

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
MINUTES
May 17, 2010**

PRESENT: Mr. Tom Boyd, Chair
Ms. Theresa Horwill, Vice Chair
Councillor Mary Wile
Councillor Jerry Blumenthal
Mr. Gary Russell
Ms. Mary Newcombe
Mr. Troy Nauffts
Ms. Helen McFadyen
Mr. Brian Aird
Mr. Jack Jones

REGRET: Phil Townsend, Manager, Capital Project, Infrastructure and
Asset Management

STAFF: Mr. Laughlin Rutt, Diversity Consultant
Supt. Cliff Falkenham, HRP
Ms. Krista Tidgwell, Legislative Assistant

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	CALL TO ORDER.	3
2.	APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES - April 19, 2010.....	3
3.	APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS - ADDITIONS/DELETIONS. ...	3
4.	BUSINESS ARISING/ DEFERRED BUSINESS	
4.1	Councillor Wile - Harlington Crescent Wheelchair Ramp.	3
4.2	Metro Transit's Accessibility.	4 & 11
	(i) Metro Transit Access-A-Bus & Transit Schedule.....	4
	(ii) Accessibility Plans for New Bridge Terminal in Dartmouth.....	5
4.3	2010 Work Plan.	8
5.	NEW BUSINESS - NONE.	8
6.	CORRESPONDENCE, PETITIONS AND PRESENTATIONS:	
6.1	Correspondence - None.	8
6.2	Petitions - None.....	8
6.3	Presentations	
	6.3.1 Derek Mathers, Taxi Broker and Member of the Taxi and Limousine Advisory Committee, re: Accessibility Taxi Concerns.....	8
7.	REPORTS - NONE.	11
8.	ADDED ITEMS	
8.1	Helen McFadyen - National Petition for Web Accessibility.	11
9.	NEXT MEETING DATE - June 21, 2010.	11
10.	ADJOURNMENT.	11

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:06 p.m. in Halifax Hall, City Hall.

Mr. Boyd welcomed the Committee's newest members, Brian Aird and Jack Jones and lead the Committee in roundtable introductions.

Mr. Boyd acknowledged that there were several staff members in attendance from Metro Transit, as well as, members of the Visually Impaired Safe Travel Association (VISTA).

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES - April 19, 2010

MOVED by Ms. Theresa Horwill, seconded by Councillor May Wile, that the minutes of April 19, 2010 be approved, as presented. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

3. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS - ADDITIONS/DELETIONS

Additions:

8.1 Helen McFadyen - National Petition for Web Accessibility (*verbal update*)

MOVED by Councillor Jerry Blumenthal, seconded by Mr. Gary Russell, that the Order of Business be approved, as amended. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

4. BUSINESS ARISING/DEFERRED ITEMS

4.1 Councillor Wile - Harlington Crescent Wheelchair Ramp

- Extracts of emails from HRM staff re: Harlington Crescent - Proposed Wheelchair Ramp was before the Committee.

Councillor Wile provided a status update to the Committee regarding a request for a wheelchair ramp at Harlington Crescent. She noted that staff had originally indicated that the ramp would be on private property; however, Taso Koutroulakis, Acting Manager, Traffic & Right of Way, advised that the ramp would be public and maintained by HRM. The Red Book guidelines indicate pedestrian ramp shall be constructed at the edge of walkways based on the following conditions: where curb and gutter is present, wheelchair access is required and there is pedestrian movement is controlled. Councillor Wile advised that she would continue to follow up with staff and report back to the Committee at the next meeting.

This matter was deferred to the next meeting to allow for further discussion with staff.

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 entrances 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.

4.3 2010 Work Plan

- A copy of the 2010 Committee of Council Annual Work Plan was before the Committee.

This item was deferred to the next Committee meeting, to allow for Mr. Townsend to provide an update.

5. NEW BUSINESS - NONE

6. CORRESPONDENCE, PETITIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

6.1 Correspondence - None

6.2 Petitions - None

6.3 Presentations

6.3.1 Derek Mathers, Taxi Broker and Member of the Taxi and Limousine Advisory Committee, re: Accessibility Taxi Concerns

- A list of the Committee's taxi concerns and questions was before the Committee for their reference.

Mr. Derek Mathers, Taxi Broker and Member of the Taxi and Limousine Advisory Committee, provided a response to the questions raised by Ms. McFadyen following the February 22, 2010 meeting. The following points were noted:

- Yellow Cab is continuously trying to improve its quality of service with respect to accommodating service dogs, groceries, etc.
- it is illegal under the *Humans Right Act* to refuse a fare because the passenger has a service dog

- Yellow Cab has experienced refusal calls due to religious issues, which has been resolved

Ms. McFadyen expressed concern that there is no way to confirm/prove that a driver has refused to take a call because of the passenger's service dog.

- there are reasons within By-law T-108 Respecting the Regulations of Taxis and Limousines for which drivers can refuse calls; the By-law would have to be amended to include/remove a specific reason
- not all taxi commissions operate their dispatch system via computer
- the refusal of fares due to groceries and wheelchairs is also a problem many taxi commissions are addressing

Councillor Wile indicated that there will be a report coming forward to Regional Council respecting administrative amendments to By-law T-108 and applicable administrative orders. She suggested that the Committee could forward their recommendations to Regional Council in conjunction with the report.

