

# shift 17 inTransit

**MARCH 2-4, 2017**

**DALHOUSIE SCHOOL OF PLANNING**

**HALIFAX CENTRAL LIBRARY**



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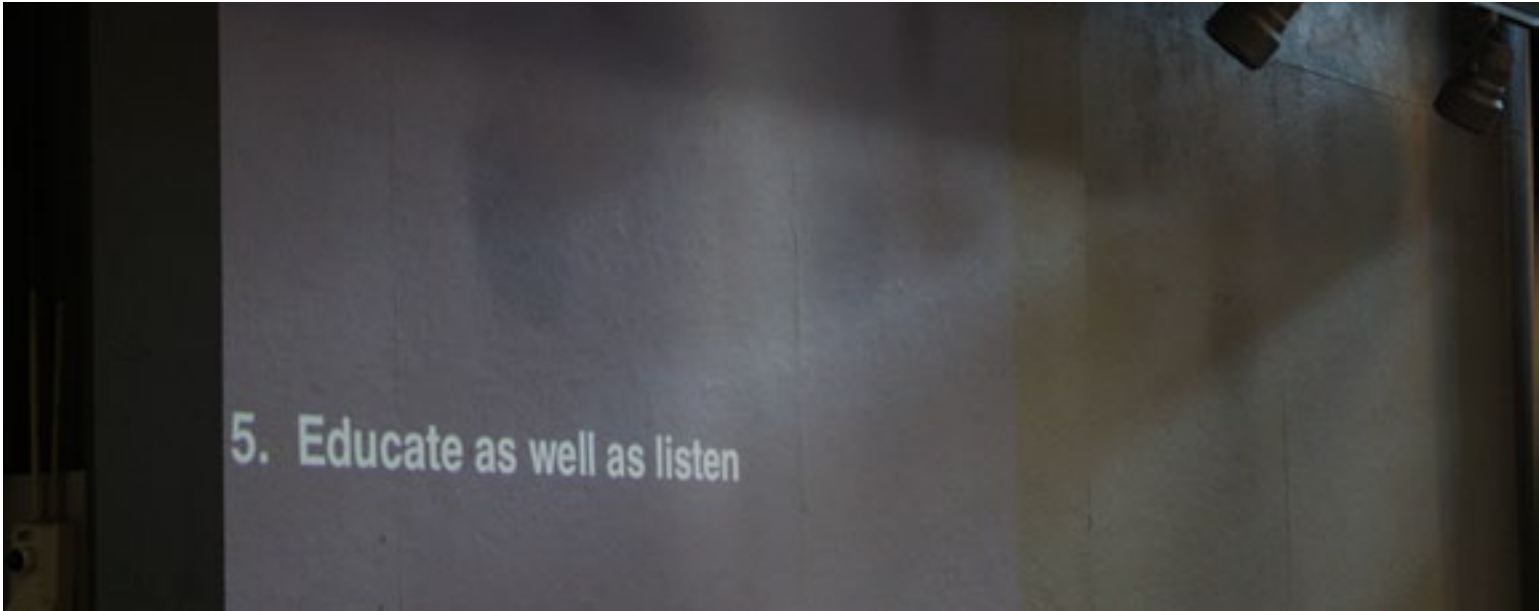
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5. Educate as well as listen

## Note from the Organizing Committee

This year, the students of the Dalhousie School of Planning organized and hosted the 28th annual SHIFT Conference, SHIFT inTransit 2017. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of all attendees, volunteers, organizers, speakers, sponsors, and partners, the conference was a resounding success. The organizing committee is grateful to everyone who contributed to SHIFT this year.

SHIFT inTransit explored the need for a major shift in the way we think about transit. For too many years, transportation planning has consisted of designing highways and accommodating cars. Fortunately, planners and the public have begun to see that transportation should serve our cities, not the other way around. SHIFT inTransit was an opportunity for professionals, students and engaged citizens to come together and build a vision for the role of transit in Halifax into the future.

Each year, SHIFT is proud to partner with the Downtown Halifax Business Commission to present the conference's opening Carmichael lecture. This year's Carmichael speaker was Andreas Røhl, an associate with Gehl Architects in Copenhagen. Røhl's talk, "More to Transport than Transport: Transport as a Tool to Create Livable

Cities," emphasized life, space, and buildings—in that order. Changing perspective and policy on this issue is not rocket science, Røhl argued, but does take political courage and good public engagement.

Røhl's talk set the tone for a conference that focused on big ideas and how to make them happen. Friday, conference participants welcomed Monica Tibbits-Nutt from Boston's MBTA who gave an inspiring speech about the purpose of transportation sprinkled with anecdotes about her path toward transportation planning. Taking a long bus from her small Indiana town to a decent school gave Tibbits-Nutt opportunities, and her planning ethos centres on ensuring everyone has access to the same types of opportunities through transit.

How can we make this happen? SHIFT inTransit's two other keynote speakers helped us find solutions. Kurt Luhrsen, who led Houston METRO's bus network redesign in 2015, spoke about what Halifax could learn from the lessons of his city's process. Key to Luhrsen's message was the need to be clear with all stakeholders about the inherent tradeoffs to transit planning, such as service aiming for the highest ridership versus the widest coverage. David Bragdon, from New York's

Transit Center, emphasized that transit does not need to be flashy, just fast, frequent and reliable. While a commuter rail line may be a tempting, shiny new investment, these are not necessary to improve service.

The conference also hosted student guests from Manitoba and New Brunswick, local politicians, HRM planners and transit workers, and many local groups advocating for better transit in Halifax. Throughout the workshops, panels and concurrent sessions, participants designed hypothetical networks which required hard decisions on what type of service to prioritize. We learned about wayfinding practices to best direct people around an area and about groups making transit work in HRM's rural communities. We also heard how local Councillors and representatives are planning to improve transit in the city.

Overall, the conference acted as a spark for discussion around transit in Halifax, prompting participants to ask what we want and how we are going to get it. This report is a summary of each of the lectures, panels and workshops held throughout the two-day conference. We hope it inspires others to always push forward and never settle for the status quo.

