



Halifax Cycling Coalition Raises Concerns Regarding Inconsistent Application of Benefit–Cost Analysis

In light of recent evidence that Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) staff have access to and can apply Benefit–Cost Analysis (BCA) tools -- despite prior statements to the contrary -- we request that these tools, methodologies, and assumptions be made publicly available and updated using current best practices. This is particularly important to support transparent, evidence-informed prioritization of infrastructure investments under ongoing fiscal constraints.

Background and Key Points

Over the past 12 months, multiple members of the Regional Council, the Active Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC), and the Halifax Cycling Coalition (HCC) have consistently recommended that HRM staff prepare a report outlining best practices for applying BCA to major infrastructure projects. The intent of these recommendations has been to support transparent and evidence-informed prioritization of capital investments.

This request aligns with broader Council direction to better understand infrastructure costs and prioritization. For example, the Regional Council directed staff in 2025 to study bike lane costs and network options, explicitly emphasizing the need for detailed analysis to inform decision-making.¹

Similarly, in 2026 Council approved a motion requesting staff to explore more cost-effective approaches and prioritization strategies for the bikeway network, including identifying opportunities to close gaps and reduce costs.²

To date, however, Halifax lacks a comprehensive framework for applying BCA across projects.

¹ City News Halifax 24 June 2025 "Council orders reviewing of bike lane costs"

https://halifax.citynews.ca/2025/06/25/hrm-council-orders-review-of-bike-lane-costs/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

² City News Halifax 9 Feb 2026 "Halifax looking into cheaper bike lane network options"

https://halifax.citynews.ca/2026/02/10/council-votes-for-report-looking-into-cheaper-bike-lane-network/?utm_source=chatgpt.com



Morris–University and Related Decisions

Debate surrounding the Morris Street / University Avenue corridor illustrates the consequences of limited analytical transparency. Council both advanced and later reversed decisions on the Morris Street bikeway following significant debate and external pressures.³

These events highlight the absence of a consistent, evidence-based framework for evaluating trade-offs between cost, safety, and network connectivity.

Staff Statements Regarding Capacity

On at least two key occasions, HRM staff advised against the use of BCA, citing lack of capacity to translate benefits and costs to monetary terms:

- Statement by Cathy O'Tool during the Morris–University debate⁴
- Statement by Lucas Pitts regarding the AAA network benefits.⁵

Evidence of BCA Use by Staff

Despite these stated objections to using a BCA, HRM continues to produce reports in support of infrastructure planning. For example, in March 2026, the staff prepared a report for the Windsor Street Exchange Phase 2, which included a BCA and which was used to move a highly contested project forward.⁶

³ Halifax Examiner 5 Aug 2025 "Halifax council approves motions on local street bikeways ..." <https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/government/city-hall/halifax-council-approves-motions-on-local-street-bikeways-ways-to-reduce-congestion-in-lucasville/>

⁴ Halifax Examiner 25 June 2025 "Halifax council passes Tony Mancini's bike lane motion after thoughtful, productive debate" <https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/government/city-hall/halifax-council-passes-tony-mancinis-bike-lane-motion-after-thoughtful-productive-debate/> . For the recordings, see <https://pub-halifax.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=1a28cfe1-6d4f-4147-a3a7-9d509900f217&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English> time point 12:06.

⁵ Transportation Standing Committee deliberations on 26 February, 2026 during discussion of an ATAC motion calling for the identification of Benefits and Costs of AT projects in HRM <https://www.youtube.com/live/T23cnBl6ppM> time point 1.11.25

⁶ Halifax 31 Mar 2026 "Project Details - Windsor Street Exchange project" <https://www.halifax.ca/transportation/transportation-projects/windsor-street-exchange-redevelopment-project/>



Key Concerns: Inconsistency and Trust

The apparent contradiction between staff claims that BCA could not be conducted, and subsequent public release of data that rely on a BCA, raises concerns regarding consistency, transparency, and the completeness of information provided to Council.

This inconsistency risks undermining public trust and complicates Council's ability to make informed, defensible decisions, particularly in high-profile and contested projects.

Recommended Actions

Given that HRM staff have demonstrated both analytical capability and access to relevant tools, the HCC recommends:

1. Transparency of Methods and Tools

That the analytical tools, methodologies, and assumptions used in recent major project evaluations be made publicly available to ensure transparency and accountability. This may include frameworks aligned with those used by Transport Canada for transportation project evaluation.

2. Adoption of Established Best-Practice Tools

That HRM adopt a recognized, peer-reviewed BCA framework—such as those developed by Portland State University⁷—which are specifically designed to evaluate and prioritize active transportation investments.

3. Commitment to Evidence-Informed Decision-Making

That HRM formally integrate BCA into infrastructure planning and prioritization processes, particularly given escalating capital costs.

Ongoing road maintenance and road widening projects, as well as completing the public and active transportation networks will cost hundreds of millions of dollars on a yearly basis, underscores the need for rigorous prioritization.

⁷ PSU Transportation Seminar: A Guide for Estimating Benefits of Closing Gaps in AT Networks
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQZC1HTe2qs>



Conclusion

At a time when HRM faces rising infrastructure costs and competing priorities, the need for consistent, transparent, and evidence-based decision-making is critical.

Such evidence must in turn be based on analytical tools deployed by staff that are publicly accountable, transparent, consistently applied, and grounded in current scientific best practices.