



The Municipality of the District of Lunenburg

Request for Decision

Report to: Fire and Emergency Services Committee

Submitted by: Alex Dumaresq, Deputy CAO
Chris Kennedy, Fire Services Coordinator

Date: September 4, 2025

Re: Driver Training Standards

Recommendation

Move that the Committee direct Staff to proceed with the directions identified in the report.

Background

Volunteer Fire Departments (VFDs) are critical partners in municipal emergency response. Fire Chief Officers are responsible for leadership, operational oversight, compliance with legislation, and ensuring public and firefighter safety. Many VFDs in Nova Scotia are independent societies operating under service agreements with municipalities. Municipalities retain a duty of care and a governance role to ensure safe, effective, and ethical service delivery.

In February of 2025 a fire chief in Cumberland County was driving department apparatus and struck a victim on scene. The Chief had a previous history of impaired driving and did not accurately report the incident to the municipality or its insurer.

The incident has prompted discussion within the Municipality and the Fire Service in Lunenburg County. The circumstances highlighted some significant risks if unlicensed drivers operate department apparatus which could affect the Municipality and fire service as a whole.

The Province of Nova Scotia establishes various licenses required for the operation of motor vehicles on public roads. There are different classes of drivers' licenses required based on the weight of the vehicle operated. An Air Brake Endorsement is also required for any vehicle with air brakes. Under the Current Regulations a volunteer firefighter can drive a fire apparatus under 14,000kgs if not equipped with air brakes without an air brake endorsement. If said vehicle is equipped with airbrakes a class 5 license with air brake endorsement is required in order to drive the vehicle. Many LRFES fire departments have gone above this standard to require all drivers to hold a class 3 license with air brake. This shows due diligence on behalf of the fire department above the minimum regulations.

Furthermore, under section 3 of the Motor Vehicle Licensing Regulations it states that a mechanic, vehicle salesperson, or volunteer firefighter may drive any vehicle with a class 5 licence during the performance of their duties. This is still a grey zone and could possibly be challenged in a court of law.

The Province of Nova Scotia establishes various licenses required for the operation of motor vehicles on public roads. There are different classes of drivers' licenses required based on the weight of vehicle operated. An Air Brake Endorsement is also required for any vehicle with air brakes. There are exemptions within the regulations for certain emergency services personnel as well.

The discussion section of this report reviews the areas discussed and provides recommendations on driver training and standards issues.

Discussion

Discussion at the workshop focused on types of licensing and training required for different types of apparatus, approaches to reduce the risk of unqualified drivers, considerations for potential minimum standards for driver/operators, and what supports would be needed by departments to assist with training.

Attendees spoke in favour of drivers having class 3 licenses, even where provincial regulations may not require more than class 5 with air brake endorsement. However, there was concern for the impact of establishing a new standard higher than what is currently required for several reasons:

- There is currently a shortage of trained driver/operators in the service;
- The cost and time to complete the training and testing is a barrier to volunteers receiving class 3 licenses;

- There is a shortage of provincial staff able to oversee testing required to earn a class 3 license;
- Smaller departments in particular may struggle to recruit and retain sufficient drivers.

Many strong concepts were put forward identifying steps departments could take to reduce risks of unlicensed operators, these included:

- Departments should maintain a list of qualified drivers and no other members be permitted to drive apparatus, unless as part of an approved departmental training program that complies with all provincial requirements
- Adoption of an internal policy requiring drivers to notify the department of any change in licensing status
- Departments receiving and retaining drivers abstracts on a regular cycle (e.g. every 2 years) for all drivers in the department
- A regional training program to create qualified driver/operators should be developed.

Key training program components could include:

- Vehicle-specific orientation and pre-trip inspections;
- Defensive and emergency driving techniques;
- Area familiarization and apparatus-specific skills;
- Hands-on evaluation;
- Documentation of all training for volunteers and departments; and
- Peer mentorship for new operators.

Additional insights around improving training for volunteers were also provided:

- Grants to provide training or municipal organization and funding
- Bursary/ compensation for volunteers' time spent training
- Collaboration with departments and municipalities regionally
- Flexible scheduling to fit into volunteers' schedules.

Several of these concepts have been identified as part of the draft training strategy for the region.

Direction

Given the issues with driver training and recruitment our region is currently experiencing, it is not advisable at this time to pursue a new mandatory standard for drivers beyond what is required provincially.

Instead of requiring a level of certification Staff recommend the following actions:

- 1) Amend the annual registration form to include the names and license types of all volunteers authorized to drive department apparatus.
- 2) Discuss the development or amendment of a best practice/General Operating Guideline (GOG) for driver requirements, training and record keeping.

Concurrent with these steps, the FESC should continue with the development and implementation of a training strategy including driver/operator training for the region.

Strategic Focus

Addressing a code of conduct and driver training is identified in Council's workplan for 2025/26.

Budget/Financial Implications

The proposed actions relating to annual registration forms and the development of a GOG for apparatus drivers will not have a budget impact.

Climate Change/sustainability

Not applicable

Inclusion Diversity equity and Accessibility (IDEA@MODL)

Not applicable

Strategic Communications

Stakeholder engagement with LRFES and with the fire service members is required for the content of a GOG on apparatus drivers.

Work plan

The proposed directions fall within the fire services coordinators workplan for 2025/26.

Alternatives

The committee could consider the implementation of a minimum driver standard that would exceed the provincial requirements.

Conclusion

Recent events in other areas of the Province have underscored the importance of adequate control and records for apparatus drivers in the volunteer fire service. Further work with fire services partners is needed to offer support to departments in implementing a process for authorizing and recording apparatus drivers with valid and current licenses.

Report Preparation	
Department	
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Report Approved by	
Date Reviewed by C.A.O.	