#### **SHIFT inTransit 2017 Organizing Committee**

Adriane Salah, Andrew Scanlan Dickie, Chris Markides, Craig Dedels, Dawn Cordeiro, Eliza Jackson, Frank Palermo, Genise Grant, Hannah Shirliff, Janelle Derksen, Jeremy Banks, Jonathon Bray, Julia Million, Kara Martin, Meaghan Dalton, Sandy Mackay, Sarah Burcu, Sarah Craig, Siobhan Evans, and Stephen McCarthy.





## Carmichael Lecture: Andreas Røhl

On March 2, Haligonians crowded into the Schooner Room at Casino Nova Scotia to attend the 15th annual Carmichael Lecture featuring Andreas Røhl, an associate with Gehl Architects in Copenhagen, Denmark. The Carmichael Lecture was created by the Downtown Halifax Business Commission (DHBC) to honour Kate Carmichael, the former Executive Director of the DHBC. The organization has partnered with the SHIFT Conference to feature speakers who can speak to the themes of the SHIFT Conference and offer ideas on how to create vibrant downtown districts.

The theme of Røhl's talk was "More to Transport than Transport: Transport as a Tool to Create Livable Cities". Røhl works with Jan Gehl, the 2016 Carmichael lecturer, and his ideas are influenced by the "Gehl approach" to architecture and planning, which emphasizes life, space, and buildings (in that order), as opposed to the traditional planning approach of thinking about buildings, traffic, and finally life. Røhl drew on his experiences as the director of the Copenhagen Bicycle Program to explain why getting people out of cars and into more sustainable modes of transportation is essential for creating better cities.

According to Røhl, transport is all about people, not modes. Røhl acknowledged that cars are the most convenient transportation option for most people. Therefore, his goal is to minimize the number of trips that people need to take by car by

turning other modes of transportation into viable options. Internationally, momentum is building around this idea, which is leading to a paradigm shift in planning. Sixty years ago, all levels of government were tearing down established neighbourhoods and building super-highways through cities. These superhighways failed to solve urban traffic problems, and today planners advocate for designing fine-grain networks that move people effectively through cities, using all forms of transportation.

Røhl believes that planning for multi-modal transportation (including public transit and bicycling) also facilitates the creation of a well-designed, dense, livable city that encourages social interaction, improves perceptions of safety, and promotes unique local attractions. He used the example of the transformation of Perth, Australia to illustrate his argument. In the 1990s, Perth had "the world's smallest city centre," one mostly-deserted downtown block. Jan Gehl recommended that Perth improve their bus service, eliminate one-way streets, and widen footpaths to give pedestrians and public transit priority over people in single-occupancy vehicles. Today, Perth is known as one of the world's most livable cities.

Røhl argues that cities must incorporate six transportation principles into city planning in order to create livable cities: proximity, connection, protection, maintenance, enjoyment,



and culture awareness. Cities should embrace dense, diverse, mixed-use development that places services and people in close proximity to each other. Different neighbourhoods and regions should be well-connected through a variety of integrated modes. For example, every taxi in Copenhagen has a bicycle rack on the back to accommodate cyclists. People walking, bicycling, or taking public transit should feel safe and secure. City maintenance and traffic control departments should prioritize the maintenance of bicycle lanes and pedestrian pathways over roadways. Human-scale recreation developments help foster a sense of identity for cities and neighbourhoods, and contribute to enjoyment of space in cities. Lastly, Røhl acknowledged that cycling culture is often perceived as political or negative in North America. He proposed that cyclists should push back against this perception and normalize the practice by engaging in civil cycling, rather than militant cycling.

DHBC Executive Director Paul MacKinnon facilitated a question and answer period with Røhl after the lecture. In response to questions about how Copenhagen paid for cycling infrastructure and data collection initiatives, Røhl pointed out that the definition of “expensive”

depends on what you compare something with. Cycling, walking, and place-making initiatives are very cheap in comparison to driving. Røhl advised Haligonians to respect that the car may be the best or only option for most trips, especially for people living in suburbs, but to try and provide different options for as many trips as possible. In order to address concerns about building more alternative transportation infrastructure, transit and transportation projects need to be integrated into broader development initiatives, not implemented in isolation.

Perhaps Røhl’s most important take-home message was that changing cities, and the way people move within cities, is not a matter of rocket science. Citing Copenhagen’s experience, Røhl said that if conditions are better for cycling, more people would choose to cycle. The same principle applies for walking, bussing, and driving. To create change, Røhl advised cities to create a vision with a few simple key moves, and then deliver on promises using a holistic planning approach. This change requires tough but necessary political decisions, but cities can explain these decisions in order to change people’s perspectives from NIMBY (not in my backyard) to IOBY (in our backyard).



# Conference Opening

SHIFT inTransit officially began at 9am on Friday, March 3 in the Paul O'Regan Hall at the Halifax Central Library. After an acknowledgement that SHIFT was taking place on unceded Mi'kmaq territory, elder Geri Musqua-LeBlanc opened the ceremony with a prayer and a teaching moment. Mayor Mike Savage then gave opening remarks

and a welcome on behalf of the Halifax Regional Municipality. Savage emphasized his support for public transit becoming the primary form of transportation in the Halifax region, and thanked the organizers and the School of Planning for hosting the conference.

## Keynote: Monica Tibbits-Nutt



Monica Tibbits-Nutt is the Executive Director at 128 Business Council, a member of the Fiscal Management and Control Board that oversees the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), and a member of the MassDOT Board of Directors. She opened the SHIFT inTransit conference Friday morning with an inspiring keynote address.

According to Tibbits-Nutt, the main purpose of transportation is to connect people with employment and educational opportunities in order to give them choices. Planners often want to change people's decisions, but this presumes that members of public have choices around transportation. Instead, the role of the planner is to find out what people actually need and give them

options so that they can make their own choices. According to her, technology and shiny new train routes for affluent areas do not address basic equity concerns for traditionally neglected communities and people who are “transit-dependent”.

Tibbits-Nutt’s philosophy is rooted in her own experiences growing up in a small agricultural town in Indiana. She rode a school bus four hours a day for 12 years to attend a better public school than the one in her hometown. After finishing high school, she worked in a bus windshield factory for a year to raise money for college. These early experiences with transit gave her choices and the opportunity to go to college and graduate school. While Tibbits-Nutt’s personal story resonated strongly with the audience, she didn’t speak publicly about it until recently. She said that it has only been recent political developments in the United States that have made her revisit how important her own background is to her planning, and that there is now an even greater need to connect transit planning with equity.

