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Information Item No. 2
Transportation Standing Committee
June 24, 2021

TO: Chair and Members of the Transportation Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: - Original Signed -
Dave Reage, MCIP, LPP, Executive Director, Halifax Transit

- Original Signed -
Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: March 2, 2021

SUBJECT: **Policy on Transit Boarding of Children and Staff from Schools, Daycares and Preschools**

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

On December 12, 2019 the Transportation Standing Committee approved a motion that included direction for staff to:

Provide a staff report on developing public-facing policy for Halifax Transit on boarding of children and staff from schools, daycares, and preschools, with input from stakeholders.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, R.S.N.S. 2008, c. 39.

69 (1) The Municipality may provide a public transportation service by (a) the purchase of vehicles or vessels and operation of the service; (b) providing financial assistance to a person who will undertake to provide the service; or (c) a combination of these methods

Administrative Order One, Schedule 7 – Transportation Standing Committee Terms of Reference

Section 4- The Transportation Standing Committee shall oversee and review of the Municipality's Regional Transportation Plans and initiatives, as follows:

(b) overseeing and reviewing the Regional Transportation policies, bylaws and functional plans;

Section 5- The Transportation Standing Committee shall:

(a) promote and enable public safety campaigns and outcomes that advocate safety;

Section 6- The Transportation Standing Committee shall:

- (a) review and oversee policy direction and long-term funding approach to promote and encourage Transit alternatives as outlined in the Regional Plan;
- (c) promote and enable positive communication between communities, ridership, and

the Council and Transit services to enable and support the Regional Transit service to the communities of the municipality.

BACKGROUND

Policies at Halifax Transit guide the execution of service and passenger use of public transit. They are intended to support the effective and efficient delivery of transit service in an increasingly complex environment, providing general and specific guidance related to customer service and operational matters. Specific objectives of these policies include:

- provide a single and standard reference for employees and passengers of public transit in carrying out their responsibilities;
- encourage continuity and consistency in the administration and application of service standards and operational protocols;
- provide direction and authority in the day-to-day operation and administration of the transit service;
- provide a foundation for the development and maintenance of procedures, protocols and training materials

A public facing policy governing groups of children traveling on transit vehicles and vessels has not been actively documented or communicated to employees or passengers of Halifax Transit. Historically, Operators have been directed to use discretion when determining whether groups of children can safely board, in consideration of limited seating, capacity and other factors not previously defined. Staff acknowledges that broad individual discretion can result in inconsistencies related to execution of service standards, and childcare communities of interest have expressed concern with inconsistencies in service standards related to groups of children traveling on Halifax Transit.

Employee and Public Engagement tools were used in an effort to further understand passenger needs in consideration of service expectations and feasibility of operational implementation.

The recent elimination of fares for young children is designed to increase access to public transit for more children and encourage the use of public transportation by youth, which will ideally lead to continued use of sustainable transportation into adulthood. Transit passengers traveling with groups of children are welcome and encouraged to use the transit service, aligned with the elimination of fares for children passengers, which is consistent with the goals of the Integrated Mobility Plan and aligns with the Council priority of building a more healthy and livable community.

Service standards, as supported by policy, are critical in the sustained growth and use of Halifax Transit. The following discussion outlines policy, service standards and protocols developed to ensure a consistent and satisfactory passenger experience related to traveling with groups of children on Halifax Transit.

DISCUSSION

A Policy on Transit Boarding of Children and Staff from Schools, Daycares, and Preschools (Policy) is designed to:

- Maintain a consistent standard for the safe use of Halifax Transit by groups of daycares, day camps and schools
- Clearly outline rules and procedures for these groups
- Provide clarity for Operators when dealing with passengers traveling with groups of children

Staff recognizes that onboard management of groups of children is challenging for Bus Operators and Ferry Crew, considering their primary duties and requirements related to the operation of their assigned vehicles and vessels. The directives contained in the Policy outline the minimum requirements to ensure the safety of the Operators, Crews, and passengers, and to execute on expected service standards. The Policy is ideally supplemented with public awareness and passenger recommendations highlighting personal safety guidelines related to traveling with groups of children on transit.

