

ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

June 20, 2012

MEMBERS  
PRESENT: Theresa Horwill, Chair  
Tom Boyd, Vice Chair  
Brian Aird  
Cynthia Bryant  
Councillor Mary Wile  
Lisa Pottie

REGRETS: Councillor Jerry Blumenthal  
Mary Newcombe  
Troy Nauffts

OTHERS  
PRESENT: Councillor David Hendsbee  
Councillor Jennifer Watts

STAFF: Supt. Cliff Falkenham, Halifax Regional Police  
Darren Young, Project Manager, Infrastructure & Asset Management  
Damion Stapledon, Coordinator, Community & Recreation Services  
Taso Koutroulakis, Acting Manager, Traffic & Right of Way Services  
Gordon Hayward, Superintendent, Winter Operations  
Patricia Hughes, Supervisor, Service Design & Projects, Metro Transit  
Patrick Meagher, Manager, Accessible Transit, Metro Transit  
Sherryl Murphy, Deputy Clerk  
Jenny Benson, Legislative Support

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	CALL TO ORDER/OPENING REMARKS/PURPOSE OF MEETING .....	3
2.	STAFF OVERVIEW OF ACCESSIBILITY CHALLENGES OR ISSUES.....	4
3.	QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC .....	5
4.	CLOSING COMMENTS .....	11
5.	ADJOURNMENT .....	11

## **1. CALL TO ORDER/OPENING REMARKS/PURPOSE OF MEETING**

The Chair called the meeting to order at 5:35pm in the Multi-purpose room of the Bloomfield Centre, 2786 Agricola Street, Halifax. She welcomed everyone for attending the Town Hall Meeting on Accessibility being hosted by HRM's Accessibility Advisory Committee.

## **2. STAFF OVERVIEW OF ACCESSIBILITY CHALLENGES OR ISSUES**

- **Darren Young, Project Manager, Facility Development**

Mr. Young explained that Facility Development is comprised of three divisions: parks and playgrounds, the trails group and the building group. His role falls into the building side which is currently working on the new bridge terminal. He stated that Facility Development is dedicated to following the CSA standards in all of their new facilities and is constantly seeking new and innovative accessibility features when developing projects.

Mr. Young shared that he also provides staff support to the Accessibility Committee which has installed 75 door operators in HRM over the past few years. Under the recommendation of the Committee he has also been working on installing pool lifts and door operators around HRM, most recently at Needham Centre. There is also work being done to ensure that all washroom features are accessible based on the CSA standards in new buildings and existing ones where possible. Mr. Young explained that Accessibility Committee members assess HRM buildings and he alters them in accordance to recommendations as the budget allows. Signage is also a major aspect of Mr. Young's job which will be expanding to Metro Transit shortly.

- **Damion Stapledon, Coordinator, Community & Recreation Services**

Mr. Stapledon is both the Coordinator and the Accessibility Committee Chair for Recreation Services. His business unit recently changed their policy to make things more accessible and user-friendly for both staff and clients to better meet everyone's needs. Community & Recreation Services recently conducted a scan of HRM to investigate and discover any services being offered similar to theirs and any challenges the organizations offering those services were facing. A large scale provincial research project was conducted to compile a list of all recreational opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Mr. Stapledon made it clear that this scan and compilation was a first step. The document, which he provided copies of at the meeting, will be available in PDF form and renewed annually. He invited the audience to send in any additional organizations and services that are missing from the list. He also asked individuals to bring to his attention any gaps in services so that he can help provide more accessible recreational services for HRM residents.

- **Taso Koutroulakis, Acting Manager, Traffic & Right of Way Services**

Mr. Koutroulakis explained the role of Traffic & Right of Way Service. His focus recently has been on making all traffic signals accessible, in the last three years thirty accessible signals have been installed. There is a plan to install two new signals by the new Dartmouth transit terminal along with other projects. He explained that he works with a number of organizations to assess where the highest needs are for accessible signals.

Mr. Koutroulakis recognized that there is an issue with the way in which signal cabinets have been installed, especially in downtown Halifax, making them difficult to detect with a cane. His team is currently looking into various models which would be detectable by canes and will be looking to install those when doing future work.

- **Gordon Hayward, Superintendent, Winter Operations**

Mr. Hayward explained what Winter Operations is responsible for the complications and challenges involved in snow removal for HRM. His business unit funds a program which provides assistance in clearing pathways, walkways and paths to oil tanks for seniors and individuals with disabilities. This program currently services over 400 clients with a demand of 600-700 clients.

- **Patricia Hughes, Supervisor, Service Design & Projects, Metro Transit**

Ms. Hughes explained her role, under which the Universal Accessibility Plan falls. The Universal Accessibility Plan examined the current transit system and conducted public consultation through focus groups to discover how to make the system more accessible. The plan is now finished, the staff report has been prepared and Council will be asked to approve and provide principle to the plan.

