

REPORT TO SAINT JOHN BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS



COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

September 13, 2022

Tamara Kelly, Chair and
Members of the Saint John Board of Police Commissioners
1 Peel Plaza
Saint John, NB E2L 0E1

Chair Kelly and Members:

SUBJECT: Reversing Falls Bridge: Mental Health Related Calls for Service

Issue:

Initiating a more proactive and preventative response to mental health calls and investigations related to the Reversing Falls Bridge in Saint John, New Brunswick.

Background:

During the past five years (2017-2022), the Saint John Police has responded to approximately 108 mental health related calls for service to the Reversing Falls Bridge.

A number of these calls also required the response of other emergency service providers including the Saint John Fire Department, Ambulance New Brunswick, and the Canadian Coast Guard.

Furthermore, the Saint John Police does have a number of outstanding missing person cases, some of which are believed to involve mental health concerns. While unknown, any number of these individuals may or may not have jumped from the bridge however there is no way of knowing.

The following table offers an overview of call types and frequency over a five-year period collected from the Saint John Police databases:

Subject: Reversing Falls Bridge: Mental Health Related Calls for Service

Scenario	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 (Jan – Jun)
Jumped and died			1			
Jumped and never found (presumed dead)		1	2			
Jumped and survived						1
Fell and survived						1
Physically restrained / prevented from jumping	5		4	5	5	2
Talked out of jumping	10	8	22	17	10	3
Police responded to bridge due to comments made, but person was found at another location	7	1	2			1
TOTAL	22	10	31	22	15	8

Fortunately, most of these cases were successfully deescalated through communication between the police and the person in crisis. Regardless of the outcome, these calls for service still required a tri-level response from emergency services.

In at least six cases, a full rescue response and investigation was required. In at least four cases, a complex and lengthy investigation was required involving many internal and external resources. At least three cases have never been resolved; therefore, families of those affected have never received any closure. This is only a brief overview of the last five years.

Proposal:

1. The Saint John Police recognizes that the Reversing Falls Bridge is the responsibility of the New Brunswick Department of Transportation and Infrastructure; therefore, installation of suicide prevention barriers providing a deterrent, although preferable, does not fall under the City of Saint John purview.
2. However, it is the position of the Saint John Police that a more proactive and preventative measure be taken with respect to the Reversing Falls Bridge. This could be achieved if the bridge provided high quality surveillance cameras installed to monitor the Reversing Falls Bridge, the benefits of which include the ability to:
 - Confirm if a person in crisis is fact present on the bridge at the time of the call
 - Confirm if a person in crisis in fact fell, jumped or left the bridge

Subject: Reversing Falls Bridge: Mental Health Related Calls for Service

- Properly assess and determine the appropriate resources required for a response in a timelier manner
- Confirm with some certainty the identity of the person in crisis
- Coordinate a more effective water rescue, if required
- Increase potential of life saving measures in a timelier manner
- Identify potential witnesses that may assist the investigation
- Increase potential of early resolution in an investigation for responding personnel, families and witnesses
- Reduce the number of resources required to carry out a full response and/or investigation

Recognizing that surveillance cameras in public locations often create privacy concerns, it is recommended that, if installed, cameras would be live monitored from a secure location at the Public Safety Communications Centre solely for the purposes of emergency response and investigation.

Recommendation:

The Saint John Police makes the following recommendations:

1. That this request be forwarded to the City of Saint John Public Safety Committee to consider a proposal with recommendations to Common Council.
2. That the City of Saint John Public Safety Committee further considers recommending other suicide prevention efforts on the Reversing Falls Bridge such as suicide prevention barriers to the New Brunswick Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.



Robert M. Bruce
Chief of Police