

REGION OF OTTAWA CARLETON  
RÉGION D'OTTAWA CARLETON

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REPORT  
RAPPORT

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DATE                       15 December 1998

TO/DEST.                 Co-ordinator Transportation Committee

FROM/EXP.                Director Mobility Services and Corporate Fleet Services  
                                  Environment and Transportation Department

SUBJECT/OBJET          **DONATION STATIONS**

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### **DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Transportation Committee recommend Council approve the donation station permit conditions as described in the body of this report.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Donation stations have become a popular means of fund-raising, particularly for sports teams and fire departments. Both Regional staff and the police are becoming increasingly concerned about safety issues at these stations.

This problem was discussed briefly during the staff presentation of the recently approved Special Events Policy. Staff were requested to bring forward a report discussing this as a separate item.

### **DISCUSSION**

Organizers of donation stations typically set up at the intersection of two Regional roads, where at least one but preferably both of the roads have a central median. These locations are selected for the high traffic volumes. In many cases, the organizer has enough volunteers to establish donation stations at multiple locations simultaneously, and the same organizer may do this several times annually.

The problem is compounded by the conduct of the donation station participants. The Department's Special Event Permit stipulates that: (a) the participants cannot enter onto the roadway; (b) the solicitation of donations from the central boulevard is prohibited; (c) traffic shall not be restricted or excessively delayed; (d) objects such as traffic cones or barricades designed to direct traffic are not permitted, and (e) safety vests must be worn by participants at all times. The Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police advise that most if not all of these permit provisions are ignored. Furthermore, where the donation station is conducted by a sports team, in many cases the participants are juveniles or even children. We are informed that, in some cases, the organizers channel traffic to maximize potential donations causing unnecessary congestion and motorist impatience.

Staff issue the permits on request with the safety conditions described previously and rely on the police to monitor and enforce the permit's provisions. On-site police supervision is sporadic. Generally speaking, a police officer will only visit the site if a complaint has been lodged or if an obvious safety problem is observed while patrolling the immediate vicinity.

The lack of staff and police resources necessary to adequately monitor these sites, combined with no obvious consequence for ignoring the permit conditions, have contributed to the donation station participants believing that they can act with impunity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff is concerned about the safety of both participants and motorists at these events, and because of this concern drafted the existing permit conditions. There is no doubt that if donation station organizers and participants adhered to the conditions there would be a minimum of risk to both themselves and motorists. However, they don't and it perhaps could be argued that it would be difficult to conduct a successful fund raising event if the current rules were strictly followed. For this reason it may be appropriate to discuss some of the issues.

Central Medians: Staff has been consistent in their opposition to central medians being used for any purpose whatsoever, the reason being that this creates a distraction for motorists when their attention should be focused on traffic in their vicinity, or what is happening at an intersection. Donation station participants, on the other hand routinely use the central median, in addition to the curb/outer boulevard area, to solicit funds. The use of the central medians appears to be a unique characteristic of this particular method of fund raising, and donation station participants will probably continue to use it in spite of the permit conditions, and particularly because of the lack of enforcement. As a concession to this characteristic and in the spirit of compromise, it is proposed that donation station participants be permitted on some central medians. As a basic safety precaution however, the median should be a minimum of 1.0 m in width, which should be sufficient space to provide a safe haven. This is considered essential because of the traffic passing the participants in both directions.

Roadway Use: Donation station participants routinely enter onto the roadway to solicit donations from motorists stopped at a traffic control signal, even though the permit specifically prohibits this. This action places the participants in an unsafe environment, particularly when the light turns green and the motorists attention is suddenly focused on the traffic around them as the stopped vehicles start to move forward. This is the moment when the motorists attention is removed from the persons circulating among the cars, and consequently, when the donation station participants are at the highest level of risk.

It perhaps could be argued that an adult may be in a position to assess potential danger and act accordingly. However, the fact is that sometimes donation station participants are juveniles or children. For this reason the use of the roadway should continue to be prohibited. As the road authority is ultimately responsible for public safety, we cannot condone what is very obviously an unsafe practice.

If the donation station participants continue to use the roadway despite the prohibition, the Region may have no alternative but to consider denying future permits.

Prohibited Intersections: Some intersections are more dangerous than others, and as such should be prohibited to donation station organizers. The difficulty lies in determining which intersections to prohibit.

The Department annually compiles vehicular accident reports and, among other things, ranks intersections based on the number of collisions, and the intersection with the highest number is ranked as number one. It is impossible to subjectively select a particular ranking and unequivocally state that donation station organizers would be safe at or below that ranking. Despite this, it is proposed that intersections with 20 or more reportable annual vehicular collisions not be considered as candidate locations.

Peak Hours: Traffic volumes are at their highest during the weekday morning and afternoon peak periods and, as a result, are the times that it is most essential for motorists to focus their attention on the roadway and the other vehicles around them. Further, most major roads are operating at near or full capacity during this time, and even a minor traffic impediment can have an exponentially disruptive effect on upstream traffic. For these reasons, it is recommended that donation stations not be permitted between 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. and between 3:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m., Monday to Friday.

Remaining Conditions: The existing permit conditions, as described previously, will continue except for the provision prohibiting use of central medians which will be amended to permit their use provided that it is a minimum of 1.0 m wide.