According to Ms. Hughes, the plan includes great recommendations around making Metro Transit more accessible, some of which will have to go to Council separately as budget items. A few of the recommendations have already been implemented at this time. She also noted that the research for the plan included an examination of every bus stop to determine which stops the accessibility ramp can be deployed. All of those stops are now listed in a pamphlet created by HRM which makes the Metro Transit system much more predictable for users who require the use of a ramp.

- **Patrick Meagher, Manager, Accessible Transit, Metro Transit**

Mr. Meagher explained that his main duties fall under Access-A-Bus, an alternative transportation service for individuals unable to use Metro Transit. Access-A-Bus transports 400 to 500 rides a day for their clients. Implementing the recommendations of a study conducted by Metro Transit in 2010 has made the service a much more efficient service, allowing them to provide the service to more clients (including their personal care attendant at no cost). Booking has also been improved to accommodate last minute travel needs, allowing clients to book up to 48 hrs prior to pickup as opposed to

seven days. Mr. Meagher noted that Metro Transit works closely with the Metro Transit Accessibility Advisory Committee which helps Access-A-Bus to provide a more accessible and convenient service.

### **3. QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

The Chair opened the floor for those wishing to speak. She reviewed the ground rules for the meeting.

Ms. Betty MacDonald, Community Worker for the Society of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Nova Scotians, stated her concern regarding individuals with hearing impairments being unable to hear announcements about bus delays and cancellations. She requested that an LED/infra-red system be installed at the main terminal to assist individuals with issues similar to hers.

Ms. Hughes explained that Metro Transit has a Twitter account now and they post all of those announcements on Twitter which would be beneficial for individuals with hearing impairments who use smart phones.

Mr. Young shared that in the Bridge Terminal there will be LED screens with the bus arrival times and also announcements with delays. Each new stop has also been accommodated at the construction level to allow for this to be installed at a later date.

Ms. Elaine Hawkins stated that she has a visually impaired individual living in her building who would appreciate more differentiation in cut curbs with different colours making it easier for her to differentiate.

Mr. Koutroulakis explained that this is not currently in the standards that his business unit works from but they are currently looking at ramp designs to make them accessible for all users with various disabilities.

Ms. Hawkins also made the point that unless you are in a wheelchair, it is very difficult to assess washrooms. She volunteered to try out washrooms for Mr. Young.

Ms. Jen Powley, the HRM Coordinator of the Ecology Action Centre, expressed her concerns around accessibility in the Khyber Building.

Mr. Young, Project Manager for HRM Facility Development, stated that his department is currently looking at adjustments in the Khyber Building to make it more accessible. He also explained that they are doing their best to make previously constructed HRM buildings more accessible on a limited budget, such as installing the lift at Needham.

Ms. Pat Gates, representing CNIB Advocacy and Awareness and the Canadian Centre for the Blind, stated that Metro Transit is her main form of transportation. She shared that in the past the CNIB has spoken to bus drivers about awareness issues and is urging Metro Transit to re-establish the practice of holding these regular meetings. She

would appreciate bus drivers having a greater awareness of what individuals with visual impairments need and a better idea of their experiences. She also expressed her disappointment around the #52's stops throughout Bayers Lake being cancelled, making Bayers Lake a very difficult location for her and others with visual impairments to navigate.

Councillor Wile explained to Ms. Gates that bus have to run on the streets owned by HRM and that the routes previously used in Bayer's Lake near the stores are on private property, and the owners have to agree to all bus stops. In the past there have also been safety issues with children dashing out in front of the bus. The Councillor arranged a meeting in the past to discuss these issues but no one attended the meeting. She proposed a bus route to run that would run further down from the storefronts, solving the safety issue, but could not attain the required consent from store owners. Councillor Wile committed to approach the store owners in Bayers Lake again because she understands the importance of this issue.

Ms. Joanne Coffey is asked whether or not a ramp could be installed around the Hydrostone. She also added on to Ms. Powley's comments around accessibility issues in the Khyber Building because they recently added a theatre which many individuals with accessibility issues cannot enjoy at this point.

Ms. Kathy James McKenna, spoke as the mother of Kelly McKenna who is a full time user of a power chair. She wanted confirmation that the new route coming in from the airport has the capacity to accommodate power chairs. Mr. Meagher confirmed that it does. She also asked if there was a tie down system for wheelchairs. Mr. Meagher explained that they do have a few options for tying down wheelchairs. When Ms. McKenna shared that in Ottawa bus drivers often forgot to tie down Kelly's wheelchair, Mr. Meagher stated that the drivers are responsible for passenger safety and would therefore be required to ensure that Kelly's wheelchair was appropriately tied.