Tibbits-Nutt believes that professional silos are the number-one issue that prevents effective transportation and urban planning. She does not think that members of different interest groups really want different things, but that they are pitted against each other for political purposes. To help get people out of their silos and teach them how planning actually works, she developed “The Master Plan” board game. In the game, people take on different roles and advocate for initiatives they may be against in their “real life” role to embrace and understand alternative perspectives.

In the question and answer session after her address, Tibbits-Nutt elaborated on some of her ideas about the most important aspects of transit, transit planning, and her work with the MTBA. According to her, the most important aspects of transit for people with few choices are predictability and safety. Unfortunately, these are often the first aspects of transit that tend to go when the system is under pressure or being cut back. Tibbits-Nutt also mentioned the need to prioritize transit access for low-income people during emergencies. Communities without other

transportation options are stranded for 50-60% longer during emergencies and natural disasters than people who have other transportation options.

The audience raised many questions about regional transit planning and addressing tensions between rural areas, suburbs, and the peninsula in Halifax. Tibbits-Nutt has looked at similar issues in Massachusetts, where everyone pays taxes to support the transit authority, but not everyone gets service. She supports regional planning and coordination between different services. However, master plans should be approached with caution, as they tend to sit on shelves and not get implemented. She advised that transit planners need to connect and serve different groups, or discussion around transit can turn into “us vs. them” arguments between neighbourhoods and regions. In the case of “infeasible” rural transit services, Tibbits-Nutt advised planners to look at why transit projects are failing in rural areas and address those issues, rather than abandoning the projects.

Tibbits-Nutt’s address resonated with audience members. Those who attended were inspired by her call for transportation planning to better address equity concerns, communicate across professional silos and be honest about past failures.







## Political Panel on Transit

**Mayor Savage, Andy Fillmore MP, Lisa Roberts MLA, HRM Councillors**

Following the opening keynote address on Friday morning, SHIFT inTransit got political with a panel of local representatives from all levels of government. The federal level was represented by Andy Fillmore, MP, the provincial level by Lisa Roberts, MLA, and the municipal level by Mayor Mike Savage as well as Councillors Waye Mason, Richard Zurawski, Lisa Blackburn, David Hendsbee, Sam Austin, and Tony Mancini. Mayor Savage introduced and facilitated the panel. The Councillors present represented rural, suburban, and urban perspectives, thus bringing a range of opinions on the future of transit in the HRM.

Panelists were asked to briefly tell their stories regarding transit. Most spoke about being transit users. Councillor Hendsbee spoke about his early political advocacy for a bike lane on the MacDonald Bridge in 1993. Fillmore spoke about upcoming infrastructure investments from the federal government, and was keen to learn what community members want to see for the future of transit in the HRM.

The panelists were asked what they think will be the next big shift in transit in Halifax. Most panelists spoke about how great it is that Halifax is considering commuter rail. Several spoke about

the need to make the rider experience “sexier” and incentivize riders with amenities like wi-fi and cupholders, but only a few panelists spoke about designated bus lanes and a bus rapid transit system. The panel’s opinions presented a stark contrast with keynote Monica Tibbits-Nutt’s argument that transit does not need to be sexy or flashy, just safe, reliable, and fast.

Most of the panel also insinuated that they are pro-density and want more people to live in the HRM’s urban areas. Many panelists revealed preconceived opinions about the benefits and cost-effectiveness of density, and none addressed the potential for increased housing costs that can come with gentrification due to revitalization. Two councillors did voice concerns around the City’s desire to increase density in the urban core. Councillor Mancini questioned how the proposed 50,000 more people living in urban areas will get onto the peninsula every day, and Councillor Hendsbee spoke with disappointment about a rural express transit bus that was planned a decade ago but never implemented. Some people want the healthier lifestyles that come from living closer to nature, he argued, so options for transit to and from rural communities should be improved.

The panelists were also asked if the proposed transit plans are moving in tandem with the large-scale transportation shift we need. Most panelists said that while transit improvement has been slow, it is improving for the better with innovations such as real time data for buses and the new stop indicators on the buses.

Taking advantage of the presence of representatives from the other levels of government, the Mayor and Councillors pressed the case that the municipality needs more autonomy to take actions on things like transit. Currently, they must always get permission from the province or partnerships with other levels of government for to innovate or to address issues of affordability and equity.

As expected with many elected leaders on stage, audience questions were engaging and pointed. One person questioned whether the sexy light rail projects the panelists supported would happen in HRM, suggesting that it is likely that any transit rail project will be a commuter rail service

on existing tracks. Panelists did not respond clearly to this statement. Another person asked why safety and vulnerability of transit users is not being addressed, drawing broad condemnations of violence and support for safety measures from the panel. An audience member who had heard Tibbits-Nutt's opening speech asked panelists how they would feel about giving up free parking as a way of encouraging the use of transit for commutes to work. Most panelists argued that drivers should not be penalized but other ways of incentivizing transit-use could be used. Lastly, an audience member spoke passionately about how unaffordable transit is for those on social assistance and those with disabilities and workplace injuries. According to him, the Province recently started forcing those on social assistance to attend twelve medical appointments per month to get free bus tickets. Panelists responded sympathetically and agreed this is an issue but did not have any specific solutions.



# Snapshot of the City

Dave Reage, Marcus Garnet, Paul Vienneau, Kerri Howells, Paul Melville



SHIFT inTransit started its Friday afternoon with an informative session called Snapshot of the City. This panel included short presentations on transit from five speakers: Halifax Transit director Dave Reage, HRM planner Marcus Garnet, transit supervisor Kerri Howells, transit operator Paul Melville, and accessibility advocate Paul Vienneau.

The first speaker was Dave Reage, the Director of Halifax Transit. His presentation focused on his role in managing the city's transit network, giving HRM Council good professional advice and ensuring that Halifax Transit executes Council's directives. Reage presented several transit infrastructure projects, such as the new Lacewood Terminal and Bridge Terminal, and discussed improving bus stops with better design, potentially including guard rails and heating technology. He noted Halifax Transit's recent launch of automated bus stop announcements and real-time data for bus scheduling, drawing applause from the crowd. Reage also outlined how Halifax Transit would like to implement transit priority measures such as dedicated bus lanes, and how the agency learns from current infrastructure projects as they start on new ones.

