



**ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

November 9, 2015

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Councillor Steve Craig, Meeting Chair
Patricia Gates, Committee Chair
Meredith Fillmore
Nancy Beaton
Mikiko Terishima

STAFF PANEL: Darren Young, Project Manager, HRM Planning & Infrastructure
Damion Stapledon, Community Recreation Coordinator, Parks & Recreation
Taso Koutroulakis, Manager, Traffic Management, Transportation & Public Works
Trevor Harvie, Superintendent, Winter Operations, Transportation & Public Works
Bill Sampson, Supervisor, Accessible Transit, Halifax Transit
Jim Donovan, Manager, Municipal Compliance, Planning & Development
Jane Young, Manager, Citizen Contact Centres

OTHERS PRESENT: Councillor Jennifer Watts
Mr. Glenn Bannon, Manager of Operations, Halifax Transit
Mr. Bruce Zvaninga, Director, Transportation & Public Works
Mr. Terry Gallagher, Manager, Corporate Facility Design & Construction
Ms. Tracey Jones-Grant, Manager, Diversity & Inclusion
Laughlin Rutt, Diversity Consultant, Government Relations & External Affairs
Ms. Jennifer Weagle, Legislative Assistant, Office of the Municipal Clerk
Ms. Jenny Benson, Legislative Support, Office of the Municipal Clerk

The following does not represent a verbatim record of the proceedings of this meeting.

The agenda, supporting documents, and information items circulated to the Committee are available online: <http://www.halifax.ca/boardscom/access/documents/AACTownHallagenda2015.pdf>

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m., and adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER & OPENING REMARKS

Minutes from last year's Accessibility Town Hall Meeting were distributed.

The Chair, Councillor Steve Craig, called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. in Common Room, Dartmouth Sportsplex, 110 Wyse Road, Dartmouth.

The Chair explained that a CART captioning system will be used throughout the meeting and asked that any issues with the system be pointed out so that they can be fixed. He also noted the ASL Interpreters at the front of the room.

The Chair stated that each staff member at the front of the room would provide a short presentation. He explained that the staff would be looking for honest, respectful feedback later in the evening.

2. STAFF OVERVIEW OF ACCESSIBILITY CHALLENGES OR ISSUES

- **Mr. Darren Young, Project Manager, Facility Development**

Mr. Young explained that since joining the Committee as staff liaison in 2009 there have been \$1.2M in accessibility upgrades completed in the city. This includes installing 120 door operators at 30 different facilities, 5 pool lifts at different locations, accessible swings and wheelchair-friendly services at over 15 parks throughout the region. New beach washrooms have been installed at Chocolate Lake and Albert Lake that are fully accessible. Upcoming projects for Mr. Young's team include upgrades at 34 HRM community facilities which will involve installing ramps, automatic door operators, audible signals and visual flashing fire alarms. There is also an upgrade taking place at the Youth Live facility in Timberlea.

- **Mr. Damion Stapledon, Community Recreation Coordinator, Parks & Recreation**

Mr. Stapledon reminded attendees that last year he reported on the national scan that he and his staff had done regarding service delivery across Canada. The goal of this scan was to come up with a new service policy and framework for recreation. An integral part of the process was asking for a new position - an Accessibility and Inclusion Specialist - to be a part of his team. This position has been approved and he shared his excitement regarding this new position and the benefits it will have in supporting families who are living with disabilities as well as staff seeking best approaches. This position will be posted shortly.

Mr. Stapledon shared that his team is looking at reforming policies surrounding built environment training and technology. Parks and Recreation is looking at different options for cost-sharing once provincial legislation is past, this is the model that is currently in practice in Ontario.

- **Mr. Taso Koutroulakis, Manager, Traffic Management, Transportation & Public Works**

Mr. Koutroulakis explained that his department looks after traffic signage, traffic signals, street lights, pavement marking, streetlight maintenance and installation. Currently 49 of the 267 crossing signals have been outfitted with accessible signals. His department is working on an initiative where the traffic signal system, equipment and communication is being upgraded throughout the peninsula. Based on feedback from last year's Town Hall Meeting, the design of pole-mounted extended boxes has been changed. The traffic signal cabinets are now being outfitted with an extended base.

