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Item No. 10.2.1

Halifax Regional Council
October 12, 2010

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original signed
Mr. Thomas Boyd, Chair, Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities

DATE: September 20, 2010

SUBJECT: Metro Transit Accessibility

ORIGIN

May 17, 2010, June 21, 2010 and August 16, 2010 meetings of the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION

The Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities recommends that the Halifax Regional Council consider the following:

1. that the Metro Transit accessibility study be considered a priority;
2. to encourage Metro Transit to develop a time line for the accessibility study; and
3. 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.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

The Chair and Vice Chair of the Visually Impaired Safe Advocates Committee (VISTA) submitted correspondence dated March 16, 2010 to the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities for review and consideration, as well as, requested to attend a Committee meeting.

The Committee reviewed VISTA's March 16th correspondence during their March 22, 2010 meeting. It was noted that VISTA is concerned that issues regarding safe transit for visually impaired residents will not be considered in Metro Transit's Five Year Plan, as well as, the perception that Metro Transit accessibility timelines are not being met. The Committee passed a motion to forward VISTA's March 16, 2010 correspondence to HRM staff for their review with VISTA's approval.

During the Committee's April 19, 2010 meeting, VISTA forwarded a revised letter dated April 19, 2010 to the Committee respecting their concerns with Metro Transit's Five Year Plan and requested that the Committee forward the April 19, 2010 correspondence to staff instead of the March 22, 2010, to which the Committee agreed.

A staff response dated May 13, 2010 was considered by the Committee during their May 17, 2010 meeting.

On May 17, 2010 and June 21, 2010 the Committee met with the Chair and Vice Chair of VISTA, as well as, Metro Transit staff to review Metro Transit accessibility. During the meeting, the Committee expressed accessibility concerns with respect to:

- Metro Transit's schedule information on the HRM website
- the new Dartmouth Bridge Terminal
- Metro Transit's Five Year Plan

The Committee passed a motion on May 17th to request that Halifax Regional Council give consideration that the Metro Transit accessibility study be considered a priority and to encourage Metro Transit to develop a time line for the accessibility study.

On August 16, 2010, Ms. Helen McFadyen, a member of the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities, expressed concern that the May 17, 2010 motion does not reflect a key element to improving Metro Transit's accessibility regarding the installation/implementation of an automated audio/visual bus stop announcement system on Metro Transit's buses. The Committee passed a motion as a newly adopted amendment to the May 17, 2010 motion, that Halifax Regional Council consider the implementation of an automated and visual bus stop announcement system as a first step to improving all accessibility on HRM Metro Transit routes.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications associated with the recommendations stated in the report. If Council chooses to direct Metro Transit to examine the cost and implications of the implementation of an automated audio and visual bus stop announcement system in the future,

Metro Transit would be required to return to Council with specific costing details as part of future budget deliberations.

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

The Committee meet with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Visually Impaired Safe Advocates Committee (VISTA), as well as, seven members of the Committee are Member at Large.

ALTERNATIVES

No alternative were provided by the Committee.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Correspondence from Lori Patterson, Manager, Marketing & Communications, Metro Transit, dated May 13, 2010.

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: Krista Tidgwell, Legislative Assistant, Municipal Clerks Office, 490-6519



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.

2.

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