



It's More Than Buses

Advocates for Better Transit in Halifax

2018 COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Effective: March 1, 2018 to Dec. 31, 2018

Prepared by: Jen Schwetje & Keith Stevens
NSCC Public Relations

Submitted: Wednesday, Feb. 7, 2018

IMTB 2018 Communications Plan

Executive Summary

It's More Than Buses is an advocacy group that aims to improve the state of public transit in Halifax and the surrounding areas. The group currently has no funding and relies on public donation for income. IMTB has a website with monthly blog posts, a newsletter sign up and a donation button along with an active Facebook page and Twitter account.

Four main objectives for the upcoming year are: to increase the number of dues paying members to an amount to be determined by the board; double social media following on IMTB's Twitter and Facebook accounts; to increase the number of steady volunteers from 15 to 25 and to raise enough funding to pay for IMTB's expansion plans, which include hiring a permanent part-time employee by 2019.

The key internal audiences for the communications plan are members of the IMTB board , current volunteers and current members. The intended external audiences are all HRM transit users, businesses who would benefit from improved transit in the HRM, city council and transit planning staff.

Strategies to increase social media following and to raise general awareness of IMTB include a hashtag campaign that encourages public interaction scheduled to run from March to April.

A deadline for the board members to define a paid membership system and then promote this system on the website and with regular social media posts. A membership drive is scheduled from September to December 2018. Other fundraising efforts include adding a donation button in the signature of newsletters and email blasts and an effort to appeal to corporate and organizational donors beginning in October.

To increase volunteers, the plan suggests that the board define specific volunteer roles by April 1 and then promote these as volunteer opportunities on the website and social media.

Time is scheduled after the hashtag, membership and volunteer campaigns for the board to evaluate the efforts and decide whether to carry on as before or to come up with a new tactic.

This communications plan relies heavily on free social media postings and additions to the website that can be carried out by volunteers. An estimated budget of \$1,125 includes \$250 for paid social media advertising, \$250 for printed membership brochures, \$125 for corporate fundraising appeal and \$500 for the membership and volunteer drives.

The plan's implementation will begin on March and continue until December 2018.

Evaluation of the plan will be determined by whether the objectives were achieved.

Situational Analysis

It's More Than Buses (IMTB), the HRM's main public transit research, education and outreach group, is about to embark on a period of growth. Before we get into the next chapter though, it is worth looking back at the first chapter.

IMTB was founded in 2011 as an initiative of Fusion Halifax and the Planning and Design Centre focused on improving public transit. The initiative hosted a series of public engagement sessions that led to the guiding principles of the organization, the "Essential Elements of Good Transit." These principles have led IMTB to advocate for a public transit system in the HRM that is fast, frequent, reliable, accessible and user-friendly throughout much of its existence. This advocacy work has led to some notable successes, especially Halifax Transit's Moving Forward Together initiative, which would bring the city's transit system more inline with IMTB's vision. The organization has also built strong relationships with several regional councillors and published a series of well-researched policy documents.

Now, approximately seven years into its life, It's More Than Buses is ready to take the next step towards professionalizing its operations. The organization recently hired noted Halifax cycling advocate Ben Wedge as its first executive director and has given him a mandate to implement several changes in a relatively short period. At present, IMTB has well-defined vision, mission and value statements, which are as follows:

- **Vision:** "Better transit connecting more people to more opportunities in HRM."
- **Mission:** "To advance well planned, well designed, safe and efficient public transit that is accessible to all residents and visitors of HRM."
- **Values:** evidence, responsibility, innovation, engagement and involvement.

The organization has also identified four strategic goals:

1. Advocating for Fast, Frequent, Reliable, Accessible, and User-Friendly transit and transit-oriented land-use planning.
2. Communicating the value and importance of good public transit and transit-friendly land-uses.
3. Engaging in broader transportation and planning initiatives.
4. Developing internal capacity.

However, IMTB does not have an overall strategic plan for the organization nor does it have supporting documents like communications, fundraising and membership development plans. To achieve his mandate, Mr. Wedge, in consultation with the organization's board of directors and membership, will have to develop these plans and several others.

