

Halifax Commuter Rail: A Fresh Concept

The Green Interconnected Rapid Transit (GIRT) Concept

The GIRT concept, proposed by BOMA Nova Scotia, incorporates a continuous system of green interconnected rapid transit that provides access to the downtown cores of both Halifax and Dartmouth. GIRT would use electric powered light rail (low floor) including in-street, with the electricity being sourced from wind or solar energy. It would function as the **primary independent** public transportation system for HRM (buses become secondary and only feed the LRT system). Overall, GIRT offers an environmentally sustainable and independent option for riders to use for more efficient travelling purposes.

Benefits of Urban Style LRT

A European design approach has been used to develop urban style LRT projects in a number of Canadian cities over the years. Urban-style LRT is based on a wider planning approach that includes linkages with land use policy, possible future development corridors not constrained by existing transportation infrastructure, and an understanding of how LRT fits within a wider transportation hierarchy. Urban style LRT is designed to be the preferred transportation choice in order to maximize the benefits of the system.

With a focus on putting the passenger first, key features of the urban style LRT projects include:

- ▶ Complete-street designs, with LRT given priority over auto traffic
- ▶ LRT designed to directly serve key destinations (jobs, education, health care, shopping, entertainment, etc.)
- ▶ Closer stop spacing to better serve communities and neighborhoods
- ▶ Redesign of local transit services to complement the LRT alignment, and convenient transfer between LRT and regional rail services
- ▶ Modern, low-floor, modular LRVs
- ▶ Low-floor stops, integrated with surrounding development and encouraging transit-oriented development (TOD)
- ▶ Segregated LRT alignments, designed within the roadway and primarily at-grade

GIRT: Planning Features

Routes

Phase 1 would include Beaverbank/Windsor Junction to downtown Halifax and downtown Dartmouth continuing to Eastern Passage and assumes use of existing rail beds to house new parallel LRT tracks. The Halifax peninsula portion would circumnavigate the peninsula through the use of in-street LRT using Hollis Street.

The Phase 1 system would create a core for potential future expansions to Timberlea/Tantallon, Enfield/Elmsdale and Mt. Uniacke/Windsor.

Ridership

Under this concept the existing bus transit system would have to be completely re-thought and the LRT system would become the primary public transportation system. Buses would be used as the feeder system to the LRT stations (rather than serving as main line routes). GIRT would become the permanent alternate transportation system for moving people, not automobiles and buses to many areas of HRM.

GIRT would become the central public transportation system capable of expansion to other areas in the future as demand and development dictate.

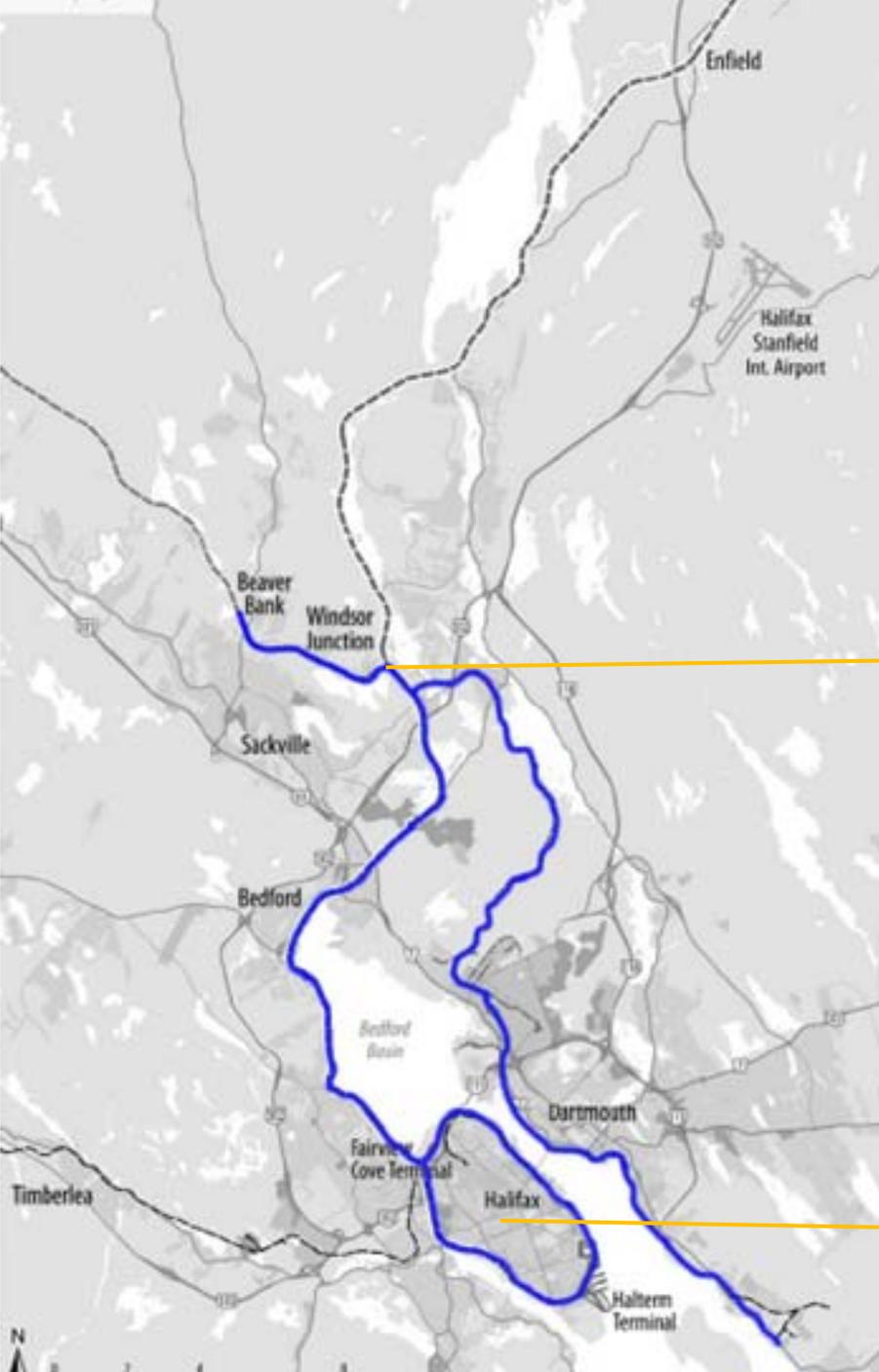
GIRT would lead to increased revenue and ridership from automobile and bus rider displacements. The ridership should be greater than the existing bus system as there would be an effective transportation platform servicing as an alternative to automobiles because of time savings, costs to users, and dependability.