- taxi drivers have the ability to choose what calls they take
- taxi company's rules/regulations are guided by the By-law; drivers could choose to work for a particular taxi company based on how relaxed their rules/regulations are
- taxi drivers receive an additional ten cents per grocery bag, however, drivers are still refusing calls due to the extra work of loading/unloading groceries; certain drivers are also not able to take grocery fares due to their physical ability

Ms. McFadyen suggested that taxi drivers who are unable to take grocery or wheelchair fares, should have a medical exemption document on file with their taxi commission. Councillor Wile noted that taxi drivers who have allergies to dogs, must have a medical exemption document on file.

- trunk size/capacity is also a factor for drivers refusing calls; problems within the industry regarding drivers having items in their trunks, which are supposed to be empty to allow for a passenger's cargo; the size of the wheelchair can also limit the driver's ability to take the fare
- passengers are not obligated to notify the taxi company that they are in a wheelchair when they place their call
- Yellow Cab has an exemption list for drivers unable to accept wheelchair and grocery fares due to age, injury, etc.
- technology is available to announce the fare amount, however, this requirement would have to be standardized within the taxi industry; all three major taxi brokers within HRM use a computer dispatch system; these systems do not have audible metres; various taxi commissions and independent drivers use a mixture of dispatch systems
- taxi drivers have to report to the By-law Office to have their vehicles inspected/re-licensed yearly

Ms. McFadyen expressed concern with the lack of consistency regarding the availability of the Important Information for Taxi Drivers in HRM About Passengers with Disabilities guide. She noted that the Committee had consulted with the Taxi and Limousine Advisory Committee and was asked to produce the guide. She noted that the Committee had reviewed the option of translating the guide for drivers who are not as fluent in English. Mr. Mathers indicated that Yellow Cab does not have copies of the guide.

In response to a question raised by Mr. Aird, Mr. Mathers indicated that disability awareness training could be included within the criteria for the Pineapple Awards for outstanding customer service.

In response to question number four within the list of taxi concerns/questions raised by Ms. McFadyen, Mr. Mathers confirmed that drivers are failing in knowledge of how to respond appropriately to passengers with disabilities. Prior to amalgamation, drivers were required to attend taxi school, which was put on by professional, police and volunteers within the taxi industry. He noted that many drivers today lack in training.

Ms. McFadyen expressed concern with driver consistency, noting that drivers should announce themselves to a visually impaired person when they arrive and not be offended by service dogs. As well, HRM needs to work towards maintaining the Important Information for Taxi Drivers in HRM About Passengers with Disabilities guide.

Mr. Mathers commented that HRM needs to put funding back into the accessible taxi aspect of transportation.

The Committee agreed the main issues revolve around regulations and administration respecting HRM's taxi standards.

Councillor Wile exited the meeting at 5:25 p.m.
Councillor Blumenthal exited the meeting at 5:28 p.m.

In response to a question raised by Mr. Rutt, Mr. Mathers indicated that each Municipality operates differently in regard to their taxi regulations. HRM's taxi licenses are owned by HRM, are nontransferable and have no value. Taxi licenses in other municipalities have a value and use the value to award accessible licenses.

In response to a question raised by Mr. Nauffts, Mr. Mathers advised that the taxi companies do not hold a formal yearly meeting with their drivers. Many taxi commissions see their drivers once a week.

Further points and suggestions noted by the Committee:

- option of the taxi commissions reviewing the Important Information for Taxi Drivers in HRM About Passengers with Disabilities guide with their drivers a meeting
- taxi schools should be reinstated

- most drivers use a Global Positioning System (GPS) as a tool for navigation; Global Positioning Systems do have the capacity to audibly announce fares; patrons with no or low vision cannot read fares and rely on the driver's integrity to verbally announce the fare
- concerned with drivers smoking in their vehicles prior to passenger pickups

Mr. Mathers advised that the emphasis needs to be within the regulations. Most taxi brokers have minimal control of their drivers outside the By-law. He further indicated that drivers are allowed to smoke in their vehicles when they are not transporting a fare under the Nova Scotia Labour Standards.

Barb LeGay, Chair of the Visually Impaired Safe Travel Association, provided an example of a personal refusal call experience at the airport. Mr. Mathers suggested that Ms. LeGay request the roof light number when placing the call or ask someone around them to identify the number when the driver arrives. Supt. Falkenham indicated that the airport may have a security video she could obtain.

Ms. Newcombe exited the meeting at 5:52 p.m.

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.

7. REPORTS - NONE

8. ADDED ITEMS

8.1 Helen McFadgen - National Petition for Web Accessibility (verbal update)

This matter was deferred to the next meeting due to time constraints.

9. NEXT MEETING DATE - June 21, 2010

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 6:04 p.m.

INFORMATION ITEMS
May 17, 2010

1. Correspondence from Kim Oats and Amanda Jenkins to Councillor Steve Adams, Chair of the Taxi and Limousine Advisory Committee, dated April 20, 2010 re: Safety of Disabled Persons.