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May 13, 2010

Mr. Tom Boyd
Chairperson, HRM Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities

Dear Mr. Boyd,

This will follow up in response to the letter you had forwarded to Metro Transit from Ms. Barbara LeGay, Chairperson of Visually Impaired Safe Travel Advocates(VISTA), in anticipation of their attendance at the upcoming HRM Advisory Committee Meeting on May 17th, 2010. As requested, Metro Transit will also have representatives in attendance at that meeting. We look forward to sharing, among other Agenda items, some of our plans for accessibility improvements to the new Bridge Terminal in Dartmouth; as well as plans for the introduction of more fully accessible (ALF) low floor routes over the next year. We have also made great improvements over the last few years, since the introduction of low floor buses into the transit industry, and now currently offer 26 fully accessible (ALF) transit routes on the conventional fixed route service.

With regards to some of the questions and concerns outlined in VISTA's letter, which we will be pleased to further address at the meeting, I wanted to also clarify some of our plans in writing.

Over the past few years, Metro Transit has been working steadily to make adjustments and modifications to the transit system to allow greater accessibility for as many passengers as possible. Millions of dollars have been spent to date to introduce accessible low floor buses on fixed route service, which has taken some of the demand off the Access-A-Bus door-to-door service. This has made the fixed route service accessible for many more persons with disabilities, providing they are able to travel to a bus stop and board independently.

Last summer, Regional Council voted to continue to offer complimentary transit to CNIB patrons, until such a time (unspecified) that Metro Transit could plan and budget to make similar improvements to accommodate persons with visual impairments such as has been made to accommodate wheelchair passengers and others with physical disabilities.

As Ms. LeGay mentioned, our Five Year Strategic Transit Operations Plan was approved at Council last Fall, and was intended to provide comprehensive recommendations for improvements to be made to future operational service standards and service area expansion. A study on Accessibility, as well as one on future expansion of the ferry, potential commuter rail and other services, were not included in the Five Year Strategic Plan, as it was recognized that they would need exclusive focus and separate studies of their own. Currently, Metro Transit is in the process of completing a full review of our Access-A-Bus service, with a report scheduled to be presented to Council in early Fall. An Accessibility study of the entire Metro Transit System will follow, with timelines to be set and recommendations to be made as to future improvements to the system. This could include budgeting for the purchase of such aids as an Automated Bus Stop Annunciation System; and better way-finding signage at Terminals and bus stops. Some improvements have already been made, as budgets have permitted to purchase new buses, with the display of larger font destination curtains and more yellow striping on stairwells, on bus stanchions and flooring inside the bus.

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This letter should confirm that Metro Transit continues to work and plan actively to incorporate accessibility features for all persons with disabilities, and we will welcome any input from your committee as progress is made. Meanwhile, thank you for forwarding Ms. LeGay's letter.

Sincerely,

Lori Patterson
Manager, Marketing & Communications

cc: Pat Meagher, Accessible Transit Manager