

# **Joint Regional Transportation Agency**

**BUSINESS PLAN – 2025-26**

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## Message from the Deputy Minister

Transportation plays a significant role in the day-to-day lives of all Nova Scotians, enabling access to healthcare, education, and employment, and allowing for the movement of goods to support people and the economy.

The Joint Regional Transportation Agency (JRTA) is tasked with addressing transportation issues associated with rapid growth in Halifax and surrounding communities. This will be achieved through the implementation of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

The RTP is Nova Scotia's first ever plan for regional transportation and presents a unified framework for the long-term future of the regional transportation system. It will facilitate sustainable growth and development and improve the safe and efficient movement of people and goods. It will identify transportation investments and measure transportation outcomes for the decades to come.

Changes to the Joint Regional Transportation Agency Act continue to evolve the agency to best equip us for what's next and how we'll best serve the transportation needs of Nova Scotians. Amendments include an expanded scope, updated governance structure, and potential to increase the Agency's geographic focus.

Over the next year, the Agency will continue to focus on the partnerships and collaboration that have been so successful to date while taking the first steps to implement priority projects in the RTP, like the light rail feasibility study, work on Highway 102, and pursuing federal transit funding.

As government works to unlock the province's potential, improve healthcare, increase housing options, and make life more affordable, improvements to the transportation system will support these priorities.

The RTP presents solutions to the challenges that come with a rapidly growing Region. Together, we can build a regional transportation system that's safer, more efficient, easier to access, more affordable, and more resilient.

Original Signed by

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Peter Hackett, Deputy Minister  
Joint Regional Transportation Agency

## Pillars & Priorities

In 2025-26, the JRTA will focus on three key pillars and have identified the priorities for each:

- Regional Transportation Plan
- Regional Transportation System
- Organization

These three pillars reflect the evolution and expansion of the Agency, the importance of making progress on the Regional Transportation Plan, and the effort required to improve the regional transportation system.

### Regional Transportation Plan

The first of its kind in Atlantic Canada, the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) presents a unified framework for the long-term future of the regional transportation system, in which the Region is more connected and easier to access, goods movement is more efficient and sustainable, and the transportation system is prepared for technological change.

The RTP provides the broad outline of how we will transform the Region's transportation system. Each of the projects and programs recommended will require further definition, collaboration, and consultation.

### Progress on priority recommendations

The RTP provides a series of priority recommendations – how we start implementing the plan. These priorities were selected based on current system needs and the availability of funding programs and are expected to be key areas of focus for the JRTA and its Core Partners over the next 10 years. In 2025-26, the JRTA will take first steps to move forward critical transportation projects.

Collaborations / Partnerships: Department of Public Works, Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), Halifax Harbour Bridges, Halifax Port Authority, Halifax International Airport Authority, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), CN.

### Technology and data

Quality data collection to help with future decision-making will be needed as work on the plan continues. Efforts to improve data collection, provide strategy and guidance for ongoing data collection, and expand available data to include goods movement will be progressed.

The RTP includes actions to prepare for new technologies before they arrive and adopt beneficial innovations to improve the regional transportation system as it progresses. In 2025-26, we'll start work to support the local transportation research community and identify priority areas for technological investments and potential pilot projects.

Collaborations / Partnerships: Halifax Regional Municipality, Halifax Port Authority, goods movement industry, Dalhousie University.

## Regional Transportation System

The JRTA is moving forward with projects and initiatives from the RTP, with emphasis on those that improve or future-proof the regional transportation system, enhance the ongoing working relationship between the JRTA and their core partners, and improve quality of life for Nova Scotians.

### Light Rail Transit Feasibility Study

Passenger rail service has the potential to reshape travel in the Region by providing a very high-capacity form of transit service. Introducing this service is a significant undertaking, should target areas of potential high ridership, and would represent one of the most significant investments in the province's history.

Performance target / measures: Completing a feasibility study will help to determine the potential for passenger rail service in the Region and under what conditions it would be viable.

### Highway 102 Enhancements

Efforts to add capacity and upgrades to key interchanges to Highway 102 will be examined through planning work underway between the Joint Regional Transportation Agency and the Department of Public Works. This expansion would help with the movement of people and goods between Exit 0 at Joseph Howe Drive and Exit 4 at Duke Street in Bedford.

The upgrades to Highway 102 will proceed to the early planning stages. As part of this work, various strategies to maximize capacity within the corridor's limited space will be explored. This includes considering solutions such as high-occupancy vehicle lanes and transit priority.

Collaborations / Partnerships: Department of Public Works

## **Permanent Student Transit Pass Program**

Support for a permanent Student Transit Pass program encourages greater transit usage and independence in youth, reduces the cost of transportation for households, and saves time for families.