Mr. Koutroulakis advised that the 2015-2016 Pedestrian Safety Action Plan mandated that crosswalk lights be outfitted with new LED lighting which is much brighter. There is also going to be a hard surface right up to the crosswalk poles so that individuals in wheelchairs can easily access the crosswalk buttons.

Mr. Koutroulakis noted that last year a program began to increase pedestrian crossing times. That program was completed a few months ago. Approximately 20% of time has been added to give pedestrians more time to cross the street.

Mr. Koutroulakis shared that tactile pads have been installed for the visually impaired at some locations, including the new roundabouts at North Park and Cunard and North Park and Rainey as well as Oxford and Almon. This is ongoing. Traffic and Transportation Works have also worked to modify standard details and are redesigning pedestrian ramps to make them accessible for all users. Currently, they are also looking for opportunities to upgrade wheelchair accessible areas in conjunction with sidewalks and trail projects.

- **Mr. Trevor Harvie, Superintendent, Winter Operations, Transportation & Public Works**

Mr. Harvie indicated that he is very new to this role. He indicated that the bus stop clearing was a big issue last winter. Throughout the summer the language has tightened up in Winter Operations contracts so that the contractors' responsibilities are much clearer. Sidewalk contractors have increased their resources over the summer to be better prepared for this winter and to help avoid situations like last year where snow got packed down.

In his former role, Mr. Harvie was working on installing accessible picnic tables in a variety parks so that individuals with mobility challenges can pull in with their wheelchair and socialize with their peers.

Mr. Harvie shared that he was given the opportunity to cross a number of streets in wheelchairs over the summer which helped him to better understand the challenges that wheelchair users face. In turn, a number of challenges and details are at the front of mind which will assist him in his work.

He further noted that litter receptacles will be relocated to be better positioned, allowing individuals with visual impairments to find them easily with their cane.

- **Mr. Bill Sampson, Manager, Accessible Transit, Halifax Transit**

Mr. Sampson stated that he has been focused on improving the system through annual low floor bus replacements, terminal upgrades and terminal replacements, improved way-finding signage, planned technology upgrades and bus operator passenger training. Halifax Transit is currently reporting that 75% of fixed bus routes are designated as accessible and they are working towards 100%

Mr. Sampson noted that terminal upgrades and replacements give Halifax Transit an opportunity to reduce and mitigate issues that individuals with accessibility issues might face.

He advised that an Animal Awareness Campaign was provided for all bus operators to increase understanding.

Mr. Sampson encouraged attendees to take Halifax Transit's Travel Training Program to learn about the various accessibility features for Accessible Transit, Halifax.

He noted that this year a new technology will provide passengers with a variety of new features including a "Where's My Bus?" app.

- **Mr. Jim Donovan, Manager, Municipal Compliance, Planning & Development**

Mr. Donovan advised that enhanced protocols on final inspection of buildings have been implemented to ensure that Halifax staff are on-site during protocols of alarm testing where there are special provisions.

Mr. Donovan's team was able to implement a reference to the CSAB-651 standard in the café sidewalk by-law which allows individuals to look at the built environment when they were licensing for sidewalk cafes last summer.

There have been a few meetings regarding Nova Scotia Building Codes. Planning & Development would like to help the province to take a leadership role and are recommending that the Minister make some amendments as a result of last year's meeting.

- **Ms. Jane Young, Manager, Citizen Contact Centres**

Ms. Young indicated that the 3-1-1 municipal call centre took about 450,000 calls and contacts last year. In addition to phone contact, they partake in transactions through an app as well as email.

There is a project underway that will allow individuals to contact 311 through web chat and mobile devices if they cannot call in. This will allow 311 to serve the community a little better.

The Chair thanked staff for sharing and indicated that Mayor Savage is unable to attend the meeting but emphasized the ongoing involvement that the Mayor has with the Committee.

