



P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. 12.1.1
Transportation Standing Committee
March 24, 2016

TO: Chair and Members of Transportation Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed _____
Dave Reage, Acting Director Halifax Transit

DATE: February 25, 2016

SUBJECT: Use of Accessible Transportation to Support Access-A-Bus Services

RECOMMENDATION REPORT

ORIGIN

This report originates from the July 25, 2015 Transportation Standing Committee meeting, Item 9.3.2.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Section 69(1) of the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter provides the legislative authority for the municipality to provide a public transportation service. The following report conforms to the Charter.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Transportation Standing Committee direct Halifax Transit staff to develop an Expression of Interest to explore the viability of a partnership with HRM Accessible Transportation service providers to support Halifax Transit Access-A-Bus service.

BACKGROUND

On June 1, 2015, the HRM Accessibility Advisory Committee submitted a report to the Transportation Standing Committee recommending a staff report to examine the use of accessible taxi services to support the Access-A-Bus service.

During the Transportation Standing Committee meeting of July 25, 2015, Councillor Mason moved that the Transportation Standing Committee receive a staff report to examine the use of accessible taxi services to support the present Access-A-Bus service.

DISCUSSION

The Access-A-Bus paratransit service is intended to transport people with mobility, sensory and/or cognitive challenges who cannot utilize conventional transit. For many users, the service is necessary to access vital services and enhance quality-of-life.

Access-A-Bus Service Demand

As illustrated in Table 1 below, there has been a steady increase in service demand since 2012. While additional staff and vehicles have been added to the fleet, demand has outstripped supply; clients who cannot be booked for a trip on a service day are placed on a wait list. The wait list annual totals are illustrated in Table 2. While there was a slight reduction in the annual wait list figures for 2015, this statistic is considered an aberration and the upward trend is projected to continue for follow-on years as demand continues to increase at a pace greater than service supply.