The Policy applies to all Halifax Transit services: Bus, Access-A-Bus (AAB), and Ferry. The scope of the Policy includes all directives not previously documented in separate but related Policies, including: Bicycle Rack Policy, Food and Beverage Policy, Lost & Found Policy, Passenger Bags & Backpacks Policy, Passenger Conduct Policy, Request-A-Stop Policy, and the Stroller Policy.

It is the responsibility of all Halifax Transit Operators and Crew to enforce all directives put forward in the Policy and advise of all recommendations and protocols related to the boarding of groups of children. It is the responsibility of passengers of Halifax Transit to be aware of, and adhere to, all directives put forward in the Policy, while utilizing the recommendations to best support a positive passenger experience.

The directives stated in the Policy will be communicated to all current Operators and Crew through standard internal notice procedures, with follow up and support from front-line Operations Supervisors. New Operators and Crew will be provided this information in orientation and training reference materials. The policy directives applicable to passengers, and recommendations, as stated below, will be communicated through the Halifax Transit Home Page; Policies & Guidelines.

Policy Directives

Preamble

- Transit passengers traveling with groups of children are welcome and encouraged to use the services of Halifax Transit

Transit Passengers

- Transit passengers traveling with groups of children must ensure they always have adequate oversight of the children traveling in their group; oversight must include maintaining standards of safety on all vehicles and vessels
- Groups of small children from daycares or preschools are not permitted to use Transit Services unaccompanied
- Transit passengers traveling with groups of children on the bus will be permitted to board up to the point where the bus has reached overload capacity; once overload capacity has been reached the Operator will trigger typical overload protocols which will require passengers and groups of children to wait for a bus with allowable capacity

Operators

- Operators must stop their vehicle when Transit passengers traveling with groups of children are waiting at a bus stop, regardless of current capacity limitations
- If at capacity, Operators must communicate with Transit Operations to comply with current overload procedures
- If bus is at full load capacity, the Operator must politely inform all customers at the stop, including passengers traveling with groups of children, that the bus is full. As a courtesy, the Operator should also inform the customers when the next bus is expected. Operators have final determination as to

the capacity allowance of the vehicle or vessel, however all refusals to board in consideration of capacity limitations must be communicated to the Transit passenger at the time of refusal.

- Operators must ensure groups of children have successfully exited the bus and are at a safe distance from the bus before continuing on-route
- In the event of a lost or separated child, the Operator or Crew will call an Operations Supervisor and the incident will be referred to Halifax Regional Police

Ferry

- Transit passengers traveling with groups of children on the Ferry must organize the children in the terminal area, and efficiently disembark the ramp area
- Transit passengers traveling with groups of children on the Ferry must ensure children in large groups do not impede passenger flow or safety exits within the terminal

Recommendations

- To provide Transit passengers traveling with groups of children the best opportunity of boarding without delay due to capacity constraints, trips should be scheduled off-peak hours between 9am and 3pm whenever possible
- Acknowledging that capacity for Transit passengers traveling with groups of children cannot be guaranteed, trip organizers should prepare in advance and complete trip contingency planning, identifying possible alternative routes and scheduling timelines. 311 should be used as a resource if assistance is required with trip planning, or if trip organizers have questions
- To expedite boarding and disembarking, Transit passengers traveling with groups of children should board and disembark together, whenever possible
- Caregivers are encouraged to have children seated while the bus is on-route. Acknowledging that a situation could arise where it may be necessary for small children to stand in the aisle of a bus without the benefit of anything to hold onto, it is largely the ownership of the caregiver to be conscious of this in consideration of safety of the children, and as such travel in smaller groups, off peak hours
- Operators, in the interest of safety, may request passengers to have small children seated while driving, however discretion remains with the caregiver and service should not be denied if there is space available on the bus
- Transit passengers traveling with groups of small children are encouraged to disembark from the front of the bus, taking advantage of the bus lowering mechanism and supporting an efficient departure

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No financial implications were identified at this time.

