



P.O. Box 1749  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
B3J 3A5 Canada

**Item No.**  
**Transportation Standing Committee**  
**September 22, 2011**

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Transportation Standing Committee

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "Eddie Robar", written over a horizontal line.

**SUBMITTED BY:** Eddie Robar, Director Metro Transit

**DATE:** September 1, 2011

**SUBJECT:** Conventional Transit Accessibility Improvements

**INFORMATION REPORT**

**ORIGIN**

The following motion was approved at the August 10, 2011 Transportation Standing Committee:

**MOVED by Councillor Watts, seconded by Councillor Fisher, that the Transportation Standing Committee request a staff report with an update on Accessible Low Floor (ALF) Metro Transit routes. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

## **BACKGROUND**

Metro Transit has been improving the accessibility of its conventional transit services over a number of years through the purchasing of low floor accessible buses and the implementation of designated accessible routes. Each year Metro Transit increases the number of its Accessible Low Floor (ALF) routes and its specialized services by expanding the size of its accessible bus fleet.

In the interest of improving overall accessibility of the transit system, Metro Transit engaged a consultant in September 2010 to conduct a Universal Accessibility Study of the conventional bus and ferry systems and make recommendations that will improve accessibility to services. The intended outcome, over time, is to become an accessible transit system and all services provided being designated accessible.

In March 2009, and then in April 2010, complaints alleging discrimination on the grounds of physical disability in relation to access to municipal transportation services in Halifax were received by the Human Rights Commission of Nova Scotia.

## **DISCUSSION**

As of November 21, 2011 the total number accessible routes will increase to 40 ALF bus routes, one (1) MetroX route, and two (2) ferry services. All ALF routes are also bicycle accessible. 66 of the 282 conventional buses are not accessible buses (this equates to 23% of the fleet is not accessible). All specialized conventional service buses (MetroLink and MetroX) are accessible.

Each year, replacement buses are purchased in order to further improve the accessibility of the bus fleet. All new bus purchases are for accessible buses, regardless of the size of the bus.

### ***Current Process for Accessing ALF Routes***

Currently, residents are able to access designated ALF routes at stops that the ALF routes service and which are clearly identified with the universal symbol of accessibility. It is important to note that not all bus stops on ALF routes are accessible.

ALF routes are accessible to both wheelchairs and scooters provided that they meet the identified specifications (ability to be tied down), and dimensions (wheelchairs 30" W x 48"; 3-wheel scooter: 40" x 21.125"; 4-wheel scooter: 40.25" x 21.25") to fit within the spaces provided on the bus. ALF buses can accommodate up to 2 wheelchairs and/or scooters at any time. In order to access ALF service, customers must be able to independently board and disembark the bus, deposit the fare, and maneuver into the allocated wheelchair/scooter space. Customers using scooters must be able to maneuver the scooter into the docking area and transfer to a fixed transit seat while travelling. If a passenger using a wheelchair/scooter requires further assistance, they must be accompanied by a companion who is required to pay regular fare.

Operators are responsible for properly restraining the wheelchair/scooter, using the tie-down system. In the event that both wheelchair spaces are occupied, or if the bus is full with a standing load of passengers and the operator cannot board a customer in a wheelchair/scooter, the operator will advise the customer to wait for the next ALF bus. The operator will notify the Transit Communication Centre of the situation in an attempt to alleviate wait time. The operator may ask another passenger to voluntarily vacate a designated accessibility seat for a wheelchair/scooter customer however the operator cannot displace another fare paying customer in order to accommodate the wheelchair/scooter passenger.

### ***Human Rights***

Through discussions with the complainants who alleged discrimination based on physical disability, a clearer understanding of the best manner for improving accessible transit services was achieved. Metro Transit entered into discussions with the complainants and the Human Rights Commission in December 2010. Throughout the discussions, all parties remained focused on how the system access can be improved for those with mobility challenges. A plan of action, through a Consent Order and a Memorandum of Understanding was developed and agreed to by all parties. The parties convened before a Board of Inquiry Chair on June 29, 2011 to present the negotiated solution. On June 30, 2011, the Board of Inquiry Chair notified the parties that the approach presented was supported. With this approval, changes in improving the accessibility to mobility challenged passengers began.

### ***Future Process for Accessing Conventional Transit Services***

Effective no later than November 2011, Metro Transit will provide passengers, who because of personal mobility disabilities are using wheelchairs or scooters, the right to embark (according to the established Metro Transit policies for the size of these devices and other space or passenger restrictions as noted above) or disembark a functioning ALF bus at any existing Metro Transit bus stop which has not been converted to a designated accessible stop, provided that the accessible ramp can be deployed without risk of damage. It is incumbent upon passengers to evaluate, in light of their own individual circumstances, the suitability of using a stop not designated as an accessible stop.

In order to best facilitate this change, Metro Transit is in the process of evaluating its inventory of bus stops that are not currently labeled as accessible to determine the accessibility of the stop. Upon completion, all Metro Transit bus stops will be identified under one of three categories: 1) accessible, based on Metro Transit's existing policy on accessibility, and designated with the universal symbol of accessibility at any location on the stop; 2) not accessible, and therefore not useable by passengers in wheelchairs or scooters under any circumstances, and designated with a no-ramp symbol (see appendix A); or 3) not designated under either of the previous two categories and determined to be usable at the discretion of the individual passenger. Any bus stop that is not designated by either of these symbols is to be evaluated by the passenger to determine their ability to embark or disembark without any assistance. The information on accessible and non-accessible stops will be made available to passengers in a variety of different media including print and The HRM Internet website.

In addition to the substantive improvements noted above, improvements will be made to existing policies to further improve accessibility. Operators will ask passengers to move from the wheelchair designated spaces to allow access to wheelchair/scooter passengers. Operators will also ask passengers to make room for wheelchairs/scooters in the event that there is a standing load that is not beyond the regulated capacity allowable. Personal Care Attendants required to travel with a disabled person will be able to travel for free provided that the passenger has an identification card, provided by Metro Transit, noting the need for such assistance. Additional training will be provided to both new and existing operators to improve the understanding of the needs of all passengers in order to further improve system accessibility.

It is also important to note that the Universal Accessibility Study is anticipated to be received by Metro Transit in late September which will be presented thereafter to Halifax Regional Municipality Council. The report will include recommendations that will further improve the accessibility of the entire transit system.

### **BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

There are no budgetary implications of this information report.

### **FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES/BUSINESS PLAN**

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Project and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Project and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

A total of four (4) community consultation sessions were held during the Universal Accessibility Study. The first two sessions were designed to receive feedback on accessibility related issues by all of those in attendance. At the second two sessions, draft recommendations on accessibility improvements were provided to attendees for comment and further feedback. Citizens were also provided the opportunity to provide comment and feedback through on line communication methods.

Information from the disabled community was sought and provided through the Human Rights Commission which provided additional information about required improvements to the accessibility of transit services.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Appendix A – No Ramp symbol

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.html> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by: Erin Flaim, Manager Service Delivery, Metro Transit, 490-6272



Report Approved by: Erin Flaim, Manager Service Delivery, Metro Transit, 490-6272

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Appendix A