In the second presentation, senior HRM

Planner Marcus Garnet explained how regional and community planning is used to encourage transit investment in ridership. Garnet's role is to provide analysis and best practice research at the regional level, and to recommend policies which shape development to support both transit and walking. Garnet talked about the role of the planner to support Council and champion new concepts and tools. According to him, planners have the opportunity to influence policy through conferences, committees and government agencies. They can also challenge public assumptions about development and inspire the public with creative solutions for planning.

The third speaker was Kerri Howells, who works for Halifax Transit's Employee Support department. Howells started working for Halifax Transit 20 years ago as one of eight female bus operators. She is now part of a six-person team which supports bus operators. Her division is also responsible for driver training, safety, employee support and recruitment and serves as an outlet for drivers to voice their concerns about transit issues.

Paul Melville, a veteran bus operator with Halifax Transit, spoke fourth. Melville is a



member of several transit committees including the Safe Ride Committee which aims to find solutions for violence against drivers. He is also heavily involved with Halifax Transit's mentorship program, helping new drivers in their transition to the role. Melville brought a practical perspective to the discussion: when asked what big shift Halifax transit needed, he responded that the buses needed wider lanes. Both Melville and Howells spoke passionately about the experience of driving a bus, and transit operators' desire to help all customers and make their service as accessible and convenient as possible.

The final speaker was Paul Vienneau an accessibility advocate, who discussed accessibility on Halifax Transit. Vienneau has used a wheelchair since a 1991 injury, and has used his own experiences to become an advocate for universal accessibility in transit and other areas. His goal is to bring about an inclusive and barrier free transportation system. Vienneau reflected on how accessibility features on transit have evolved



since the late 90s, and how we should shift the way we develop transit services to accommodate everyone as instead of creating separate systems for specific groups of people.

Snapshot of the City concluded with a Q&A session with the speakers. One audience member asked each panelist what shift they would recommend for Halifax Transit. The responses included making transit more attractive and more inclusive, reducing parking in the downtown core, establishing rail on both sides of the harbour, and making the ferry service more consistent. The audience also asked questions around ridership, how long it takes to see change in transit, implementing public feedback into transit services and how to move more people rather than buses around. Overall, the session was a dynamic and educational dialogue among different levels of Halifax Transit, advocates and the general public.



# Keynote: Kurt Luhrsen

Friday afternoon wrapped up with a keynote lecture by Kurt Luhrsen, the Vice President of Planning at the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Houston, Texas. Luhrsen spoke about the lessons he learned from leading the team which redesigned Houston's bus network in 2015. He presented the lessons he learned from this process, backed up with details from his experiences.

**Define the case for change:** Luhrsen argued that the most difficult aspect of changing a transit system is defining the reason it needs to change. In Houston, the geographical distribution of the city's population was changing and the bus program was no longer addressing the city's needs. The transit agency asked whether its transit system was effectively serving the region. Luhrsen said that this question was critical to answer before proceeding with any other aspect of the project because if defined the case for change.

**Seek insight, not just information:** According to Luhrsen, transit agencies have plenty of information but not much insight. Luhrsen argued that transit agencies need to disseminate the information they have in a way that is easy to understand, especially when proposing a change

to service. He presented a hard-to-understand but often produced example of a table showing ridership for several of Houston's routes, and contrasted this with two maps showing the ten highest- and ten lowest-ridership routes over a background of population density. The maps effectively communicated that the routes with highest usage were simple, straight and long lines running through densely populated areas—an insight not available by looking at the graph.

**Engage diverse stakeholders at many levels:** Once the need for a project has been established, Luhrsen argues that planners should focus on three ways of engaging diverse stakeholders. Planners must first inform and educate elected officials, communicating a clear reason why staff are pursuing the project. Next, we must involve the public at every step to improve project buy-in and incorporate community wisdom. Finally, we need to consult other plans and departments to make sure the best possible ideas are being used in the project.

**Educate as well as listen and define goals based on real trade-offs:** Luhrsen stressed the importance of educating all stakeholders on the tradeoffs involved in transit decision-making.





One basic tradeoff is between two types of service: demand-based, where routes are planned for high ridership, and coverage-based, where routes are planned to ensure broad spatial access to transit. Luhrsen made it clear that neither service was right or wrong in itself, and the right balance between the two depends on the goals of the transit agency. He argued that engaging stakeholders with games can help them understand the needs of other stakeholders and the tradeoffs involved, leading to a more meaningful discussion of the transit project.

Plan collaboratively with the right team: Once the project's goals are established and all stakeholders have contributed, Luhrsen emphasizes the need to collaborate with the right team. Houston brought in transit guru Jarrett

Walker to help redesign their bus routes and seconded a team of about a dozen city planners for a week-long design session. The team then worked to ensure they could communicate their decisions in a compelling, visually appealing story backed up with data.

Be willing to adapt to feedback: Luhrsen left the audience with a closing argument that planners must be willing to modify their plans, accept feedback and manage expectations. Even the well-managed Houston project underwent revisions after input from city council and public hearings. However, this should not be discouraging. Luhrsen emphasized the positive contribution planners can make, as the choices we make about our transit system can have a lasting and significant impact.

# Film Screening and Social at Seven Bays

After kicking off the first day of keynote speakers and panels, the conference presented a short film festival and social event at Seven Bays Bouldering, a local café and bouldering facility located in the north end of the Halifax peninsula. The event encouraged keynote speakers, conference participants and event organizers to enjoy a relaxed evening of inspirational films, offered an opportunity to get off campus, and explore an eclectic Halifax neighbourhood.

The majority of films were produced by Streetfilms, an organization committed to illustrating how smart transportation design and policy can result in better places to live, work and play. The films exemplified transportation success stories, and included:

Santiago, Chile: 2017 Sustainable Transportation Award Winner, a film illustrating the major improvements made in pedestrian spaces, cycling and transit in the last year by Santiago, and the successes that led the city to receive the 2017 Sustainable Transport Summit award.

Vancouver's Multimodal Success Story, a film highlighting the multitude of transit options, from bike, bus, SkyTrain and SeaBus available in Vancouver. Illustrating the power in multiple sustainable mode options and creating a large-scale shift in how people choose to commute.