GIRT provides, through the use of existing transportation channels, a complete and independent system without reliance or overloading of existing road systems.

Other Features/Impacts

- ▶ Use of electric trains to significantly reduce CO2 emissions
- ▶ Makes use of solar or wind energy to improve sustainability and reduce utility costs
- ▶ Substantial reduction in road capital and maintenance costs to HRM and the Province
- ▶ Cost savings from modified bus system

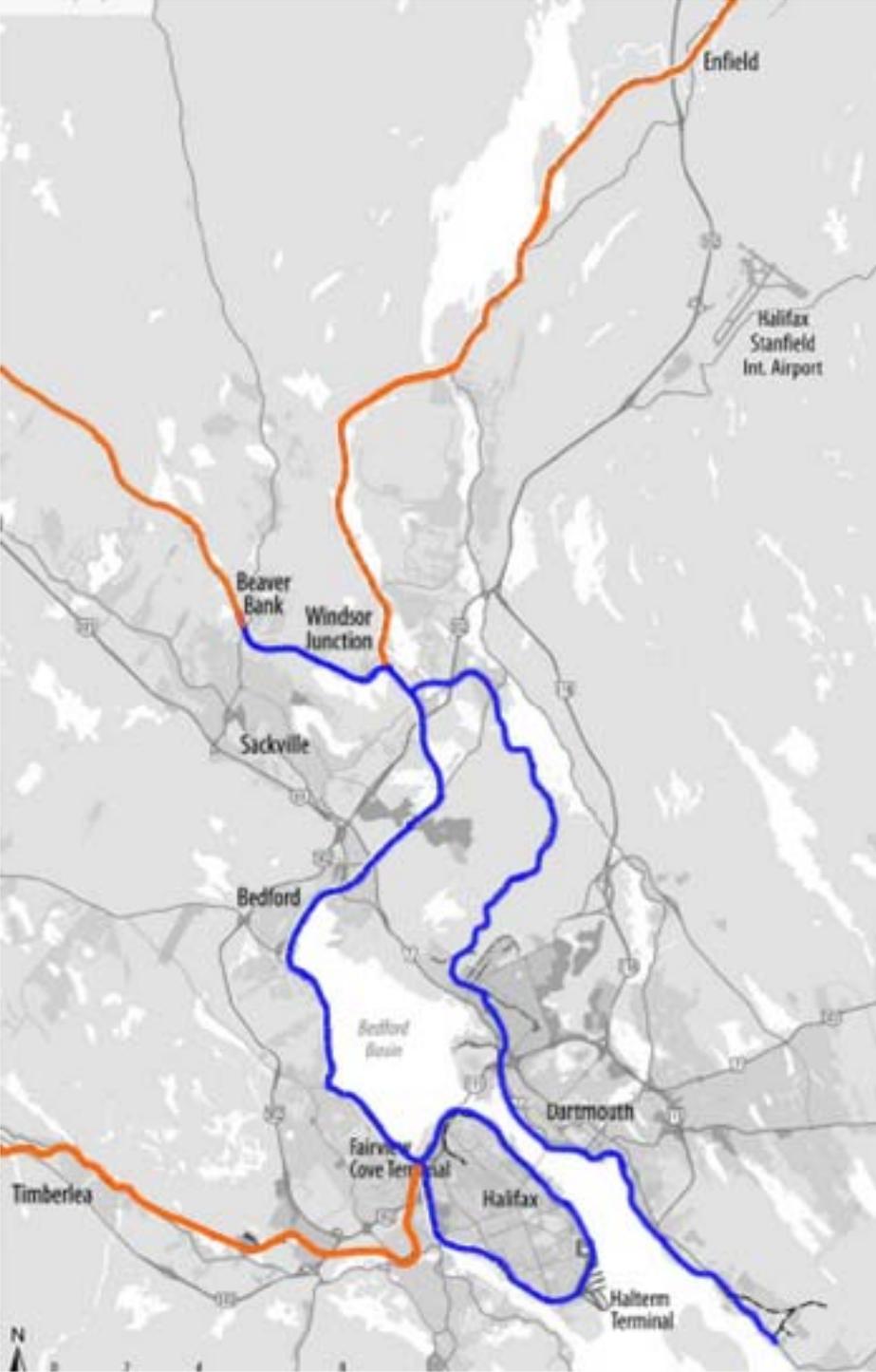
GIRT Routes – Phase 1



Buses connect communities to rail stations

Buses run east/west to connect riders in the peninsula

GIRT Routes – Phase 2



GIRT Economic Benefit Analysis

As noted previously, the CPCS study limited the economic benefit analysis to:

- ▶ Travel time savings
- ▶ Automobile operating cost savings
- ▶ CO2 emission reductions

Other jurisdictions include additional items within the scope of quantified economic and other benefits.

	Halifax-CPCS study	Ottawa	Hamilton	Kitchener-Waterloo	MetroLinx (GTA)
Travel Time Savings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vehicle Op Costs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CO2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Accident Costs		✓	✓	✓	✓
Air Quality		✓	✓	✓	✓
Land Value & Increased Tax Revenue		✓	✓	✓	✓
Salt use		✓	✓		✓
Job creation			✓	✓	✓
Safety					✓
Road Congestion Costs					✓

It is recommended that the following elements be analyzed as part of the economic benefit analysis of GIRT:

- ▶ Travel time savings
- ▶ Automobile operating cost savings
- ▶ CO2 emission savings
- ▶ Accident costs
- ▶ Air quality improvement
- ▶ Increased tax revenues from new development corridors

- ▶ Transfer of costs from existing transit system
- ▶ Salt use/road maintenance savings
- ▶ Job creation
- ▶ Safety

In addition the GIRT concept would result in savings to both the Province and Federal Government in relation to road construction.

