

Survey aims to track travel patterns

TRANSPORTATION

Text message service to help you better get around Halifax



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Metro | Halifax

Answering a text message could help shape the future of transportation services in the Halifax region.

On Monday, 2,000 randomly selected cell phone users living in HRM received text messages inviting them to participate in a transportation survey that's the first of its kind in Nova Scotia.

Members of the Dalhousie University Transportation Collaboratory (DalTRAC) are working with HRM to collect information about daily travel activities of residents throughout the municipality.

Over the next six months, the survey will expand its reach to target an additional 10,000 HRM residents with landlines.

"What we are looking for here basically is where, when, why and how people are travelling," explained DalTRAC director Ahsan Habib.

"We need people to travel log for a 24-hour period starting at 3 a.m. so they have to document the places that they have visited, the departure and what they are doing at that place."

Similar surveys are common in cities like Toronto, Mont-



Survey feedback from thousand of drivers could help forecast travel patterns in the future. JEFF HARPER/METRO FILE/METRO

real, Ottawa and Vancouver. But because this is a first for Nova Scotia, Habib said they're trying to hammer home the importance of participating.

The survey takes about 20 to 25 minutes to complete.

"Once we get information from all these 12,000 people or

an expected rate of response, we'll have a profile of the entire HRM," he said.

"We want to develop a computer-based model so that we can forecast how these travel behaviours would evolve, what kind of transportation is needed, whether we need to widen

a road or where the congestion is happening."

Habib said as HRM works on its integrated mobility plan, these pieces of information will prove invaluable.

"This will give us the baseline for where we are at in terms of modes of transportation, the kilometres that we travel and how we travel," he said.

"In this way we will benchmark or create this evaluation criteria for where we are at now and where we will be after five years."

Anyone who received a text is urged to click the link and participate via the user-friendly website. Follow-up calls will be made to those who don't respond.

"In Halifax this large scale survey is new so there could be some familiarity issue and people may not really understand the importance of submitting the survey," Habib said.

"I'd like to say this is important and encourage people in your community who get an invitation to participate and help us."

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DalTRAC director Ahsan Habib