The following is provided to in response to questions raised at the December 8, 2014 meeting of the Public Works Committee.

In a July communication to Council, information was provided on a phased in launch which was to be completed by early September, with the bikeshare system in full operation. However, while all the stations and bikes were delivered by this time, the electronic communications systems that are necessary for the bikes to operate were not delivered. Social Bicycles Inc., the vendor that was awarded the bikeshare supply and operations contract through a competitive bid process, encountered issues with the bike communication devices and electronics manufacturing.

After a significant delay, the technical and manufacturing issues with the devices have been resolved and 100 electronic communications units have arrived in the City and are being prepared for field testing. Other Social Bicycles systems launching in various cities in North America, including Phoenix, Arizona, have been impacted by similar delays. It is anticipated that up to 100 bikes will soon start rolling out in small batches across the city as part of the first test phase of the bikeshare program. Further information will be provided to the public and Council when the exact date of the beginning of the field test is determined. The full program launch of 750 bikes will occur in late March, 2015. Bikes will be available at the stations that are already installed on-street. Every attempt was made to reduce street car parking impacts with the design of the system and no revenue generating car parking spots were removed.

Starting the test phase of the bikes during the winter season not only supports winter cycling, it will also provide SoBi Hamilton, the local non-profit bikeshare system operator, with an opportunity to test the system (including winter site maintenance) and ensure it is completely operational for prime cycling season. It is important that the bikeshare system be fully tested and ready for the full launch in late March, making the period between December and March vital for testing the system with a small number of users. In addition, the Hamilton systems’ robust bikes are designed for four-season use.
During this testing phase and during regular system’s operations, the City will not be responsible for any operational costs, including snow removal at stations. As outlined in previous Council communications, Social Bicycles Inc. is solely responsible for the financial and legal liability of the system.

In terms of the current bikeshare members, anyone who has already purchased a bike share membership - or who buys a membership during the test phase - will be able to ride the bikes as soon as they are available, as part of the test phase. The membership clock for Annual and Founding Memberships won’t start ticking until the official launch of the program in late March 2015 so members will get 15 months of usage but will only pay for 12 months. Monthly members get two months for the price of one. Those that use the system during the test phase will have the opportunity to help ensure that the system is ready for launch and help the City obtain valuable winter cycling data.

For more information about the bike share program and memberships please visit sobihamilton.ca. The bicycles and racks were provided by Social Bicycles Inc. (socialbicycles.com) and purchased through Metrolinx Quick Wins funding. The daily operations of the program will be handled by SoBi Hamilton, a local non-profit organization.

For more information, please contact Peter Topalovic, Project Manager, Transportation Demand Management at extension 5129.

Copy to:

Chris Murray, City Manager
Mike Kirkopoulos, Director, Communications & Intergovernmental Affairs
Gerry Davis, General Manager, Public Works Department
Rose Caterini, City Clerk
Kelly Anderson, Communications Officer, Public Works
Christopher Newman, Legislative Coordinator, Corporate Services
Mike Zegarac, Acting General Manager, Finance and Corporate Services Department
Anna Apkarian, Manager, Finance and Administration (PW), Corporate Services Department
Dr. Elizabeth Richardson, Medical Officer of Health, Public Health Services
Al Kirkpatrick, Manager, Transportation Management
Christine Lee-Morrison, Manager, Mobility Programs & Special Projects