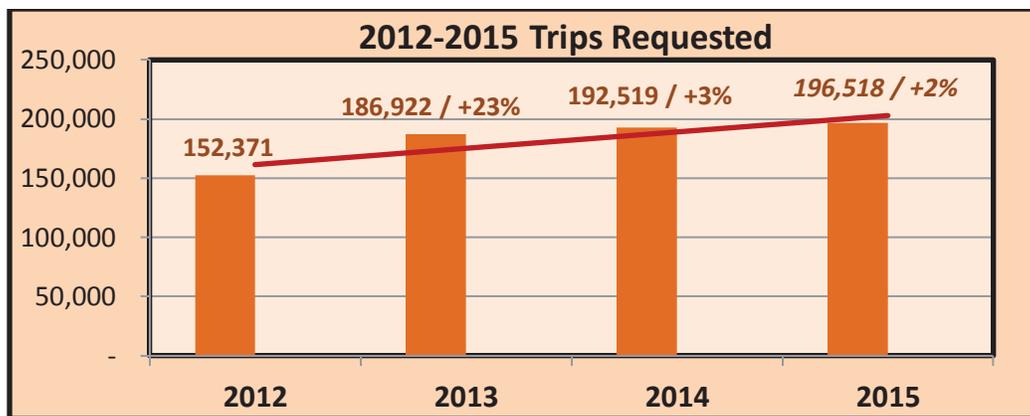


Table 1: Increase in Access-A-Bus Service Demand

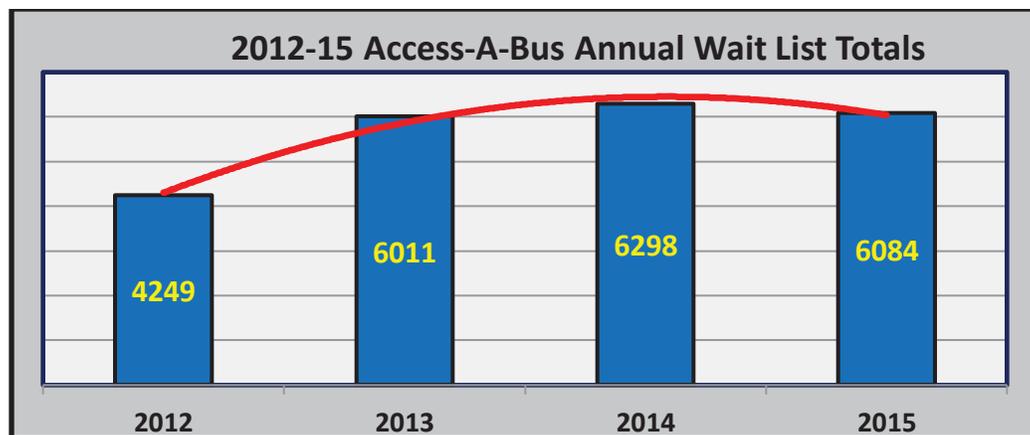


Table 2: 2012-2015 Access-A-Bus Annual Wait List

In the pursuit of a solution, additional staff and paratransit vehicles will not necessarily address the challenge. While the Access-A-Bus scheduling staff makes every attempt to batch bookings and trips for each paratransit vehicle in the most efficient way possible, the travel patterns and schedules of individual clients often require trips to destinations, local or remote, with only one or two passengers onboard; this is not an optimal use for a scarce vehicle resource of relatively large capacity. Within the municipality, there

are other operators of vehicles of a variety of capacities that can accommodate persons with mobility challenges, and there is great potential to leverage these resources for greater efficiency and to alleviate current stresses on service supply.

Industry Scan

As detailed in Table 3 below, numerous transit properties throughout Canada have adopted a service model that incorporates support for their dedicated paratransit fleet via the use of external providers such as taxi services and other operators of accessible vehicles. The extent of usage varies significantly, with some properties using external providers to service more than 45% of scheduled trips.

	Transit Property	Para-Transit Service	Dedicated Fleet	Non-Dedicated Service
1	Saskatoon Transit	Access Transit	97%	3%
2	Peel Region, ON	TransHelp	89%	11%
3	Greater Sudbury, ON	Sudbury Handi Transit	88%	12%
4	Hamilton Street Railways (HSR)	DARTS	82%	18%
5	Victoria Regional Transit System	HandyDART	76%	24%
6	RTL, Longueuil, QC	RTL Paratransit	65%	35%
7	Durham Region Transit	Specialized Services	61%	39%
8	OC Transpo, Ottawa	Para Transpo	55%	45%
9	Calgary Transit	Access Calgary	55%	45%
10	STO , Gatineau, QC	STO Paratransit	48%	52%

Table 3: Percentage Utilization of External Providers – Various Properties

Given the growing trend to leverage the support of external providers, it seems logical to investigate the potential for similar application of this model with Halifax Transit.

Accessible Taxi Partnership - History

It should be noted that this service model has been implemented here in the past. In 2008, what was then Metro Transit entered into a partnership with a local taxi company, but the service model did not contemplate the conflicting demands placed on limited resources by a variety of client needs and the service ultimately failed to support the requirements of the transit service. Notwithstanding the failure of this experiment, the concept retains great potential if supported by a sound support model, a thorough assessment of risk and the creation of an effective strategy for mitigation as a basis for any contractual partnership.

Support for Recommendation

While the employment of support from an external provider is becoming more widespread in other jurisdictions, there will be differences in the level and types of resources available within this municipality, and with the challenges faced by local service providers. Given the results of the previous experiment, the concept should be considered and approached with a great deal of care. If there is a desire to pursue this concept further, the potential for support from the local market could be explored in the form of an Expression of Interest, with the aim of determining:

- Existing and planned accessible resources
- Service coverage and schedules
- Industry perspectives on potential models for support
- Challenges experienced with operating accessible units to date
- A detailed assessment of known risks and associated strategies for mitigation