3. QUESTIONS & COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Chair opened the floor to those wishing to speak.

Mr. Dave Buffett, President of the Halifax Taxi Drivers Association explained that individuals who require accessible taxis outside of downtown face challenges getting cabs and asked why accessible taxis have not been put into zones like conventional taxis.

Mr. Donovan explained that there are no restrictions on where accessible taxis can be so there are 44 accessible cabs traveling throughout Halifax and there is no limitation on the number of accessible cabs that can be licensed. The city is working towards increasing the number of accessible cabs and decreasing the number of conventional cabs meaning that there will be more accessible taxis without increasing the total number of cabs.

The Chair explained that the issue the way Mr. Buffett explained it is not equitable under the current legislation. He also stated that this is an issue that is being discussed among elected officials.

Ms. Anne McCrae stated that her son is a wheelchair user. They wanted to go to an event one evening and they called all three taxi companies and each one of those companies only had one accessible taxi out. They were unable to have a taxi come to their house so they were unable to go to the event. She requested that there be a certain level of accessible taxis available throughout the 24-hour period so that this situation doesn't arise.

Mr. Barrie Abbott, stated that many taxi companies have apps where you can book cabs but they are not voiceover accessible. Mr. Abbott has explained this issue to Casino Taxi and shared that that app developers can easily make these apps accessible.

Mr. Abbott also expressed concerns about the timeline of Annunciation on Metro Transit being pushed back again.

He requested that sidewalks be roughed up so that individuals with visual impairments can know when they have arrived at the bus stop.

He also shared with Mr. Koutroulakis that there is a group called Sendero who make GPS devices that allow users to access the GPS coordinates of lights, garbage cans and benches allowing the device to act as a second pair of eyes.

Mr. Glen Bannon, Manager of Operations, Halifax Transit, indicated that they are the implementation phase with their technology projects. The CAD AVL system is going to be installed in 12 buses shortly so that extensive testing can be done. This will allow Metro Transit to know where all of its buses are at any given time. The next phase of the project will be the public interfaces which will allow users to go online or

use a smartphone to locate their bus. This is expected in mid-2016. Phase II of this project involves stop announcement. There is extensive testing that will have to happen with the stop announcement phase. Halifax Transit is hoping that in the spring of 2017 this will be rolled out. Mr. Bannon explained that he knows many individuals are reliant on these systems and is working to have them implemented as soon as possible, while ensuring that they are well tested and working properly.

Mr. Koutroulakis requested Mr. Abbott's contact information so that they can have a discussion following the meeting.

Ms. Wendy MacDonald, commented that there continue to be issues with LCD monitors and communications for deaf and hard of hearing individuals. She explained that last winter was challenging because there was a time when the bus she was on was unable to cross the bridge. When she asked the bus driver about what was happening he was not helpful and the LCD monitor did not display the issue. She requested that the LCD needs to display what is happening when issues come up that impact passengers.

Ms. McDonald also expressed that there are also issues with in Halifax regarding recreation and sport. There is no budget for a particular individual who is looking to join a swim team but is unable to get an interpreter. She has been looking for funding and cannot find it. Ms. McDonald shared that there are apps that are helpful but the communication with people is the problem that she is experiencing.

Mr. Glen Bannon explained that right now Metro Transit is working on implementing the foundation system for technologies and then they will be looking at the public interfaces. The messaging will be on the LCD screens in transit terminals and applications on phones. These technologies should be rolled out sometime in the summer of 2016.

Mr. Damien Stapledon shared that one of his mandates will be to work with other sport organizations and recreation organizations in the municipality to find funding, resources and partnership opportunities. The problem that Ms. MacDonald brought up is the sort of problem that they will be looking to solve. He is hoping that the new Accessibility Inclusions Specialist will help to move things forward. He also suggested that she chat with him after about his involvement with the Recreation for All Foundation that does provide funding for this sort of thing.

The Chair explained that the CART captioning communication technology available at this meeting is also available online for Council meetings.

Ms. MacDonald shared that it is not an equal experience because passengers can hear the announcements but she cannot so they need to be on the LCD screens. This technology is available in Ontario already.

Mr. John Dunnhollander recognizes the work that has been done. There are still barriers to overcome but forums like this make it easier.