To that end, two NSCC public relations students, Jen Schwetje and Keith Stevens, have been contracted to develop IMTB's first communications plan. The plan will lay out the organization's

communications objectives for the remainder of 2018 and attempt to detail a modest list of strategies and tactics that can be implemented without the help of a professional PR staff. The plan will also touch upon IMTB's need to develop its fundraising and membership infrastructure.

This communications plan will draw upon several primary and secondary research sources, especially interviews with key stakeholders within the organization. It will also look at the work of organizations with similar mandates outside Halifax, including Toronto's TTCRiders, Winnipeg's Functional Transit Winnipeg and Boston's TransitMatters. The work of these three organizations, which are further along in their histories, could serve as templates for IMTB's own development and efforts should be made to draw

It is the intention of this plan's authors to give IMTB a communications plan that not only serves its needs in 2018 but that can also serve as the basis for its communications planning for 2019 and beyond.

Objectives

1. Increase paid membership to a TBD level by January 2019.
2. Double social media following by January 2019.
3. Increase number of steady volunteers to 15 by August 2018 and 25 by January 2019.
4. Raise the money necessary to pay for IMTB's expansion plans by January 2019.

Key Audiences

- Internal
 - Current members
 - Current volunteers
 - Current board members
- External
 - Anyone over the age of 15 who uses public transit in the HRM (i.e. "the public")
 - Businesses and organizations that are interested in or could potentially benefit from improved public transit, especially cycling groups and Burnside businesses
 - Government, especially city council and transit planning staff
 - Media, especially online and alternative publications

Key Messages

1. IMTB is the HRM's most vocal advocate for a better public transit system and is one of the city's best sources for public transit policy.
2. IMTB successfully advocated for Halifax Transit's "Moving Forward Together" process, among other notable accomplishments.
3. IMTB has built good relationships with other similarly-minded groups and transit-focused political leaders.

4. IMTB has ambitious plans for 2018 and is building toward the 2020 municipal elections. To make these plans a reality, IMTB needs volunteers and regular funding.

SWOT Analysis

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support from businesses who would benefit from improved public transit in Halifax ● Have a part time staff person for the first time ever ● Have a dedicated board of directors that meets regularly 	<p>WEAKNESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● IMTB doesn't have a lot of money ● IMTB doesn't have many members ● IMTB doesn't have much "grassroots" support or supporters outside of the urban core
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Integrated Mobility Plan is currently before Council ● Other cities have similar groups to IMTB that we can get ideas from ● Many transit users/potential users don't hold favourable opinions of the system 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There are other groups, like the EAC or the Our HRM Alliance, with similar mandates ● Transit staff doesn't like the work IMTB does on transit policy ● IMTB isn't well known among "the public"

Strategies

- promote the new paid membership plan
- Increase public interaction with Facebook and Twitter posts by posting more often and being more response to inquiries.
- Reach out to other local groups and Hali-famous individuals to help promote Twitter and Facebook pages. Encourage re-tweets and shares.
- Define possible volunteer roles within the organization
- Promote volunteering through social media channels
- Include donations links on all e-newsletters and other e-blasts
- Reach out to businesses that would benefit from better public transit