GIRT - Further Study

Since current road and transit expansions have not been able to meet the transport demands of the growing HRM population, it is recommended that a detailed study of the GIRT concept be undertaken to understand the feasibility of this innovative approach to solving the transportation issues in HRM.

Implementing green public transit is consistent with the direction of the Federal Government with its new infrastructure plan and related funding initiative. Capital costs associated the proposed concept (electric LRT) would be substantial; however, ridership should be substantially greater compared to the concept studied in the CPCS report assuming that the bus transportation system is converted to be a feeder service to the LRT system.

The economic benefit analysis should be expanded to reflect other benefits quantified by other jurisdictions.

The financial analysis should include recognition of potential sources of Provincial and Federal funding.

The analysis should also recognize potential savings to the Province and the Federal Government arising from the decrease in road construction funding that would be required in future years should GIRT be fully implemented.

About BOMA Nova Scotia

The Building Owners & Managers Association (BOMA) Nova Scotia is one of the eleven federated locals that together form BOMA Canada, which represents over 2300 Canadian members in the industry and over 2.1 Billion square feet of office space. Since its origins in the United States in 1907 BOMA has grown and prospered, dedicating itself to establishing best practices and researching real estate topics that would be valuable to commercial real estate managers, operators and suppliers. Our mandate at BOMA Nova Scotia is to provide commercial real estate leadership and support throughout Nova Scotia.