Ms. McKenna had a further inquiry about whether or not there was a lift at the Canada Games Centre. Mr. Young stated that there is a new lift device at the pool. Ms. McKenna stated that she contacted the facility and was told that the only way for Kelly to get into the pool would be for the lifeguard to lift her into the pool. She stated that physical lifts lead to issues around anxiety, liability and privacy. She stated that there is no pool in HRM that Kelly can use without a physical transfer and requested that a lift be purchased.

Councillor Wile explained that she has a friend who is in a wheelchair and uses the hydrotherapy pool with the assistance of a lift. The Councillor offered to follow up with Ms. McKenna.

Ms. Jean Coleman from the Nova Scotia Association for Community Living works with families who have children with disabilities. It has been brought to her attention that a number of the families she works with have found many of the recreational programs

throughout HRM to be inaccessible, requiring families to bring a support person with them for the activities.

Mr. Stapledon explained that there are two types of facilities, those that are municipally owned and volunteer operated and those that are municipally owned and operated. Community recreation facilities are usually in municipally owned and operated facilities where all accessibility needs are taken care of by HRM-hired staff or attendants. HRM is currently encouraging municipally owned, volunteer-operated facilities to be more mindful of accessibility needs and provide more of the support that is needed.

Ms. Jocelyne Tranquilla from NS Association for Community Living stated that she is an advocate for making spaces more accessible. She would like accessible washrooms to be gender neutral to accommodate attendants and trans-gendered individuals.

Ms. Carol Epstein from Dartmouth explained that she has a scooter and has a very difficult time at crosswalks with her scooter because cars cannot see her at that height forcing her to often rely on pedestrians passing by to alert cars of her presence.

Mr. Koutroulakis explained that the new standards that his department is working from should make crosswalks more accessible, however, a number of pre-existing locations have a number of accessibility issues. He encouraged Ms. Epstein to pass along suggestions for locations where these new crosswalks should go in, or alternatively where paving should go right up to the sign.

Ms. M.J. Crawford, representing the Deaf Advocacy Association of NS and Teamworks, echoed an earlier comment stating that there is no closed-captioning with the safety signage at the ferry terminal instructing individuals with disabilities of safety standards and procedures. She encouraged HRM to arrange to have messaging systems on tourism activities or to train tour guides and attendants in sign language. She also requested that the system individuals can phone to check bus times and delays be available by text for individuals with hearing impairments. Her final request was to have basic signs placed in the recreation books so that staff could easily include children with disabilities in their activities without having to learn sign language. She stated that her son is deaf and this would have been of great benefit to him.

Mr. Martin Wexler, President of Continuing Care of NS, discussed issues around the licensing of large group homes. He stated that at this point group homes cannot be located anywhere other than in industrial parks under municipal zoning. He explained that this removes the tenants of these homes from their communities and creates issues around social integration since these areas are isolated. Mr. Wexler requested that Councillors take this to Regional Council.

Councillor Jennifer Watts explained that the Centre Plan is currently being created to re-establish the zoning and regulations in downtown Halifax, making it very important for individuals like Mr. Wexler to make their voices heard in the process as soon as possible. She encouraged him to submit his request to the Centre Plan online.

Mr. Lui Greco, Director of Government Relations at CNIB commended HRM staff on holding this meeting and the attendees for their engagement in these important issues. He requested that new traffic structures stay away from formats such as traffic circles and roundabouts because they create a number of issues for individuals with disabilities. He used Armdale Rotary as an example of a format which is particularly challenging for individuals with disabilities to navigate.

Ms. Gail Bruhm, representing NSLEO and Co-chair of NS Disabilities Strategy, commended HRM on having this meeting and requested a cordless microphone be used at the the next meeting. She stated that crosswalk painting has to start earlier and has to be intense and noted that she is aware of streets that were never painted last year. Ms. Bruhm shared that this is an issue for everyone, not just those with visual impairments. She also encouraged HRM to train bus drivers on how to better accommodate and understand individuals with disabilities. She noted that there are a large number of trees and shrubs currently hanging down onto the sidewalks which obscure street signs and interfere with equipment required by some individuals to be mobile. It is also her belief that parking meters are very oddly placed in HRM and that Access-A-Bus needs to be moved to an essential service (she noted that she is aware that this would be under the province's mandate, not HRM's).

Ms. Mary Lou Cassie is deaf and blind and uses the Access-A-Bus daily to go from her home to her job at Dalhousie. She had an amazing bus driver who learned how to communicate with her through the British sign system and has now passed away. She is upset because her current bus driver ignores her and does not communicate with her on the bus now. She often worries about delays and requires something to be in place for deaf and blind individuals who use hand-on-hand communication. Ms. Cassie suggested that an orientation take place with the Access-A-Bus drivers who drive her route so that they can learn how to communicate with her.