Mr. Dunnhollander stated that the bus stops that are on the streets are very poor. The small sign for the bus stops are very difficult for individuals with visual impairments. At the terminal the signs are low and tactile which is helpful. Also, there are also monitors up explaining what should happen if a ferry runs into problems. Someone who is visually impaired, blind, deaf will not know what to do in an emergency. The general public and abled users have this information.

He asked if there are any audible traffic signals in Sackville, and noted that there are no crosswalks on Baker Drive in Dartmouth. If he wants to take the bus he has to take the bus up to Woodside and then come back the other way. He would only need one bus if he could cross the street.

Mr. Glen Bannon shared that the issue of bus signage is a budgetary one. Halifax Transit is working to install the same accessible features across all facets the transit system gradually. They just re-did the transit safety video making it a far better product with closed captioning. In addition, if you have an

accessibility concern Metro Transit is asking individuals with accessibility challenges who use the ferry service to self-identify when they get to the ferry booth. They are then assigned to a member of the ferry crew who will attend to them in the event of an emergency. They will also ensure that passengers get down the ramp and seated comfortably on board.

Mr. Koutroulakis stated that there are two accessible pedestrian signals in Sackville now. They are planning to install two more in the next 2-4 weeks. With respect to Baker Drive, a crosswalk will be installed at Trailwood Place adjacent to Shannex Place that is going to be complete with overhead crosswalk lights and sight-mounted flashers.

Ms. Kate Watson, asked if the total time at crosswalks increased or is the walk light now lit for a shorter time to offset increased crossing time? Is the city aware that construction impacts individuals with accessibility challenges the same way that icy sidewalks do?

Mr. Koutroulakis needs a site-specific location in order to accurately comment on traffic signal times. Staff looked to determine whether the walk clearance, which is the flashing hand, was long enough for somebody to safely cross the street. After looking at all intersections staff upgraded the timing plans based on the width of the street and using a new walking speed which was reduced to one metre per second. With regards to construction, a lot of thought is now being put into how construction projects are being staged. Currently if the sidewalk on one side of the street is not safe, the sidewalk on the other side is left open.

Mr. Abbott asked if there is a time limit on how long construction can take.

Mr. Koutroulakis explained that typically sidewalk shut down time is minimal but unfortunately with large development projects it can be inaccessible for much longer. The city is looking at options for providing safe access during the duration of projects.

Mr. Jim Donovan shared that Planning & Development regulate the use of the right of way during development projects. The duration of a temporary encroachment cannot be controlled. They are trying to bundle together a new regulation called "Mission Mitigation of Construction Projects" which is particularly focused around projects in the downtown area that are impacting pedestrian movement.

Melina stated that a lot of individuals with disabilities were barricaded by snow and now they are barricaded by construction. She and her guide dog are endangered when they encounter a place where both sides of the street are barricaded. She explained that she has had to walk in the middle of the road constantly and it is not fair. She also noted that turning off automated pedestrian signals at 11pm is not accessible because individuals with blindness go out after 11pm.

Mr. Koutroulakis stated that with respect to the London Street construction project he will be following up with the group in charge of it. The particular location of pedestrian signals at Almon and Windsor have pedestrian indicators that go off as well. As part of the traffic signal project that was talked about earlier they are upgrading their signal timings and then they will be able to take away the night flash which will allow them to turn on the pedestrian indicators all night. Accessible pedestrian push buttons will be installed if an individual presses the button for 3 seconds so it will only come on when needed.

Mr. Paul Vienneau expressed concerns regarding the ramps that road crews put up when part of a sidewalk has been removed. He expressed frustrations about the fact that the individual who has signing authority on completed curb cut does not understand what is required to make them accessible. Specifically, he explained that there are issues with the curb cut at Spring Garden and South Park.

Mr. Vienneau believes that the Accessibility Committee and individuals with accessibility needs should be more involved in the process of determining what adequate snow removal is and the requirements around snow removal.

He also expressed frustrations surrounding the lack of accessible taxi availability.