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

There is a risk that Transit passengers traveling with groups of children could be separated from one or more children from their group. Halifax Transit is not responsible or liable in the event of a lost child or a child separated from the group.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholder engagement tools were used to gain insights from teachers, child caregivers, day camp organizations and parents on their levels of satisfaction with transit and identify the issues that arise when

traveling with groups of children. Stakeholder engagement tools were also used to gather feedback from Operators and Ferry Crew on challenges they face when managing groups of children and gain input to help develop and implement policies and protocols. The tools included a public Talk Transit survey, and an Operator lobby survey. Some key takeaways from those engagement sessions are provided in Appendix A and included themes of safety, organizational service standards, and passenger service expectations.

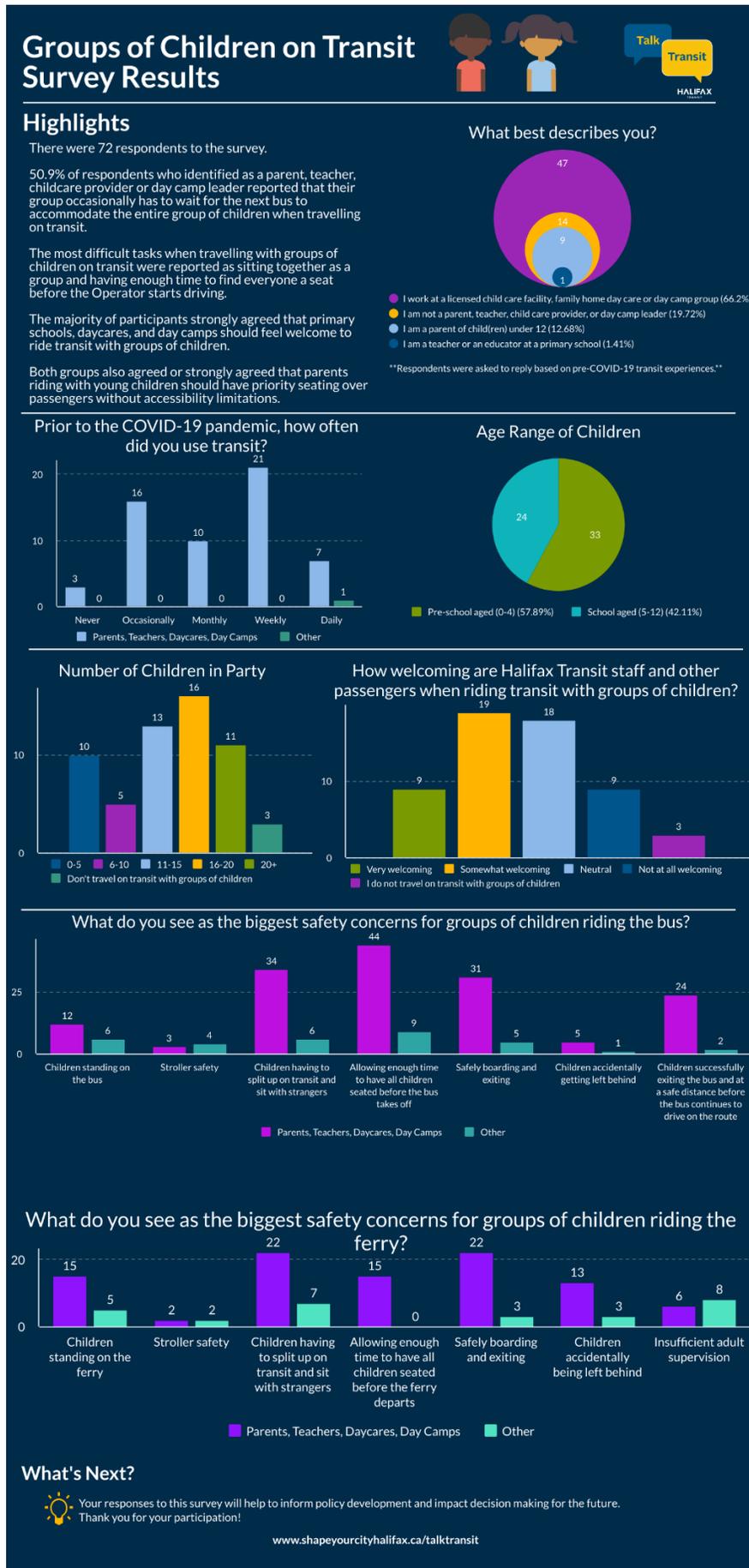
ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Transit Survey Infographics - Groups of Children on Transit

