

## Minute Extract - Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities May 17, 2010 session

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### 4.2 Metro Transit's Accessibility

- Correspondence from Lori Patterson, Manager, Marketing & Communications, Metro Transit, dated May 13, 2010 re: response to VISTA's letter of March 16, 2010 was before the Committee for review.

#### (i) Metro Transit Access-A-Bus & Transit Schedule

Mr. Nauffts provided an overview of his concerns expressed during the February 22, 2010 meeting. Highlights were as follows:

- HRM's Metro Transit online bus schedule is not accessible/compatible for persons who are visually impaired and use screen readers
- concern with the frequency of the transit website being updated; possibility of inaccurate information
- possibility of adding a link underneath each of the bus routes, which would open into a separate text box that would provide the following information:
  - a description of the route's schedule (days and times)
  - a description of the outbound/inbound route and each designated stop
- certain transit inbound routes are different from their outbound routes
- Mr. Nauffts is not able to open PDF formatted documents; possibility of using HTML format

Mr. Nauffts provided an example of the transit website for Fredericton, NB and commented that Fredericton's transit website is fully accessible to screen readers.

Tiffany Chase, Coordinator, Marketing & Communication, Metro Transit, advised that Metro Transit changes could be made to the Metro Transit website to make it more accessible. She further indicated that staff are reviewing the BrowseAloud software, noting that it is presently not working within Metro Transit's website.

Kelly Marney, Webmaster, E-Commerce & Web Services, commented that given the amount of data, it could take time for staff to reconfigure each bus route. She noted that the accessible bus schedule does not have the same format as the rest of Metro Transit's route schedules. It is important for staff to ensure that the transit schedules are consistently updated in a frequent manner. Ms. Chase confirmed that Metro Transit's website is updated regularly at the end of each month. Ms. Marney further indicated that Metro Transit's route schedules are substantially larger than the city of Fredericton's schedules.

In response to a question raised by Ms. McFadyen, Ms. Chase indicated that Metro Transit will establish a time line for implementing the work and report back to the

Committee on the progress.

Mr. Nauffts suggested having the Committee's involvement/input during the reconfiguration of the website.

Ms. Marney indicated that she is presently working on a server changeover and once this project is complete, she will be reviewing the accessibility policies for HRM's website. HRM's Accessibility Policy will start out with broad guidelines and as HRM develops its website, the Policy's guidelines will tighten up. She encouraged the Committee's input during this process.

During the ensuing discussion, the Committee, along with the representatives of VISTA, made the following comments/suggestions:

- there is presently no alternative for visually impaired persons to review HRM's bus schedules; the Google Transit site is also not very accessible to screen readers
- possibility of bringing in a consultant that has experience with accessible websites
- possibility of hiring a summer student on a work term to assist with upgrades

Ms. Marney indicated that she is presently taking an accessibility course and has been involved with several international accessibility conferences. She is also a member of the Special Interest Group on Accessible Computing (SIGACCESS).

Following a brief discussion, the Committee agreed, to prevent confusion/inconsistency, Metro Transit staff should upgrade the transit schedule routes based on its current sequence. Further, it is important for HRM to have the internal resources to be able to maintain the website.

## **(ii) Accessibility Plans for New Bridge Terminal in Dartmouth**

Dave Raege, Coordinator, Project Planning, Metro Transit - Service Development, and Stephen Outerbridge, Architect with Sperry & Partners, provided an overview of the new bridge terminal in Dartmouth to the Committee. Highlights were as follows:

- present terminal is located near the Dartmouth Sportsplex; busiest transit transfer hub within HRM's core (approximately 18,000 people per day)
- the present terminal was built as a temporary facility in the early 1990's; over the past three years, HRM staff has been undertaking a process to replace the terminal with a new transit facility
- the geometry of the terminal is not accessible for mobility devices
- the new transit terminal will have 16 bus bays and be located above the Dartmouth Sportsplex parking lot between Nantucket Avenue and Thistle Street; the core of the facility will be a building in the middle with eight bus

- lanes down each side of the facility
- staff is presently addressing organizational concerns regarding pedestrian safety re: drop off/pick up
- there will be pathways through the parking lot, which lead to the rooftop entrance; pedestrians avoid crossing through bus traffic
- there will be an elevator and two stairwells leading from the rooftop entrance into the core of the facility
- there will be entrances at both ends of the facility
- there will be GoTime monitors in the facility, advising local route information; the monitors have the ability to be automated through a touch screen
- there will be signs with large text at the entrances of the facility and an option to have braille signage

During the discussion on the presentation, the Committee raised the following points and concerns:

- lack of audio announcements for visually impaired persons
- concern with how a visually impaired person will navigate a touch screen GoTime monitor; importance of accessing route information and having the interactive monitors
- less than 15% of the visually impaired population reads braille
- how will a visually impaired person identify where their bus will stop with multiple buses stopping at the same location

Mr. Raege advised that the terminal has a saw tooth bay design, with designated spots for each bus. The entrance doors will have bright yellow strips around them, with a tactile difference. Signage will indicate the designated spot for each bus on the platform.