Seattle: America's Next Top Transit City, a film demonstrating how one of the fastest growing cities in America achieved public support for transit and increased ridership through setting clear transit priorities with bold goals and focusing on the quality of service delivery.

Santa Monica's Savvy Multimodalism, a film illustrating the comprehensive transportation system in Santa Monica, focusing on the newly implemented Breeze bike-share project, a convenient, time saving and easy to use system encouraging citizens to cycle.

Zurich: Where People are Welcome

and Cars Are Not, a film looking at the "global champ" in transportation planning, illustrating the numerous policies and practices in the city endorsing and enforcing the pedestrian as the priority.

High Frequency: Why Houston is Back on the Bus, a film illustrating how Houston METRO reimagined its entire bus network starting with a clean slate. The film conveys how in 2015 Houston created a new system; optimizing efficiency, improving service and doing so using only existing resources and budget.

The night ended with a screening of The Case for Complete Streets, a film produced by Planifax, a local community organization dedicated to educating and informing communities about urban planning issues. The film presents the concept of complete streets, a policy and design approach that considers all users of all abilities and all modes of transportation.

Each film illustrated a place-specific transit success story, demonstrating although there is no one-size-fits-all solution, approaches to improve transit are wide ranging and feasible almost anywhere.



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- Zurich: World Class Transit Metropolis
- Why Houston is Back on the Bus
- Halifax Complete Streets
- ...and more!







## Keynote Panel

**Frank Palermo, Monica Tibbits-Nutt, Kurt Luhrsen, David Bragdon**

SHIFT inTransit started with a bang on Saturday morning with a panel of our three keynote speakers: Monica Tibbits-Nutt, Kurt Luhrsen, and David Bragdon. Dalhousie professor and SHIFT faculty sponsor Frank Palermo opened the session with an impassioned argument for a major shift in the way Halifax looks at transit, then opened the floor to an open dialogue with the panel and audience.

Palermo's believes that Halifax should completely change its approach to streets to put people first. Palermo noted that the past 30 years have been dominated by the car, with pedestrian accessibility as an afterthought, and that this way of thinking continues to influence built form throughout Halifax. However, many places around the world have better streets than Halifax. In Cairo for instance, even though people are surrounded by cars, they come first since public space in that city is about community and people getting together. Saying that we have made streets the domain of traffic engineers, Palermo challenged the audience: what if we took back the streets? Bike lanes, wider sidewalks and an end to car-centric design would make the street a social place instead of just a movement system.

Palermo argued that Halifax needs to completely shift its approach to transportation

by putting transit first. He outlined how car culture undermines equity by depriving those without the means or ability to drive of a mode of transportation, leaving society's most vulnerable populations the least served. Palermo believes that Halifax can do better by learning from places that have been doing this for a long time, such as Curitiba in Brazil. Referencing a plan for transit on the peninsula, he asked: what if we had simple routes, but transit was safe, frequent, and efficient? He explained how better transit would spur economic growth, help address climate change and reduce social inequities. He also urged those present to recognize the urgency and necessity of change, questioning why we talk about transit investments as though we have a choice.

The panel discussion started with a question on the barriers to good public transit. Tibbits-Nutt cited trip speed. In Boston, transit is well used but the buses are stuck in the same traffic as cars. She argued that if the system ran more quickly, people wouldn't need to drive. She also raised the concept that parking is a human right as a barrier, suggesting that many developers are open to reducing parking but are trapped by zoning regulations. Bragdon raised the issue of large-scale visions without binding force, with multi-decade timeframes that allow politicians to



escape accountability. He noted that politicians who will be long out of office when a plan is evaluated have no incentive to act on the plan, and recommended establishing incremental goals with formal evaluation metrics. Luhrsen agreed that elected officials often hide behind timeframes, and that people's priorities are not always what they say. He suggested that the most effective thing for voters to do is watch the decisions politicians make during their terms rather than their election rhetoric.

Palermo then asked the panel what factors make for effective citizen engagement. All panelists agreed that truly engaging people is difficult, and that traditional forms of engagement tend to attract those with the time and means to attend, underrepresenting some groups. The panelists recommended that planners go to existing meetings unrelated to planning, such as church groups. As well, Luhrsen pointed out the need for planners to be able to defend a proposal, since the public have so many opportunities to discuss it via social media. He argued that this keeps planners accountable. Bragdon argued that design charrettes and workshops have a large payoff, though they take time and resources

up front. These kinds of interactive sessions can provide both parties a perspective on the tradeoffs inherent for planning decisions, which results in better feedback and a better informed public. Tibbits-Nutt recommended not using so many acronyms, which just serve to distance the public from the planning process.

While the panel's dialogue did not always connect with Frank Palermo's vision for a transit-oriented and people-first Halifax, its focus on the process of planning did offer a good discussion on what it will take to get there as well as great tips for emerging planners. As well as the discussions above, David Bragdon emphasized the value of open data in empowering advocacy groups. Kurt Luhrsen suggested that to better understand how people viewed planning, planners could visit a Grade 3 classroom to talk about their job. And speaking from personal experience, Monica Tibbits-Nutt warned prospective planners to be prepared to be tweeted at constantly by irate or concerned members of the public. Overall, the panel's message was that genuine conversations with the public are necessary rather than empty gestures of formal engagement.



# Concurrent Sessions

## University of Manitoba Students

Two students from the University of Manitoba City Planning program joined the Dalhousie SHIFT inTransit conference to present their research.

First up, Jeff Hanson presented his project called Transit Tiles: Systems thinking through tiles play. Hanson described his work as a child-friendly cities project, which provides a fun and educational game to provoke thought on transit. He drew from multiple theories when creating the game, including gameplay, game design, constructionism, systems thinking, and decision making. The game contains tiles with transit lines, stations, and Transit Oriented Development hubs, which all fit together to create a transit system. The player's goal is to balance the their system's efficiency (allowing vehicles to traverse the network quickly) with access (having many stations and TODs). The game is time constrained to create a good balance of competition and cooperation.