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Lynn Llewellyn, Director Transit Operations, 902.233.4812

Groups of Children on Transit – Survey Results



Groups of Children on Transit – Survey Results

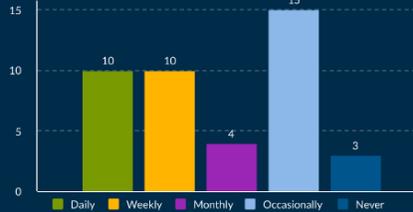
Groups of Children on Transit Operator Survey Results



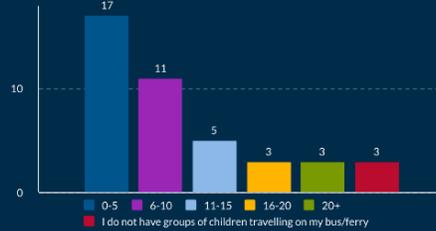
Highlights

- A total of 42 Operators responded to the survey
- 57.5% of Operators reported that they never had to instruct the group to wait for the next bus or ferry to accommodate the entire group of children.
- Operators reported that waiting for everyone in the group to find adequate seating and accommodating strollers was somewhat difficult.
- They strongly disagree that all children over the age of 5 should be allowed to stand on the bus or ferry.
- Operators strongly agree that a clear policy is required to address rules and responsibilities regarding riding with groups of children on transit.

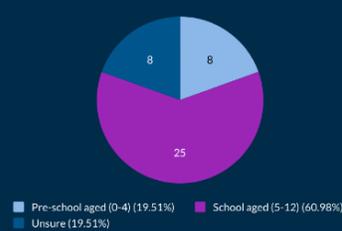
Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, how often did you have groups of children on your bus/ferry?



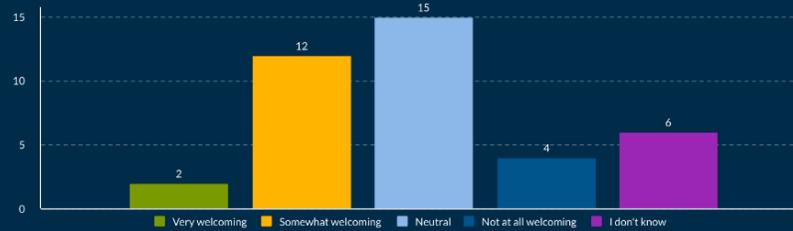
Number of Children in Party



Age Range of Children



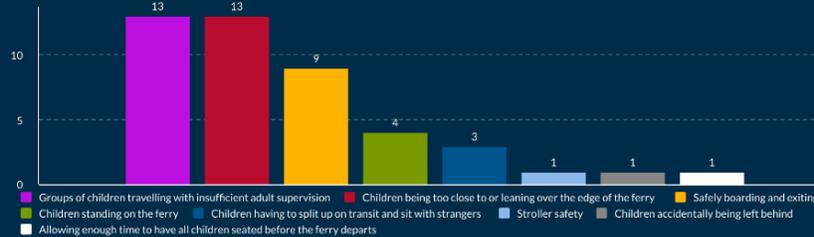
How welcoming are other passengers when groups of children ride transit?



What do you see as the biggest safety concerns for children riding the bus?



What do you see as the biggest safety concerns for children riding the ferry?



What's Next?



Your responses to this survey will help to inform policy development and impact decision making for the future. Thank you for your participation!