

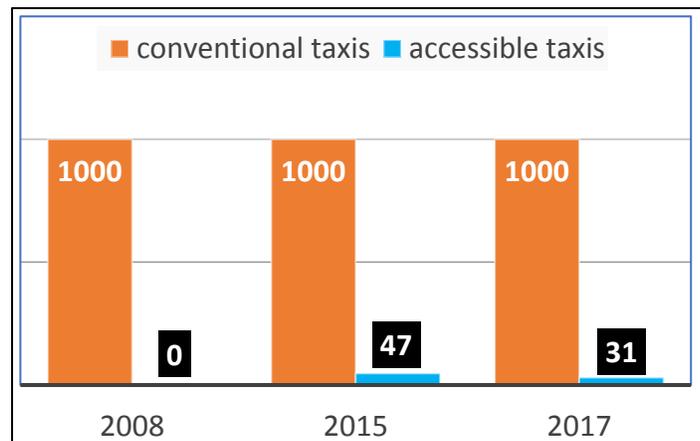
Promoting Accessible Taxis in Halifax

Ardalan Shareghi Boroujeni
Honours Thesis project
School of Planning, Dalhousie University

SUMMARY

In the HRM, there are currently 950 entries in the waitlist for obtaining a taxi owner's license, which is necessary to operate a taxi vehicle (E. Lister & Dhunpath, 2016). And while there are no limits on the number of accessible taxis in the city, at its highest numbers there was only 47 accessible taxis, while at 31 currently, there are 1,000 conventional taxis (see Sood, 2014). This is despite the fact that operating an accessible taxi allows the driver to be the primary holder of the owner's license while many conventional taxi operators are renting out other owner licenses.

This study aimed to explore solutions for meeting the demands of accessible taxis from both the service beneficiaries and service providers' perspectives.



Currently, Haligonians who rely on a wheelchair must wait a long time to receive service from an accessible taxi. In some cases, if they are located far from the city core, no accessible taxi service is available to them whatsoever.

Taxi companies follow a zoning system enforced by the taxi commission; examples include Dartmouth and Halifax. The accessible taxis are concentrated in the Halifax zone where there is a higher call

volume, making it costly for them to provide services to people with a need for accessible taxi in other zones. This, in turn, has separated, indeed isolated, people with a mobility disability from the rest of the city.

This zone system has caused an increase in price and limited profit margins for accessible taxi operators who provide services to customers in the so-called ‘outsides zones,’ and this cost is usually passed onto the consumers. It is important to understand why the number is declining and find out ways to increase the number of accessible taxis in the HRM. To this end, the study had three objectives:

- 1) To understand the Halifax taxi system currently in place:
- 2) To review strategies applied elsewhere (through case studies and literature review) or proposed locally (through blogs, news articles and word of mouth); and chose 3 possible solutions for HRM
- 3) To assess the applicability of the 3 strategies found from elsewhere in Halifax in the perspectives of taxi users and taxi industry.

Results

Below shows some of my findings and comments from the study, which involved literature review and interviews with members of disability communities and taxi industry in Halifax.

Three recommendations were identified from the case studies:

- 1) Central dispatching of accessibility taxis
- 2) Funding support
- 3) Replacement or outsourcing of Access-A-Bus

1) The HRM has a general dispatching system for both conventional vehicles and for accessible vehicles, inadequate attention is given to accessible taxis. Central dispatching separate for accessible taxis was selected as one of the possible solutions. This system seems to have worked in British Columbia because in that region, like in the HRM,

business is concentrated in core dense areas while there are also many adequately populated suburban neighborhoods (Leapfrog developments).

An example quote:

“Central dispatching concentrated on accessible taxis works because sometimes when you call a taxi company that has a lot of different cars, they just try to compromise with a conventional taxi”

2) Funding support to the industry or taxi users was the second possible solution. Funding support may be in different forms and seen in many case studies.

Example quotes:

“I don’t think accessible taxis can work without some kind of assistance because there aren’t enough people with a mobility disability to make it work.”

“The combination of funding systems would work like a chit system, top off of fares, advertisement on accessible taxi vehicles and so on.”

3) Replacement or outsourcing of Access-A-Bus. This solution has been picked due to the conversation it has sparked in the HRM. A disability advocate has provided me with his research on the matter and it has created a good starting point to ask the interviewees what they thought of the idea.

An example quote:

“Eliminating Access A Bus is not a good idea but we need to outsource around 80% of the calls to accessible taxis the result will be a better cheaper service”

- Explained a disability community advocate.

Highlights of participant perspectives

Apart from the questions asking about the above three possible solutions, I asked the interviewees if they have any ideas or perspectives they wanted to share. Interesting and helpful responses were gathered as the result.

Some important issues raised included:

- a. It is illegal for Government to give money to local businesses to help them prosper
- b. There seems to be a negative perception around the issue of accessible taxis, from, taxi drivers and from the general public.
- c. Fleet makeup such as low floor accessible taxis cannot be mandated.
- d. The taxi system in the HRM has many departments and has resulted in a decision-making process that is not streamlined.
- e. Interviewees claimed that sometimes it can take up to 2 years to book a ride with Access-A-Bus in order to get to work and back on time.

Some important strategies to resolve the issues included:

- a. It would be helpful if demand concentration was mapped out and a certain number of accessible taxis were allocated to each zone to ensure adequate distribution in order to meet demand.
- b. A free government controlled dispatching can be helpful in order to cut down costs and ensure quality of service
- c. Work shifts for accessible taxis can be helpful and can be introduced with the help of incentives by the government
- d. Advertisement for accessible taxis can help them make some extra money and be able to operate a profitable business.