Mr. Koutrolakis clarified that both sides of Spring Garden Rd. were dug up at the same time in several places. He explained that only one side should be done at a time to give individuals the opportunity to use the other side and still reach their destination. He also committed to following up on ramp design issues.

Mr. Trevor Harvie explained that education and accessibility awareness are important.

Mr. Laughlin Rutt explained that he is HRM staff but is asking questions on behalf of an individual named Michael from Halifax who approached the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in advance of the meeting. Michael is wondering what the plan is to convert inaccessible bus stops to accessible ones? How many have been done in the last few years? He is also concerned about the lack of curb cuts on the perpendicular side of T-intersections making it difficult for him to cross the street.

With regard to trails, Michael feels that about 35% of trails have some degree of accessibility and he is wondering what our plan is with making trails more accessible because he uses them with his son. He noted that if Halifax is putting funds into private trails accessibility parameters need to be put in place with the funding. He also has questions about accessibility at a variety of fields where his son plays sports. Even where washrooms have been made accessible he often has challenges spectating and accessing the field assist his son.

Mr. Rutt will be providing the panel members with Michael's contact information so that they can respond to his concerns.

Mr. Matthew Spurway from Dartmouth had a question about Crosswalk Safety. He asked that crosswalk flags be installed where there is a stop sign and where the public sees a need.

He also asked a question on behalf of Terry from Dartmouth North who had his bus pass taken away from him. He cannot afford a bus pass. Mr. Spurway asked that consideration be given to individuals with economic and mobility issues who rely on bus passes to get around.

Mr. Koutrolakis explained that the current direction around crosswalk flags is for staff to help the implementation of the program at locations specifically at uncontrolled marked crosswalks. Staff are planning to bring this issue forward to Council for further attention.

Mr. Bill Sampson stated that the fare issue has been moved up to senior management. Mr. Glen Bannon noted that the topic has been raised before and fares are set by the Transportation Standing Committee and Council. Mr. Bannon requested Mr. Spurway's contact information for follow up.

Councillor Watts stated that there is an initiative that has been brought forward around low income fare structures that is being reviewed by legal services. She said it is very promising and is hoping that it moves forward.

Mr. John Dunnhollander asked about what happens if work needs to be done on a sidewalk when there is no sidewalk on the other side of the street?

On behalf of Ted Hirtle, Mr. Dunnhollander asked if it is possible to provide marking or signage that would allow for contractors and construction workers to better see individuals in wheelchairs when negotiating crosswalks and construction sites. He is wondering what can be done about a light standard that is located in the middle of a crosswalk at the crossroad at Sackville Drive. He also asked about what can be done to encourage business owners to make their business more inclusive to the general public.

Mr. Koutrolakis confirmed that he will have the light stand in the middle of the Sackville Crossroad at Sackville Drive looked into.

Mr. John Dunnhollander clarified that this would be for individual in a wheelchair trying to negotiate sidewalks and up/down curbs to ensure that they are not hit by a snow plow.

Mr. Donovan explained that under some circumstances some businesses are required to have automated doors. If it is a recently constructed building 311 should be contacted and the building inspectors will be sent out to examine it. The standards can even be applied retroactively. Business have been required to reactivate door operators in the past.

The Chair shared that there are a number of bus stops outside of the urban core where there is no curb cut on the pad, leaving some users stranded.

Mr. Koutroulakis stated that a discussion has begun on this and he will follow up.

Lisa from the Kings College of Journalism asked why no one on the discussion panel has a visual disability. The Chair explained that there are a number of Halifax staff who have disabilities but no one in the specific positions that were required by the panel.

Dave Buffett President of the Halifax Taxi Drivers Association clarified that the problem with accessible cabs not being zoned means that over 70 taxi drivers have accessible lights and all of them choose to operate in the Halifax zone. They are pushing for the city through the province to state that they are zoning accessible cabs to Dartmouth and Sackville.

The Chair stated that the industry needs to be responsive to the needs of individuals throughout the municipality.

4. CLOSING COMMENTS

The Chair thanked everyone for coming.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:42 pm.

Jenny Benson
Legislative Support