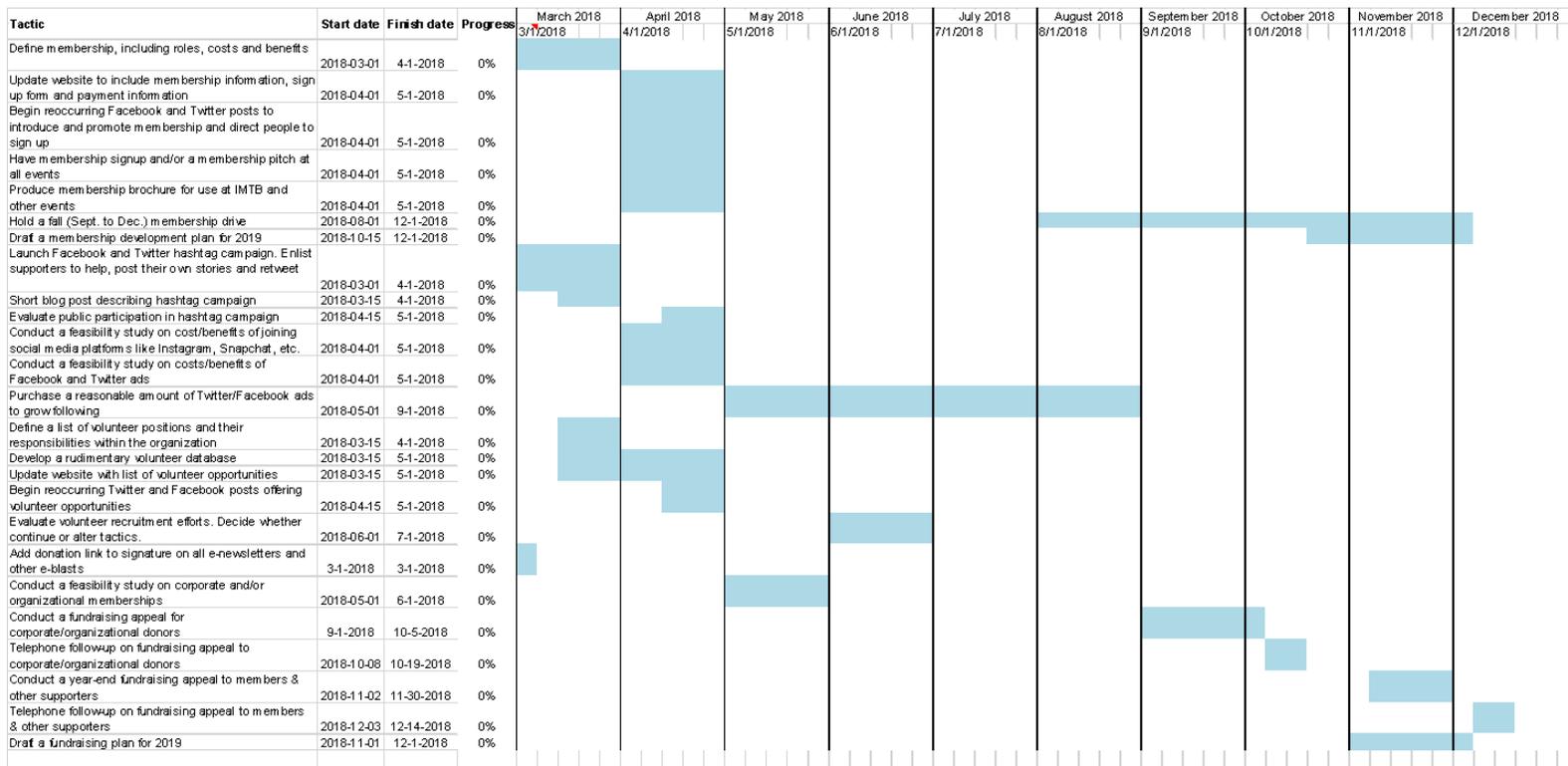
Tactics

Tactic	Audience	Obj.	Due Date	Person Responsible	Cost
Define membership, what it means, what it costs, does it come with benefits (possible partnerships with local businesses to offer discounts for members)	Board members and volunteers	1,4	April 1/18	Board members	Time
Update website to include membership information, sign up form, payment information	Public	1,4	May 1/18	Volunteer	Time
Begin reoccurring Facebook and Twitter posts to introduce and promote membership and direct people to the website	Public	1,4	May 1/18	Volunteer	Time
Have membership signup and/or a membership pitch at all events	Public	1,4	May 1/18	Volunteer	Time
Produce membership brochure for use at IMTB and other events	Public	1,4	May 1/18	Board members and staff	\$250 (get a PR student to design for free)
Hold a fall (Sept. to Dec.) membership drive	Public, board members, volunteers	1,4	Sept. 7/18	Board members and staff	Time
Draft a membership development plan for 2019	Board members	1	Dec. 1/18		
Launch Facebook and Twitter hashtag campaign. Enlist friends, family, volunteers to help, post their own stories and retweet	Public	1,2	March 1/18	Volunteer	Time
Short blog post describing hashtag campaign (in addition to monthly blog/op-ed)	Public	2	March 1/18	Volunteer	Time
Evaluate public participation in hashtag campaign. Is it working? Determine whether to continue with it or come up with a new campaign.	Board members and volunteers	2	April 1/18	Volunteer	Time
Conduct a feasibility study about the cost/benefits of joining social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, etc.	Board members	2	May 1/18	Volunteer	Time
Conduct a feasibility study on the costs/benefits of Facebook and Twitter ads	Board members	2	May 1/18	Volunteer	Time
Purchase a reasonable amount of Twitter/Facebook ads to grow following	Public	2	Sept. 1/18	Staff and volunteers	TBD based on size of ad buy