With investment from the Province, the Halifax Transit Student Transit Pass Pilot Program was extended for the 2024-25 school year and expanded to include all junior high and high school students in HRM (HRCE and CSAP students). This provided 26,000 students with free bus and ferry service. Early results show an increase in ridership, a better sense of independence and a well-received program. Ongoing provincial funding will make the program permanent.

Performance target / measures: Halifax Transit ridership increase (overall and near participating schools), public sentiment on program being measured by Halifax Transit each fall and spring using online survey, potential efficiencies with bussing services.

Collaborations / Partnerships: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Halifax Transit (HRM), Halifax Regional Centre for Education, CSAP, and across Provincial departments.

Accessibility initiatives: Improves equity and access for students and improves affordability. Halifax Transit's fleet is 100% accessible.

## **Federal Transit Funding**

Many projects within the RTP will require significant investment. Securing federal funding is critical to the success of the plan. Nova Scotia has been invited to apply for the Canada Public Transit Fund, Metro-Region Agreement stream.

The JRTA will lead the development of the Integrated Regional Plan (IRP), required to access this funding. The IRP will be based on the RTP, but with a focus on major transit and active transportation projects within Nova Scotia's only Census Metropolitan Area (HRM and the Municipality of the District of East Hants).

The projects to be funded under the MRA are still to be determined but must focus on major transit and active transportation initiatives related to significant housing density.

Performance target / measures: Timely submission of IRP.

Collaborations / Partnerships: Department of Public Works, Halifax Regional Municipality, and Municipality of the District of East Hants, with JRTA leading the work.

### **Additional support for community transportation**

Community Transportation operators provide a vital transportation service in areas where fixed-route transit is too costly, inefficient, and ineffective to operate. However, these operators depend on provincial funding and are struggling to meet existing demand. Development of a sustainable funding model in collaboration with operators will support service growth and affordable fares for users.

Performance target / measures: Operators able to meet existing demand.

Collaborations / Partnerships: Department of Public Works, Community Transportation Operators, Rural Transportation Association, Community Transportation Network Association.

Accessibility initiatives: Improves access to healthcare (reduces the burden on Emergency and Health Services for medical transport), employment, and services, and better connects residents in rural areas to fixed-route transit services for longer distance trips.

## **Organization**

Over the next year, the Agency will continue to grow and evolve the organization to ensure the actions included in the RTP are realized. Work in this area will also help to build on governance structure changes announced as part of amendments to the JRTA Act in February 2025.

The JRTA will be at the forefront of this transformation, evolving to meet the needs of the Region, prioritizing the transportation needs of the province, furthering the collaborative work to date, and championing the actions in the RTP.

### **Operating structure options review**

The establishment of the JRTA signaled a shift to a regional approach to transportation and infrastructure planning in Nova Scotia, but this regional, coordinated approach has been well-established in jurisdictions across the country.

A jurisdictional review of the governance and organizational structure of similar transportation agencies and their function, authority, funding, and setup will help the JRTA determine the short, medium, and long-term goals and structure of the Agency.

### **Organization re-brand**

Amendments to the Joint Regional Transportation Act changed the name of the Agency to Link Nova Scotia. The legislation and name change aligns the Agency with other Crown corporations and

supports the expanded scope of the organization. To support the name change, a re-brand will take place, including a new logo and modification of the existing JRTA brand.

### **Collaboration, relationship-building, and information-sharing**

Most of the RTP's actions require some level of coordination with municipalities, agencies or other Core Partners—regardless of the lead organization—these groups have been involved in the early stages the RTP development, to ensure a unified vision and build support for the resulting recommendations.

The need for strong collaboration across departments, all orders of government and organizations within the transportation sector was essential for plan development and will only increase with time. The JRTA will continue to foster these relationships, working together to improve the transportation system.

With the expanded scope of the Agency, emphasis will also need to be placed on building new relationships across the province, including municipalities, transportation operators, and other organizations.

Collaborations / Partnerships: Department of Public Works, Halifax Regional Municipality, Halifax Harbour Bridges, Halifax Port Authority, Halifax International Airport Authority, ACOA, CN, all municipalities in the Region.



## Financial Summary

<b>Crown/ Agency Expenses Summary</b>			
	<b>2024-2025 Estimate</b>	<b>2024-2025 Forecast</b>	<b>2025-2026 Estimate</b>
Salaries and benefits	\$1,243,000	\$1,071,000	\$1,405,000
Professional services	\$648,000	\$1,570,000	\$682,000
Operating Expenses	\$230,000	\$230,000	\$230,000
<b>Total - Agency Expenses</b>	<b>\$2,121,000</b>	<b>\$2,871,000</b>	<b>\$2,317,000</b>
<b>Additional Information:</b>			
Ordinary Revenues	(\$2,004,000)	(\$2,754,000)	(\$2,317,000)
Other Revenue Source	(\$117,000)	(\$117,000)	(\$0)