Registered Charities: The original intent of establishing donation stations was to raise funds for charitable organizations. It has since evolved to the point where this method of fund raising is being used for such things as sports teams to purchase equipment, trips, etc. This is a departure from what was originally intended, and it is recommended that all future donation station permits be issued only to organizations or groups raising funds for registered charities; and furthermore, that all the funds raised must go to the charity.

## PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Agencies/persons that were issued donation station permits within the past 12 months were provided with a draft copy of this report and requested to provide comments. Further, the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Service, local fire departments and the Central Ambulance Communications Centre were also requested to comment.

Comments: Comments were received from the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Service, Central Ambulance Communications Centre, City of Ottawa Fire Department, Township of Cumberland Fire Department and Township of Rideau Fire Department. The comments are summarized below.

The Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Service agreed with the safety concerns described in the report and supported the Department's recommendations. Specifically, it was requested that the proposals "not be compromised or altered because of enforcement issues. Examples include the prohibition of participants on the roadway and the median strip usage specifications". It was further stated that "the terms and conditions to obtain a permit and participate should remain strictly adhered to by all participants".

The Central Ambulance Communications Centre had no comment.

The City of Ottawa Fire Department agrees with the Department's recommendations.

The Township of Cumberland Fire Department agrees that the review of this issue is timely because it has been observed that "the popularity of this form of fund raising is escalating to the point of being out of control". This unique method of fund raising used to be the exclusive purview of organized groups to raise funds for registered charities, but has given way to local groups raising funds for specific projects, etc. "The level of safety and organization in how some groups operate the stations is questionable and creates undue risks for the participants, the motorists and the general public".

The correspondence further states that "what we are experiencing on a regular basis are poorly organized, poorly marked and poorly located road tolls which create risk in many cases. Regardless, it would seem logical and effective to limit the use of donation stations to registered charities along with restrictions as to the locations where they are permitted. Criteria should be developed regarding the requirements for signage, personnel identification, hours of operation and guidelines to reduce the impact on traffic flow".

On the other hand, fire departments use this method of fund raising to raise money for Muscular Dystrophy, accounting for a significant portion of the total donations each year. The Cumberland Fire Department is of the opinion that its “road tolls are well identified, strategically located and operated in a safe manner by personnel experienced in traffic flow and control”.

The Township of Rideau Fire Department repeated what was stated previously, namely that this is how fire departments raise funds for Muscular Dystrophy. It is “appalled that the Regional Government wishes to restrict the road tolls to a level they have control on where, when and what time of day the tolls are to be set up”. It was stated that the fire fighters are identified by uniform, wear safety gear with retro-reflective strips, and use fire apparatus with emergency lights flashing. The tolls are therefore highly visible and provide ample time for motorists to slow down. Also, the tolls are set up during peak hours, but the inconvenience to motorists is minor compared to the benefits to people with Muscular Dystrophy. The local police are always consulted and there has never been an accident at a toll station. The Rideau Fire Department recommends that the “fire service” be exempt from the regulations recommended in this report.

There were no responses from the other agencies/organizations that were issued Donation Station Permits within the past 12 months.

Staff Response: No response is necessary for the first three respondents as they either agree with staff recommendations or have no comment.

A review of the two dissenting comments reveals that, in actual fact, there is hardly any difference in staff’s position and their position. Consider the following.

- The Cumberland Fire Department agrees with staff that Donation Stations are not being conducted properly by the majority of permit holders.
- Both fire departments state that fire departments should continue to be permitted to conduct donation stations to raise funds for Muscular Dystrophy. Staff have recommended that donation stations be restricted to groups raising funds exclusively for charities.
- Staff and the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Service are concerned about public safety at donation stations, and the fire departments obviously are as well, as shown by the precautions described in the correspondence.
- The Cumberland Fire Department states that some location restrictions should be implemented for safety reasons. Staff have recommended that intersections with 20 or more annual vehicular accidents be prohibited, and further, that central medians must be a minimum width of one metre if they are to be used by donation station participants.

A difference of opinion appears to be that the Rideau Fire Department conducts donation stations during peak hours. Staff have recommended that they not be conducted during the a.m. and p.m. peak hours Monday to Friday. This is the period when roads are operating at near or full capacity and any impediment to traffic flow can have an exponentially disruptive effect on upstream traffic. The Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Service agrees with staff on this issue. As well, the Cumberland Fire Department appears to agree with staff on this issue as it has recommended in its correspondence that regulations be implemented to reduce the impact of donation stations on traffic flow.

Insofar as the Rideau Fire Department's request that the "fire service" be exempt from the regulations recommended in this report is concerned, these recommendations have been established in consultation with the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Service and are considered essential to ensure the safety of both motorists and donation station participants. Donation stations should not be conducted under two sets of rules: one for the fire departments and one for everyone else.

#### FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

There is no financial implication.

#### REGIONAL OFFICIAL PLAN/TRANSPORTATION MASTER PLAN

The details of this report do not apply to either plan.

#### CONCLUSION

The details of how donation stations function have been reviewed with the result that one of our existing regulations has been relaxed and others established. It is an attempt to increase the practicality of conducting a successful donation station event while at the same time decreasing the likelihood of donation station participants violating the permit's safety provisions. This method of fund raising is considered risky and the Department has an obligation to recommend procedures to protect both donation station participants and motorists.

*Approved by  
Doug Brousseau*

SEM/JT