent years in HRM and other climate-related considerations (wildfires, flooding) have necessitated reconsideration of the infrastructure requirements in the area.

There are multiple ongoing or upcoming projects that will further investigate the merits of these projects:

- The Joint Regional Transportation Agency (JRTA), a provincial crown corporation established in 2021, is mandated with the development of a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) that will identify the long-term transportation needs of HRM and the surrounding areas (generally encompassing a one-hour commuter shed beyond HRM). HRM Staff are actively involved with the JRTA at the executive and staff level.

The RTP, which is scheduled to be completed in fall 2024, will consider a wide range of regional transportation infrastructure upgrades. The Plan will develop recommendations based on transportation demand modeling that is informed by updated population and employment forecasting – it is anticipated that the Beaver Bank Bypass and Margeson Drive south extension will be considered as part of the modeling.

- In 2023, HRM initiated the "Future Serviced Communities" study that is reviewing four provincially designated 'Special Planning Areas' that are identified in the Regional Plan as potential future locations for serviced development. One of the four areas being investigated as part of this study is the Sandy Lake lands north of Hammonds Plains Road between Highway 102 and Larry Uteck Boulevard. The study, which is being completed on behalf of HRM by a consultant (Stantec), will investigate the suitability of the site for development and identify high level infrastructure requirements that are expected to be required to enable development to occur. The infrastructure review for Sandy Lake site will explicitly consider the extension of Margeson Drive south to Hammonds Plains Road due to the existing road capacity constraints in the area, and the benefits of the Beaver Bank By-pass will be studied.
- Following the wildfires and flooding that impacted multiple communities in HRM in 2023, residential subdivision egress has been at the forefront of community safety considerations. Staff intend to complete a region-wide assessment in 2024 that focuses on access/egress for existing residential subdivisions. It is intended that the study will identify, assess, and prioritize residential subdivisions with secondary access challenges, and that this study will inform the approach to the planning,

design, and implementation for any necessary secondary access interventions that may be deemed necessary.

The findings of the study are expected to be relevant to the Beaver Bank Bypass and the extension of Margeson Drive to the south, enabling a better understanding the extent to which the proposed roadway connections could improve access/egress for residents, and providing a means to prioritize the connections relative to other proposed connections that may be warranted in the municipality.

- Phase 5 Regional Plan Review / Strategic Growth and Infrastructure Priorities Plan: The review of the Regional Plan has been undertaken through a phased approach, with Phase 4 (which includes a revised Regional Plan) expected to come forward for Council review and approval in Spring 2024. Phase 5 of the Regional Plan Review, considering future growth scenarios, will begin immediately following the adoption of the new Regional Plan. The Draft Regional Plan released in June 2023 included policy intent to undertake a Strategic Growth and Infrastructure Priorities Plan. This work is expected to guide the Municipality's work on where future growth will take place and identify the required investments in services and infrastructure including water, wastewater / stormwater services, mobility, emergency services, and community / parkland facilities, among others. Phase 5 will be informed by the projects described above and may result in further changes to the Regional Plan and/or Regional Subdivision By-law.
- African Nova Scotian Community Action Program (ANSCAP): The proposed Margeson Drive extension would be located within the historic African Nova Scotian community of Lucasville. In 2020, Regional Council endorsed the *African Nova Scotian Road to Economic Prosperity*. This is a strategy developed and owned by the African Nova Scotian community to address systemic issues and improve economic and quality of life outcomes for African Nova Scotians. It aims to attract investment to historic African Nova Scotian communities, increase labour force attachment and entrepreneurship, and build community capacity. Planning & Development will be working with communities including Lucasville to undertake community action plans, which allow residents to take a leading role in the evolution of their communities with municipal support.

During the planning of the extension of Margeson Drive south from Highway 101, HRM engaged with Halifax Water on the potential to integrate water infrastructure into the project. Halifax Water were (and still are) planning a new transmission main between the Pockwock Transmission Main connection (near Hammonds Plains Road) and Middle Sackville, and the Margeson Drive extension presents a potential option for that connection. They have completed portions of the new transmission main along Lucasville Road (to Bryanston Road) and are currently planning the next phases that will complete the extension to Sackville – the Margeson Drive extension remains a route that is of interest to Halifax Water for that connection and a potential integration opportunity.

Potential Approaches:

Next steps for the potential advancement of these projects should be informed by the the results of the JRTA's RTP and HRM's Future Serviced Communities Study and Subdivision Egress Study (all are anticipated to be completed in 2024-25). Staff will be engaging with the JRTA and consultants associated with these projects to ensure that the Beaver Bank Bypass and Margeson Drive projects are explicitly considered as part of the analyses.

In the interim, the following are tasks that staff could pursue if deemed a priority by Regional Council:

- Carry out conceptual and preliminary design work, as appropriate, to advance previous concepts that were developed earlier in the planning and design process.
- Re-initiate efforts to acquire lands to preserve the ROW necessary to build these proposed roadways in the future.
- Engage with developers in the area to gain an understanding of the status of current and future plans in the area that could offer opportunities for integration.

- Investigate potential funding opportunities to advance the project including partnerships with the Provincial / Federal Governments or developers.

Funds to complete planning, design, and land acquisition are not currently budgeted in the draft 2024-25 Capital Plan and would be required to carry out the above-noted work. Further, staff resources are not currently assigned to carry out these tasks and would need to be reassigned from other planned work.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications at this time. Funds to complete planning, design, and land acquisition are not currently budgeted in the draft 2024-25 Capital Plan. If Regional Council wishes to pursue any of these potential approaches, funds will need to be designated as part of the capital budget process.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was required.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Proposed Road Connections / Municipally Owned Lands

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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