2018 IMTB Communications Plan 6

Define a list of volunteer positions and their responsibilities within the organization	Board members and volunteers	3	April 1/18	Board members	Time
Develop a rudimentary volunteer database (Excel or Google Sheets should suffice)	Board members and volunteers	3	April 1/18	Staff and volunteers	Time
Update website with list of volunteer opportunities	Public	3	May 1/18	Volunteer	Time
Begin reoccurring Twitter and Facebook posts offering volunteer opportunities	Public	3	May 1/18	Volunteer	Time
Evaluate volunteer recruitment efforts. Is social media enough? Decide whether continue or alter tactics.	Board members and volunteers	3	July 1/18	Volunteer	Time
Add donation link to signature on all e-newsletters and other e-blasts	Public	4	Mar. 1/18	Board member	Time
Conduct a feasibility study on having corporate and/or organizational members	Corporations, organizations, government	4	June 1/18	Staff and board members	Time
Conduct a fundraising appeal for corporate/organizational donors	Corporations, organizations	4	Oct. 5/18	Staff and board members	\$2.50 per letter x # of letters
Telephone follow-up on fundraising appeal to corporate/organizational donors	Corporations, organizations	4	Oct. 19/18	Staff and board members	Time
Conduct a year-end fundraising appeal to members & other supporters	Members and volunteers	4	Nov. 30/18	Staff and board members	\$2.50 per letter x # of letters
Telephone follow-up on fundraising appeal to members & other supporters	Members and volunteers	4	Dec. 14/18	Staff and board members	Time
Draft a fundraising plan for 2019	Board members	4	Dec. 1/18	Staff and board members	Time

Timeline



A live version of this timeline exists in a Google Sheet. The link is as follows:

<http://bit.ly/IMTBTimeline>

Budget

In recognition of IMTB’s modest budget, most of the tactics in this plan cost time instead of money. Some tactics will require an investment in the short-term. These costs should benefit the organization in the long-term. Those costs are estimated below.

Activity	Estimated Quantity	Estimated Cost per Unit	Estimated Cost	Notes
Membership brochure	100	\$2.50	\$250.00	Try find someone to design it for free
Social media ads	XX	XX	\$250.00	number will change based on ad buy
Corporate/organizational fundraising appeal	50	\$2.50	\$125.00	
Member/volunteer fundraising appeal	200	\$2.50	\$500.00	
TOTAL			\$1,125.00	

Based on this budget, this communications plan will cost IMTB approximately \$1,125 to implement. It is up to IMTB’s discretion to scale up or scale down the costs as it sees fit.

Evaluation

The outcomes of this communications plan will be measured on a per objective basis. This evaluation will in turn serve as the basis for next year's communications plan. Evaluation should be conducted in November/December. Here are some questions to ask as you review.

1. Increase paid membership to a TBD level by January 2019.

- Is IMTB at or around the membership level established by the strategic plan as you approach the end of the year? Did the fall membership drive lead to a noticeable increase? Does IMTB need to do more membership promotion going forward?

2. Double social media following by January 2019.

- For this objective, the baseline numbers are approximately 650 Facebook supporters and 1800 Twitter followers. Does IMTB have or is close to having 1,300 Facebook supporters and 3,600 Twitter followers? Did IMTB see growth in any new social media channels it invested in?

3. Increase number of steady volunteers to 15 by August 2018 and 25 by January 2019.

- How many volunteers are listed in IMTB's volunteer database? How often do they volunteer? What role do volunteers typically take on? Are new members moving up the engagement ladder? What other volunteer opportunities should IMTB offer in 2019?

4. Raise the money necessary to pay for IMTB's expansion plans by January 2019.

- Did IMTB raise the amount it sought to raise? What was the breakdown between member/corporate/organizational donors? Does one donor group need more/less attention in 2019? Should IMTB put more of a focus on raising money through selling memberships? Should IMTB do more online fundraising through its e-blasts in 2019?

Together, these questions should give IMTB's future communications planning a solid base.