

Bus Stop Annunciation Research August 18, 2011

Introduction

The Chair of the advisory Committee for Accessibility in HRM requested assistance with research on the best practices associated with bus stop annunciation. This matter was previously discussed by the Committee but not finalized by the Committee.

Background

Announced bus stops on Transit systems are not new. The service was provided on many early systems not specifically carried out for persons with visual disabilities but as a service to all passengers. This role was filled by the conductor on the tram system.

Announced bus stop information is provided both manual and automated forms in many countries. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires it by law in the United States. There is no such national act of law in Canada. Such announcements benefit all citizens as well as visitors that are unfamiliar with a specific geographic area.

The issue resurfaced in Canada specifically focusing on persons with visual disabilities.

In July 2007 the case “Lepofsky versus The Toronto Transit Commission”, the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario “*found that the failure of the Toronto Transit Commission (TCC) to ensure announcement of all stops on buses and streetcars violated the human rights of persons with disabilities. In particular, the Tribunal found that the TCC failed to establish that alleged risks associated with drivers verbally announcing stops would amount to undue hardship, while the costs associated with implementing such a program would be relatively minor.*”

In October 2007, the Ontario Human Rights Commission began preparing a report on Public Transit Stop Announcements in Ontario. This was the result of “*recent developments and ongoing concerns in the area of transit accessibility*”. The conclusion of the report stated, “*We have heard that stop announcements provide improved service for many community members, such as persons with visual or cognitive disabilities, people who find it hard to read street signs, tourists and others visiting unfamiliar areas, and passengers who are distracted or unable to see outside due to bad weather or full vehicles.*” “*We have also heard, from some transit organizations and vehicle operators, as well as from transit riders both with and without disabilities, that announcing all stops simply makes sense.*”

Following the “Lepofsky versus Toronto Transit Commission” decision most Ontario transit systems immediately began taking action and changing their practice. By the time the Ontario Human Rights final report was released in April 2008, most of the 41 Ontario Transit systems identified in the report were actively providing stop announcements.

In the August 4th, 2009 report to HRM Council, the Acting CAO Wayne Anstey noted that “Automated Bus Stop Annunciation technology is being introduced in other Canadian transit systems and Metro transit will be evaluating this technology for future implementation.”

During the same timeframe, the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities had spoken of the matter at multiple meetings and indicated to senior management of Metro Transit that automated announcements should be implemented.

The October 7th, 2009 Metro Transit Five Year Strategic Operations Plan, prepared by the IBI Group, did not contain any comments on bus stop annunciation. In a supplemental report to Council by CAO Dan English on January 6th, 2010 it was stated, “*The Plan speaks to improving accessibility through increasing accessible infrastructure at bus stops and terminals, purchasing additional low floor buses, and increasing the number of routes providing accessible service.*”

The “GO Times” publication of Metro Transit of February 2010 stated that, “*a further budget item will be added in 2010/2011 to conduct an overall accessibility study of the entire Metro Transit system and will help guide future decisions surrounding accessibility, including items such as Automated Bus Stop Annunciation*”

Managers from Metro Transit attended the May 17th, 2010 meeting of the Advisory Committee for Persons with disabilities and indicated, “*that staff is not in a position at this time to implement an annunciation system.*”

On August 16th, 2010 the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities passed a motion recommending “*that Halifax Regional Municipality give consideration to the implementation of an automated audio and visual bus stop announcement system as a first step to improving all accessibility on HRM Metro Transit routes.*”

Advantages

The advantages include:

1. Moving Metro Transit towards enhanced customer service for all citizens.
2. Provision of a specific benefit to the groups represented by the Advisory Committee on Accessibility in HRM.
3. Provision of a specific benefit to tourists and visitors; persons with low literacy.
4. Decrease potential of complaints on this subject under the Nova Scotia Human rights Act.

Risk Related Information

The Lepofsky Case formed a precedent decision that would likely be considered when assessing similar human rights complaints in Nova Scotia.

Considerations

1. An interim measure requiring manual bus stop announcements by operators until an automated system of voice and visual bus stop announcements is implemented. How long to implement this option? (30 days, 60 days, 120 days)
2. Implementation of an automated system of visual and voice bus stop annunciation. How long before it should be done? (1 year, 18 months, 2 years)
3. Consultation with Transit Management, the unions involved and Labour Relations of Human Resources as to the potential effect on labour / management relations.

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