DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

MacEachen Institute for
Public Policy & Governance

Objectives

Our research identifies and analyzes relevant online communities, key contributors, and discussions about the Macdonald Bridge re-decking project on social media.

Recommendations

Social media platforms are important communication channels for reaching out to and engaging with Haligonians about the Macdonald Bridge re-decking project. Our analysis reveals that Instagram is a viable educational and discussion platform for community engagement. In particular, we found many examples of how images about the Big Lift generated serious, in-depth discussions. We believe that using Instagram to share images about the re-decking is an effective way to keep the public informed about the project's progress.

Twitter is another useful social media platform for HHB to engage with the public. Beyond engagement, Twitter can also provide insight into Haligonians opinions about the Big Lift. Discussions about the re-decking project on Twitter are dominated by local organizations who report about the status of the bridge and bridge traffic. Consistently using and promoting a unique hashtag - such as #bigliftHFX - would make it easier to track sentiments, concerns, and opinions regarding the project and collect information directly from the broader Halifax community.

SMART INFRASTRUCTURE

How Haligonians use social media to discuss the Macdonald Bridge re-decking

Findings

We analyzed the content of Twitter messages posted since February 2015 about the Big Lift. More than half of the messages concerned traffic updates, congestion, delays, closures, etc. News and weather-related updates also dominated Twitter conversations.

The top contributors to Big Lift discussions on Twitter (based on the number of times they were mentioned or replied to) were the following organizations and institutions:

- **HHbridges** (Halifax Harbour Bridges)
- **HFXtransit** (Halifax Transit)
- **CBCNS** (CBC Nova Scotia)
- **HFXtraffic** (unofficial updates about traffic, transit and road conditions for Halifax and Nova Scotia)
- **BigliftHFX** (Big Lift project official account)

We also analyzed comments on Instagram photos shared by **bigliftHFX**, the Big Lift's official Instagram account. Our analysis revealed that comments were long, with lots of questions about the project. This is somewhat uncharacteristic for Instagram, which tends to prioritize pictures over words. This finding reveals that Haligonians are generally aware of the project and are interested enough to engage and ask lots of questions. We also found that Haligonians were predominantly positive on Instagram (and Twitter) when it came to the tone of their discussion about the Big Lift.

In sum, Twitter plays a role as a source for live traffic updates and road closures related to the Bridge posted by authoritative sources , and Instagram serves as a public forum for Haligonians to share their feelings and excitement about the Big Lift project.

For more information about this research, contact Anatoliy Gruzd at gruzd@dal.ca.

Dr. Anatoliy Gruzd is an associate professor in the Ted Rogers School of Management at Ryerson University. He is also the director of Ryerson's Social Media Lab (http://anatoliygruzd.com). Dr. Gruzd is a Canada Research Chair in *Social Media Data Stewardship.* For more information, contact Dr. Gruzd at gruzd@ryerson.ca.