After explaining the game, the session

participants broke off into two teams and tested it. Dalhousie and Manitoba students faced off in a friendly competition to make the best transit system. The teams were neck and neck until the end. After time run out, the systems were tested for efficiency and access. The two teams tied for the most efficient network, but Dalhousie took the win with the most transit stations! Overall, the game sparked thought about what makes a transit system functional and where there are trade-offs. In discussion after the game, a few people commented on the game as a potential engagement tool.

The second presentation, led by Matthew Robinson, was called BRT in Winnipeg: Designing a Transit Hub through Union Station. Robinson went over a brief history of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) implementation in Winnipeg noting its slow pace. In 2012, Winnipeg started the first phase of a BRT project. Following this, Robinson worked with a team of people to redesign Union Station in Winnipeg for the BRT. He explained the history of Union Station and the possibility of bringing





it back into functionality, making an argument for Union Station as a hub for cultural activity and a gateway to downtown Winnipeg. Robinson concluded that bringing rapid transit to the station was a long and arduous process with many challenges still ahead, but the system was worth the pursuit because it created greater connectivity and liveliness to downtown Winnipeg.

Both students presented innovative research on transit and provoked thought about how we create transit systems and the tradeoffs involved in transit decisions.

### **Aaron Short: B-Line Analytics**

Planner Aaron Short presented his mobile app called B-Line Analytics. He started developing this app after working in Toronto, and is currently developing the backend and looking for funding. The app aims to use data to understand trends and transportation needs, and through this to remind people of the value of each mode of transport and recommend ways to improve people's health and reduce their environmental footprint.

B-Line Analytics tracks user movements, demographics and health information and has

been tested successfully in New York and Toronto. The app's main benefit is its real-time data tracking system. It can provide more accurate data for a transportation network than surveys. Key features include:

Monitoring every mode of transit in real time, adding demographic info and then tracking your travel patterns

- Breaking down caloric, carbon offset, etc. by each mode of transit you use
- Creating large amounts of health, education and movement data is
- Providing linkages that can be used to plan active transportation in cities

The app is currently in development and will be available next year through institutional subscription.

### **Adam Fine: Wayfinding**

Dalhousie Master of Planning student Adam Fine presented a session on the importance of quality wayfinding and the many ways it can be used. Wayfinding is not just signs and maps, but a strategy to help people move through a space, and good wayfinding helps visitors to new spaces by





being easy to understand. Wayfinding can include paths and landmarks, nature, architecture, signage, information counters and pre-visit information such as a website. Planners deciding how to help people get around a space must consider modes of travel and messaging. Spatial design must also consider the audience, making sure it is accessible for people of all heights and ages.

Fine identified ten wayfinding principles at the end of the presentation:

- Every trip begins and ends with walking, and wayfinding often helps get people into a pedestrian space and out of their cars.
- People often combine modes of transit, and the best time to implement wayfinding is when switching modes.
- Short names are good, since people will say, for example, “meet me at Alderney”, but they need to be clear as well.
- Long names do not necessarily do what they need to.
- Give people information only when they need it, since too much information can be overwhelming.
- Signage should be inclusive, standing 1-2 metres so that it accommodates children and those in wheelchairs, and should be simple, brief and with a legible text size.
- Wayfinding should help people find things that move such as buses, for example with route maps and schedules.

- Connect things together as much as possible; for instance, bus headers, terminal names, bus bays, pedestrian walkways, parking lots can use consistent names.
- Dynamic wayfinding such as transit apps using real time data is good.
- Wayfinding is often low on the totem pole due to lack of policy and understanding of its importance, so it is key to link it with a wider municipal wayfinding program.

## **Marcus Garnet: Integrated Mobility**

Marcus Garnet, a senior planner at the HRM, led a session on the creation process and priorities of the Integrated Mobility Plan on Saturday afternoon. This plan will create a vision for how people will move around the municipality by 2031, and will direct investment towards active transportation, transit, and a roadway network to improve links between people and their communities. It connects transportation and land use options; plans, policies and initiatives; and municipal departments and orders of government. The priorities of the Integrated Mobility Plan reflect the Regional Regional plan’s directive to implement a sustainable transportation strategy that offers viable alternatives to the single occupancy vehicle. However, Garnet acknowledged that the targets for the plan are on the timid side. For example, one goal is to have “only” 70% of people in the HRM driving to work by 2031.



HRM staff developed the Integrated Mobility Plan with guidance and leadership from an outside consultant. In order to get out of traditional planning silos, staff from Transportation and Public Works, Halifax Transit, Planning and Development, and Nova Scotia Public Health worked on the plan together. There were two rounds of public consultation, with online surveys, in-person workshops, and pop-up events.

Garnet acknowledged that the HRM will face many challenges in implementing the Integrated Mobility Plan. The HRM is one of the largest municipalities in Canada, with a population widely dispersed in rural, suburban, and urban areas. The Integrated Mobility Plan was intended to encourage interdepartmental communication and coordination, but different departments and levels of government continue to make decisions without consulting the plan. For example, HRM still requires a minimum number of parking spaces for new developments, which further entrenches car culture in the HRM. As well, implementing or raising road tolls to discourage driving are still unpopular options, and they would likely have a disproportionate impact on low-income drivers.