Mr. Meagher expressed his compassion towards Ms. Casey and explained that accommodating individuals like her is very challenging and cannot be promised at this point.

Mr. Isai Estey asked why is the number 10 bus not accessible.

Ms. Hughes explained that the #10 route is not accessible right now and would require an articulated bus. There are more articulated bus being put into the works and it is on HRM's radar.

Ms. Anne McRay who was accompanying Mr. Estey explained that they have been downtown in the past and have tried to board accessible busses to be told that they were not allowed to board because not all of the stops along the bus' route were accessible. She asked whether or not under the new guidelines they would now be able to board the bus and get off at the bus stop that is the closest accessible stop to theirs. Ms. Hughes stated that she believes this is the case now.



Dr. Nina Woulff, mother of Noah, complimented Access-A-Bus but requested that it extend its catchment routing to the airport. Mr. Meagher stated that Access-A-Bus does go to the airport and that the fare is the same as the regular bus. Ms. Woulff also shared that she has grave concerns about the accessibility of the buildings in HRM and believes that accessibility should be essential, not considered a “nice thing”. She would also appreciate it if someone were to be designated as a facilitator for accessibility issues who could liaise with individuals with disabilities in HRM. She also requested that a sign be put by the entrance of each HRM building noting the level of accessibility it is equipped with, stating that this would be of great assistance to her son and others facing accessibility challenges.

Mr. Laughlin Rutt, Diversity Consultant for HRM Human Resources and Accessibility Committee Member, explained that the Accessibility Advisory Committee is there for any individual with disabilities and can bring forth anything in the area of disability. He explained that he utilizes the Accessibility Advisory Committee when he is facing challenges or has questions regarding accessibility. Mr. Young explained that they could place a request for any inquiries that come into the 490-4000 line be sent to the Accessibility Advisory Committee. It was also shared that there is a TTY at a different number which Mr. Young will provide.

Mr. John Cox, COS, stated that the last time he used Access-A-Bus the driver did not know the route he was to take even though there was only one stop. The issue that he wanted to bring to HRM’s attention was the need for materials to continue to be provided in print form because texting, Twitter and social media are not always accessible for individuals with limited reading ability. He also voiced his support for having a coordinator who individuals could call about program access, instead of being referred to a booklet or website.

Mr. Stapledon stated that individuals’ needs can be addressed on an individual basis. His business unit can provide braille copies of material for those who require it and also printed copies by request.

Ms. Patricia Lewis from the SCRI Society, asked how her son who uses the Access-A-Bus would notify her if something went wrong or if there was a delay since he does not carry a cellphone. She suggested that despite cost it would be very useful for the buses to have aides on them. She also wondered about an earlier reference to an attendant being able to ride for free if they were registered, and what registering entails. Mr. Stapledon explained that if you are accompanying an individual who is travelling on Metro Transit that requires assistance you can apply to be registered with Metro Transit which will allow you to ride free of charge. He also clarified that the bus aide’s role is the same as what the bus operator is required for, bus operators handle any issues and contact the appropriate individuals if any passengers have issues.

Ms. Lewis also shared that more opportunities need to be provided for individuals with disabilities who are over the age of 21 and can no longer be in school.

Councillor Wile shared that the TTY phone number for all of HRM is 490-6645.

Following up on the earlier discussion of accessibility issues in Bayers Lake, Johanna Stork of CNIB shared that there are some great examples of developments that have gone up such as the plaza in Sackville that have sidewalks going through the plaza and very accessible bus stops. She requested that the city influence these types of considerations be taken into account in planning and designs. For example, there is no way for individuals with visual disabilities to get around Dartmouth Crossing.

Mr. Bob Venus from Dartmouth East shared that he had heard of a recommendation going forward to Council requiring one of every ten new buildings to be accessible for individuals with disabilities. He recalls this recommendation being accepted by Council and passed onto the province but is unsure where it stands now and noted that one in ten buildings is not nearly enough. He also asked whether or not passengers taking Access-A-Bus to the airport can bring luggage.

Ms. Hughes stated that Access-A-Bus started going to the airport on May 31<sup>st</sup> and shared that their standard regulations apply and individuals would have to be able handle any luggage themselves.

Ms. Jennie Bovard from the North End expressed that she believes stop annunciators on provincial transit are great. She lived in Vancouver for the last few years and found it to be of great assistance, but has been having a difficult time using the transit system since moving back to Halifax. She also requested that when planners are thinking about signage to make it high contrast, which would be very considerate and creative in her opinion.

Ms. Dorothy Kitchen encouraged HRM staff to learn about disabilities so that they could make more informed decisions.

#### **4. CLOSING COMMENTS**

The Chair thanked everyone for coming.

#### **5. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:28 p.m.

Jenny Benson  
Legislative Support