Further information provided by staff included:

- passengers can also access the facility from the Dartmouth Sportsplex parking lot, which will have an extension from the sidewalk to avoid cutting through the parking lot
- the facility will be approximately 7,000 square feet and has an elongated design, which makes it four times longer than its width
- there will be passenger waiting lounges at either end of the facility
- the facility will be closed between 2 a.m. to 4 a.m.; the hours of the facility are dependant on the number of buses running
- consideration is being given to install a staff information desk; a staff member will be present throughout the day to assist passengers
- a security guard will also be present at the new facility

In response to a question raised by Councillor Wile, Ms. McFadyen indicated that additional elements such as colour, tactile, signage, braille signage are beneficial;

however, there is a variety/range of ability in regard to vision loss. Ms. Jackie Corbett, Vice Chair of VISTA, commented that bright yellow lines and tactile is beneficial for people with low vision.

Ms. Corbett further expressed concern in regards to how a visually impaired person would locate a braille sign or the facilities doors.

Ms. Barb LeGay, Chair of VISTA, asked what forms of consultation had taken place between staff and persons with disabilities or other interest groups. Mr. Raege advised that in conjunction with today's discussions with the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities, staff has also met with the Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB). From those discussions, staff were able to identify key element changes related to accessibility regarding signage, textural changes in the carpeting and flooring inside the facility and along the pathways leading to/from the facility. Orientation to the new facility could be beneficial to individuals when they first visit the facility.

During the ensuing discussion, the Committee expressed further concerns:

- the importance of staff receiving all the information respecting accessibility issues before construction begins
- a large sum of money is being spent; concern with not having a fully accessible terminal
- an audio announcement should be a key element offered within the new facility

Mr. Outerbridge advised that the facility has been designed to accommodate touch screen monitors and GoTime information. He noted that he has been tasked with the design element of the facility and suggested that the Committee members forward their concerns to Regional Council regarding the implementation of an audio system.

Mr. Aird commented that there are many individuals who are not able to read signs and some people often misread signs. He noted that many cities use audio announcements, which creates less confusion and decreases the likelihood of needing an orientation period.

Mr. Outerbridge advised that the facility will be wired to accommodate an annunciation system, as well as, installing additional wiring for future upgrades.

Mr. Raege indicated that staff is not in a position at this time to implement an annunciation system.

The Committee noted further concerns/suggestions as follows:

- option of having a distinct sound for each bus bay to alert passengers that their bus has arrived; people come to expect these forms of technology

- within modern terminals
- concern with how visually impaired persons will identify that their bus has arrived if they are inside the facility
- option of having a facility staff person announce the departure of each bus

It was noted that Councillors Blumenthal and Wile would relay the Committee's accessibility concerns expressed during the meeting regarding the new bus terminal to Regional Council during budget debate.

The following further points were noted by staff:

- the present terminal has six bus bays; however, it has a capacity to hold twelve to fourteen buses during rush hour; bus drivers are presently stopping where they can find room within the terminal
- the Dartmouth Sportsplex presently has approximately fifty parking spaces; HRM will not be building any additional parking for the new terminal

Due to time constraints, the Committee agreed to invite the members of VISTA back to the next Committee meeting to discuss the May 13, 2010 correspondence from Metro Transit, as well as, VISTA's email of March 16, 2010.

The Committee requested the Clerk contact staff from Metro Transit and invite them back to the next meeting.

This matter was further discussed later in the meeting, see page 11.

Following further discussion, it was **MOVED by Ms. Helen McFadyen, seconded by Mr. Jack Jones, that the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities recommend that Halifax Regional Council give consideration to the following:**

- 1. that the Metro Transit accessibility study be considered a priority; and**
- 2. encourage Metro Transit to develop a time line for the accessibility study.**

**MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

It was noted that the Committee's recommendation to Regional Council related to item 4.2 - Metro Transit's Accessibility would be deferred to the next meeting to allow for further discussion with the members of VISTA.