



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

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August 31, 2009

The Honourable Bill Estabrooks, M.B., M.L.A, Minister
Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal
PO Box 186
Halifax NS B3J 2N2

Dear Minister:

I am writing you today in regards to an important matter in my constituency. The Waverley Road Crosswalk Program was initiated by a local group of concerned citizens and crosswalk safety in the area. As you may know, the trial was modeled on similar programs in place in many cities across the United States, where it is endorsed by various state and local governments. At the time of implementation, I was the municipal councilor for the area and was pleased to join individuals and local businesses in financially supporting the trial.

It's my understanding that you are familiar with the program and have written to the residents involved with the trial in support of their efforts. I thank you for your support, you join a wide group of individuals and politicians of all political stripes who have been put their names behind the crosswalk flag program.

In the spring of this year, Halifax Regional Council unanimously agreed that the trial had sufficient public support and merit that it should be sent for a full review by the Transportation Association of Canada. Unfortunately, on July 31, 2009, the traffic authority for the Halifax Regional Municipality under recommendation from the Transport Association of Canada, requested the flags be removed from Waverley Road and the program cease. This action was taken by the traffic authority without review by council.

I believe that this action was ill advised and the logic used to end this community based and operated program was misguided. I disagree with the conclusion that crosswalk flags are not a traffic control device and that they provide a false, and therefore dangerous, sense of security for the pedestrian. The exact same arguments have been used publicly by the HRM traffic authority against the installation of count down timers and painted crosswalks, yet these are still installed, endorsed by the Transportation Association of Canada, and publicly supported.

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I believe that this program is extremely beneficial to the community and helps to raise crosswalk awareness in the area. There are few other crosswalk safety measures (overhead warning indicators, sound beacons) on this road and the Waverley Road Crosswalk Flag program helps to increase awareness for both drivers and pedestrians. The Crosswalk Flag program may in fact provide an option for direct community involvement in improved crosswalk safety on busy two lane roads similar to Waverley Road across Nova Scotia.

Collisions at marked crosswalks have been all too frequent in recent years. The public is demanding options, and this is an option which is clearly widely supported. In nearly all circumstances, these accidents are preventable and it is the responsibility of public officials to ensure the well-being of our citizens.

This is not a political matter but one of public safety and I firmly believe we must do our best to raise awareness for pedestrians and drivers. I hope this is one we can work on together to bring forth a solution. It is my understanding from your letter to the Waverley Crosswalk Flag Program group that your department has given you legal advice that the Motor Vehicle Act does not allow you to overrule the HRM Traffic Authority. Respecting the advice you have received, I would ask that your department consider other options which may permit the continuation of the flag program on Waverley Road with the support of Halifax Regional Council, and its consideration by municipal councils elsewhere in the province.

Young or old, crossing the street, even at marked crosswalks, can be an unsafe task but does not have to be so. There is no question pedestrians and operators of vehicles must both take due care on our streets. However, as public officials I believe we have a duty to make available for community consideration as many options as possible to improve visibility of crosswalks.

Children and teenagers begin classes this week, which further emphasizes the heightened need for care and attention when crossing the street. I strongly urge you to review this matter immediately. I would further request you ask the traffic authority for the Halifax Regional Municipality to reverse its decision and reinstate this important program until identification of the crosswalk flags can be identified as an official traffic control device by either or both of the Transportation Association of Canada and Province of Nova Scotia guidelines and legislation.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this program and the options in person please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Andrew Younger, MLA
Dartmouth East

cc: The Honourable John Baird
Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities
His Worship, Peter Kelly, Mayor
Halifax Regional Municipality