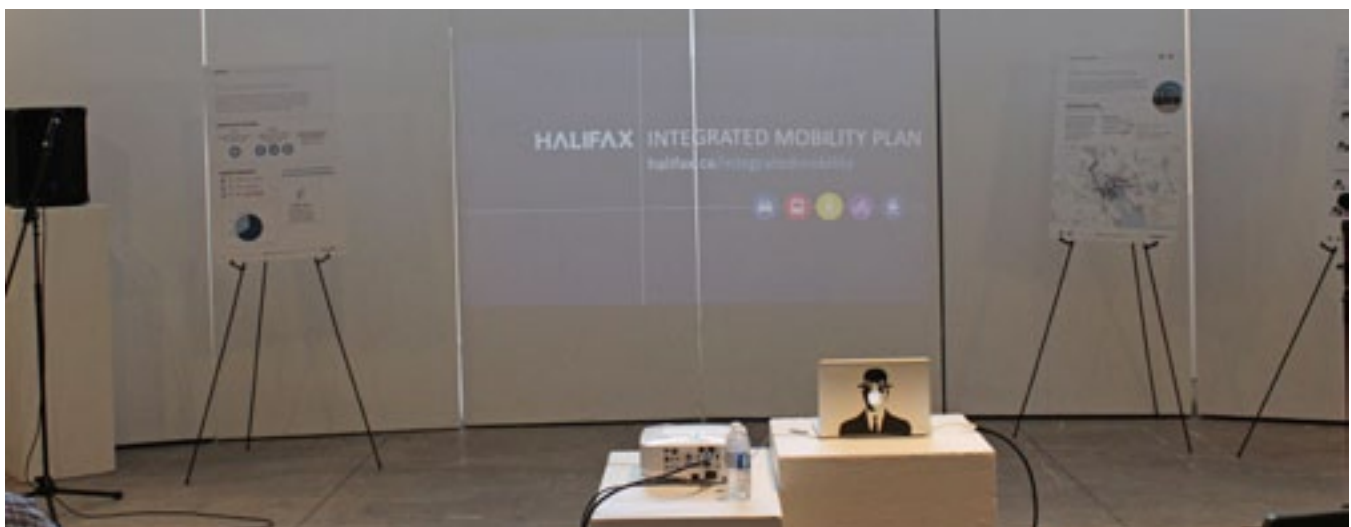
Whether the Integrated Mobility Plan succeeds in breaking down traditional planning silos and meeting its goals for changing the shape and structure of transportation in Halifax remains to be seen.

## MusGo Rider

MusGo Rider presented a session to inform conference participants about their history and the service they offer. MusGo Rider is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing publicly accessible transportation in regions east of Dartmouth, from East Preston and Lawrencetown through to Ship Harbour. MusGo was founded in 2012 to serve an area of 30,000 people along 1500 kilometers of road. After a feasibility study was completed, MusGo started with a single vehicle and volunteer drivers and became fully accessible by the end of the year. MusGo now employs seven drivers and their network of cars travels over 10,000 km per month.

MusGo is supported by and supports the local community, and where possible, the organization sources vehicle supplies and maintenance locally. All MusGo drivers are trained in first aid, empathy, and mental health to support the high number of clients with barriers, including social isolation. The driver training is especially important for MusGo Drivers as many rides are substantially longer than a taxi service and are often some of the longest social contact their clients have. MusGo clients travel primarily for work, medical reasons, and shopping.

The Rural Transportation Association provides MusGo with knowledge-sharing opportunities. The Rural Transportation Association is composed of 16 rural transit



providers from across Nova Scotia who meet twice monthly. With peer-guidance from member of the Rural Transportation Association, MusGo has established regular fixed-funding with the Province and Halifax Regional Municipality's Rural Transit Fund. Additional revenue is from subsidized fares.

Even with this support, the organization faces various challenges. Regular maintenance of its vehicles is expensive since the cars regularly experience 100,000km of travel per year and require dozens of check ups. Fixed funding relationships make it difficult to scale the service with increasing demand without reducing fare subsidies. Like urban transit counterparts, long term planning is a shifting conversation as MusGo explores new ways of providing the best compromise between level of service and coverage area. New ideas for improved service include fixed-flex routes, where transit vehicles operate on a fixed route yet may detour off to provide door-service for those who call ahead, developing new relationships with HRM as MusGo takes on ridership that Halifax Transit no longer serves, and exploring new business models that integrate with existing express lines.

## Community Transportation NS

Community Transportation Nova Scotia (CTNS) is a non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring all Nova Scotians have access to transportation. The group made a brief presentation to participants in the rural transit breakout session. CTNS advocates on behalf of



local transportation initiatives such as insuring volunteer drivers, coordinating group-purchases for transportation supplies, advocating for accessibility legislation to address transportation in addition to built forms, connecting local transportation actions with knowledge-groups including Dalhousie University, and DalTRAC. They are excited to incorporate students and youth into advocacy and planning for transportation reform in Nova Scotia.

## Go Maritimes

The Go Maritimes project rounded out the rural transit group. This Ecology Action Centre initiative was inspired after a cross-country train trip, where finding transit options in various Canadian cities was extremely difficult. Go Maritimes' work focuses on how people discover information to find transportation options. Their research illuminated the frequent and increasing use of Google Maps and Google directions in wayfinding, especially in unfamiliar locations.

A dilemma with Google Maps to wayfind is that not all existing routes are included in the Google database. For example, Kings County Transit is a well-established transportation network not currently available. Other established transportation networks not included in Google data include Amtrak, Greyhound and Via Rail. In this context, Go Maritimes started by creating and maintaining a database of schedules and trips to Maritime destinations at their website ([gomaritimes.ca](http://gomaritimes.ca)).

Go Maritimes is currently exploring other service models, as frequent changes in prices and schedules of long-haul bus service and rail networks make maintaining the site difficult, and other services such as Kayak, Expedia, and Google often duplicate schedule and trip information. In the future, it will shift to a social enterprise model to help municipalities upload, update, and maintain existing schedules and related information with Google Maps and Google directions. Go Maritimes will help make the maritimes, and all of North America, more accessible with the support of volunteers, sponsors, and transit providers.

# Workshop: It's More than Buses

On Saturday afternoon, Jeff Blair and several other members of the local transit advocacy group It's More Than Buses led SHIFT inTransit attendees in a bus route design workshop. Using maps of the road system with population density and important locations, participants worked in small groups to reshape Halifax's transit system. Groups measured transit lines using pipe cleaners, with each group having a budget of 120 pipe cleaners.

Blair encouraged the groups to discuss whether they were trying to design routes to maximize ridership (the number of people taking the bus) or coverage (reaching smaller Halifax communities). One pipe cleaner represented one bus route that ran once every hour. Groups had the option of stacking pipe cleaners to increase route frequency, but that also proportionally increased the cost. After each group mapped out their routes, participants were invited to walk around and see what other groups had come up with.

The facilitators acknowledged that the activity left out several important aspects of



transit, including accessibility and vehicle capacity, due to time constraints. However, the workshop was an informative hands-on introduction to the challenges of designing a transit system that works for everyone with limited resources. Like many other sessions at the conference, it emphasized the necessary tradeoffs in transit planning and encouraged an open and honest discussion of these decisions.







