



Accessibility Advisory Committee Annual Town Hall

Halifax Transit Updates

Cheryl Chappel – Supervisor, Customer Support & Engagement, Halifax Transit

Good Evening.

My name is Cheryl Chappel, and I am Supervisor of Customer Support & Engagement with Halifax Transit.

At Halifax Transit, our mission is to work together to provide a safe, reliable, and sustainable transit system for all. This requires consistent attention to accessibility issues, and a passionate commitment to continuous improvement.

I am pleased to be here this evening to share some of the exciting progress Halifax Transit has made to address improved accessibility for customers.

Infrastructure Updates

I am pleased to share significant infrastructure updates that are helping to make Halifax Transit bus stops, terminals, and facilities safe and accessible spaces for all customers.

Bus Stop Accessibility

Bus Stop Accessibility is an ongoing priority aimed at improving accessibility for customers. Each year, Halifax Transit installs concrete landing pads at bus stops which allows the Operator to deploy a ramp at the request of mobility impaired passengers. In 2020, Halifax Transit installed 125 bus stop landing pads, and an additional 80 were installed in 2021 (work is still ongoing through

November). This brings the total percentage of fully accessible bus stops in the Halifax Transit Network to approximately 68%. In addition, another 5% are considered Total Non Standard Accessible with ramp and another 22% are Total Non Standard Accessible.

Woodside Ferry Terminal Renovation

Extensive Woodside Ferry Terminal renovations, which began in October 2019, are scheduled for completion in January 2022. The newly renovated facility will feature universal washrooms, additional escalators traveling in both directions, and the replacement of one small elevator with two much larger ones, creating a more accessible experience for all transit users.

West Bedford Park & Ride

On November 22, the first phase of the new West Bedford Park & Ride will open as part of the *Moving Forward Together Plan* – Halifax Transit’s long-term plan to make our transit network faster, more reliable, and easier to understand.

The new Park & Ride, which will include a terminal, heated shelters, better signage, and electronic message boards - will offer improved access to transit services and a new commuting option for passengers in the area.

Public Communications and Education

Halifax Transit has made exciting progress in the areas of public communication and education.

The Transit Code

In August 2021, Halifax Transit publicly launched The Transit Code – a guide for passenger conduct and policies on Halifax Transit. Developed in collaboration with members of the Municipality’s Diversity & Inclusion team, the Transit Code defines the organization’s expectations of passengers when traveling on transit. The goal of the Transit Code is to ensure a safe, courteous, and respectful experience for everyone. Important Transit Code themes, ranging from serious topics such as anti-racism, anti-harassment, and anti-bullying, to policy themes such as courtesy seating, accessibility policies, and service animals, will be communicated via integrated communications channels including transit shelters, bus ads, digital advertising, social media, and terminal Pop-Up events. Many of you may have already seen the first campaign currently in market focusing on anti-racism.

Community Education Programs

Halifax Transit is developing new community education programs to reduce barriers to public transit and assist riders in understanding how to use the transit network.

Newcomers’ Education Program

For newcomers to the area, language is often a challenge. In November 2020, Halifax Transit launched a series of printed guides and videos in 11 different languages to help

newcomers navigate the transit system. In January 2021, targeted public engagement was conducted with organizations serving newcomers to determine how the organization can better meet the needs of this growing community. An ongoing newcomers' community travel training program is currently being developed, with an anticipated launch in the Spring of 2022. The number of newcomers accessing Access-A-Bus services is also increasing and options are being explored to address language barriers.

Service changes booklets for upcoming November 22 service changes have also been developed and are being distributed in 10 different languages.

Accessible Transit Education Program

Halifax Transit is also developing a travel training program for accessible transit customers who use both Halifax Transit's Access-A-Bus service and conventional buses. The program will include one-on-one training, as well as regularly scheduled education events hosted by transit staff throughout HRM which will include the presence of a bus, presentations, demonstrations, and materials for distribution. For some current Access-A-Bus clients, conventional transit can offer more freedom and flexibility than Access-A-Bus, and we want people to feel comfortable with this option, empowering them to decide about whether it's right for them.

On-Demand Accessible Taxi Program

For many years, the municipality has heard from residents and visitors about the lack of accessible taxis for hire, making spontaneous travel a challenge for people requiring these vehicles. Due to the high cost of buying, maintaining, and operating accessible vehicles, the number of accessible taxis in HRM has declined dramatically from 56 in 2015, to 11 today.

On February 23, 2021, Regional Council gave approval for Halifax Transit to contract an accessible taxi-style service. Under this new program, the municipality will pay a fee to the contracted company to provide an accessible taxi-style service, while users will pay the standard taxi rate for trips. This new program will add 10 new accessible taxis in Halifax and provide additional travel options for our accessible transit clients.

Access-A-Bus

Access-A-Bus has made progress with its implementation of the Continuous Improvement Plan, with daily attention to the wait list, monthly review of schedules to look for efficiencies, and more frequent “Batching” of trip requests to fill in spaces as cancellations are made.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, transit ridership is down across the country. However, I am pleased to share with you that Halifax Transit’s Access-A-Bus service is currently back to 85% pre-COVID-19 trip requests.

Technology upgrades are underway for Access-A-Bus vehicles, including the installation of Mobile Data Terminals which will allow for real time



information such as On Time Performance, Same Day Scheduling opportunities, Fare Management, better scheduling based on continuous updating of travel times, and load times. 15 new buses are being added to the Access-A-Bus fleet next year.

To support the Halifax Transit's Community Education program, a new Mobile Supervisor will be recruited in the new year to provide enhanced travel training for persons with disabilities.

On behalf of all my transit colleagues, thank you for the opportunity to share the exciting initiatives underway to improve accessibility for Halifax Transit customers. We welcome any feedback and suggestions you may have to help support a safe, accessible, and inclusive transit experience for all.