## Keynote: David Bragdon

Saturday afternoon featured the conference's closing keynote by David Bragdon, who is the director of TransitCenter, a New York based public transit advocacy, research and education foundation. Bragdon describes TransitCenter as a civic philanthropic organization whose mission is to improve the public interest in public transit. TransitCenter advocates for transit and advocates for undoing the mistakes we've made in our cities.

In his speech, Bragdon recapped the major themes that had emerged throughout the weekend, starting from Monica Tibbits-Nutt's opening keynote to the It's More than Buses workshop. Transit is about connecting people to opportunity. Transit means different things to different people. Everyone uses more than one mode of transportation so it is imperative that we invest in as many as possible. And if transit is bad enough, people will find another way to travel and vice versa.

Bragdon also offered his own insight into planning better transit. He noted that while transportation had been designed to serve cities, in the last 50 years that paradigm switched so that cities have become designed to serve cars. He offered hope that this reversal would not last, suggesting that municipalities are finally investing

in transit because they need to be competitive.

Like Tibbits-Nutt on Friday, Bragdon cautioned that cities do not need to invest in shiny new rail lines or the cutting edge of transportation infrastructure. He argued that creating good transit is not rocket science, and offered two fairly simple solutions to improve public transit. First, frequency and travel time matter to people. To get more people onto transit, improve those two things. Second, transit needs to connect people to where they need to go, not just to downtown. The type of transit is not as important as when these criteria are met.

Bragdon expanded on Kurt Luhrsen's point that transit authorities need to be willing to reach out to people and adapt to their needs. He said this means not only hosting engagement sessions, but also showing up at community events and listening to feedback.

To wrap up the speech, Bragdon congratulated Halifax for having what he claimed was the most important key to transformational change in the transit system: active and informed citizens who want to make a change. The evidence for this, he said, was the conference attendees ourselves. Perhaps in this way, the SHIFT inTransit conference will have helped create the shift in transit that Halifax needs and deserves.



# Last Words Towards First Actions

## Reflection by Professor Frank Palermo



There are two significant ideas that inspired and directed the conference: the need to make public transit the best option and first choice for everyone; and the proposition that it is action on the ground that matters, not the words that describe it.

With the help of local politicians, community members and planners, invited guests from Copenhagen, Boston, Houston and New York, films of transit initiatives in Santiago (Chile), Vancouver, Seattle, Santa Monica, Houston and Zurich, and student participants from the Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Manitoba, we were able to significantly advance our collective understanding of both propositions.

### **Making Public Transit the Best Option and First Choice**

Throughout the SHIFT inTransit conference, we were reminded that change is necessary and is happening. The form and structure of cities is changing as a result of environmental, health, economic, equity and technological imperatives. Around the globe, the

cities we want to live in, work in and visit often are focused on people, not cars; on walking, not how easy it is to park; on how safe it is for children, not how quickly one can drive through. Cities like Zurich and Curitiba and New York and Seattle demonstrate how better streets and public spaces are possible.

Transit is the foundation of this shift. For Monica Tibbits-Nutt and for every child, for those who can't afford a car and for those who may be too old to drive, transit is the key to connecting with friends, discovering the city, having access to services, educational, and work opportunities. Even if transit is not the only choice, to fulfill its promise, it needs to be the best option.

We need a long-term vision for public transit that connects not just to what we responsibly need to do, but also to capture and showcase our values. Transit must be the glue that holds the community together. Transit will shape our future, as a place with a soul, for young and old, for living and working and playing and connecting. We want to create places where quality of life matters and life—not traffic—happens on the street.

The SHIFT inTransit needs to happen now. It needs to come first before we conclude the Centre Plan or the Integrated Mobility Plan, before we can reduce parking, change Spring Garden, complete the redesign of the Cogswell Interchange, improve traffic congestion, widen sidewalks, create bikeways, increase density or insist on development contributions to improve public places.

Andreas Røhl reminded us that the SHIFT is not “a matter of rocket science”. It is possible based on a larger vision and a holistic, inclusive, community based approach, to alter local perspectives and find new and creative ways to move forward. It is possible to move from focusing on what we can’t do, what won’t work, what we can’t afford, to recognize what we collectively can do and that the status quo is not a viable option.

## The SHIFT in Halifax

Locally, we may lack some confidence in our own future. We definitely have too many vested interests, too many siloed agencies with out-dated agendas, too much authority and legislation rooted in the Motor Vehicle Act and administered by traffic engineers. There are too many short term, competing, uninspiring and ultimately unworkable options.

Still, it’s possible to imagine that the SHIFT can start here.

The conference workshop led me to believe that elements of the current Transit Plan can be built; that some aspects of a BRT initiative can be adopted as interim measures in suburban and rural areas of HRM; and that the commuter rail idea is, or can be, part of a long term provincial transit strategy. Perhaps in the not too distant future, commuter rail (or fast trains) can serve to connect towns and regions throughout the province to urban centres.

However, even together these three propositions don’t describe a compelling or complete or transformational vision for transit in HRM. None of these ideas adequately serves the Downtown and the Centre Area. All are inconsistent with the idea of streets, not to mention

the priorities for focused population growth established in the Regional Plan. It is unreasonable to build our city around propositions that are fundamentally anti-urban and can’t possibly be construed as making transit the best option.

It is important for us to now realize and conclude, as many communities have done before us (including Portland, Calgary, Waterloo, Auckland, Copenhagen, and more), that LRT is the best option. In dense urban areas, where streets serve social, open space, market and movement functions; where transit needs to have permanence so it can serve as a catalyst for development and can be integrated into new buildings; where the quality of the ride and stops/stations matters and it’s important to connect the Centre Area: LRT is the only choice.

On reflection it seems rather obvious. The big vision has to be light rail serving the Centre Area. Beyond that point a number of light rail and commuter rail) lines would radiate out to connect suburban and rural communities. As an interim measure, the fingers connecting to the edge of the Centre Area may be BRT lines that terminate at major transfer points or light rail stations that also provide commuter parking.

We don’t need more studies; it is time for action. Let’s invest in transit now, when current development activity can help us pay for it. We need to bring the community together to develop these ideas and together describe and imagine what the city, region and province can become.

Transit can be the first choice for everyone. It is the first move. It is an investment in changing the way we see ourselves, the perception of our city, our quality of life and our economic prospects.

We need to make public transit the best option, and we need to start now.

Here are some ideas—let’s start here.

- Frank Palermo