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Item No. Info 2
Transportation Standing Committee
October 23, 2025

TO: Chair and Members of the Transportation Standing Committee

FROM: Jacqueline Hamilton, A/Commissioner of Operations

DATE: August 21, 2025

SUBJECT: Update on Bus Air Conditioning Performance and Cleaning Procedures

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

August 21, 2025, Transportation Standing Committee motion (Item 13.2.1):

MOVED by Councillor Purdy, seconded by Councillor Morse

THAT the Transportation Standing Committee request a staff report from Halifax Transit providing an update on the functionality of air conditioning systems and the cleanliness of buses, including:

- The number of buses currently in service with fully functioning air conditioning systems;
- Average turnaround time for air conditioning repairs, including how long buses remain in service without functioning air conditioning;
- Information on whether windows can be opened on all buses and if riders are permitted to do so when needed;
- Cleaning protocols for buses, including the frequency of cleaning and whether nightly inspections/checks are conducted for dirt, grime, garbage, and overall sanitation.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report addresses concerns regarding air conditioning functionality and cleanliness on Halifax Transit buses, especially during the recent summer heat. Efforts are ongoing to maintain and improve bus cooling systems, prioritize repairs, and enhance driver and passenger comfort. Regular cleaning and maintenance protocols are in place to ensure a clean environment for riders.

BACKGROUND

This summer, with record-breaking heat across Nova Scotia, many Halifax Transit riders and Operators have noticed a growing issue: the air conditioning on some buses hasn't been working as well as it should. Concerns about the cleanliness of buses have also been raised alongside the cooling challenges.

DISCUSSION

Halifax Transit's conventional bus fleet are all equipped with air conditioning systems. As of September 4, 2025, 80% of the conventional bus fleet has fully operational air conditioning systems. This is an improvement from the summer low percentage of 70% experienced during the heat wave. The transit team and contracted vendor are continually working to maintain and increase this percentage.

Repairing air conditioning systems on buses can be complex. When an issue is reported, technicians typically spend approximately one hour diagnosing the problem. Following diagnosis, the vendor must source any necessary parts, a process that may vary in duration depending on availability. Minor repairs generally require up to four hours, while more extensive repairs—often involving the removal of additional components—can take a full day or longer.

Currently, the vendor is managing two to three air conditioning repairs per day. Due to the volume of repairs needed, Halifax Transit has begun performing some repairs in-house to accelerate the turnaround time. This collaborative approach aims to reduce the number of buses out of service due to air conditioning malfunctions.

Halifax Transit prioritizes deploying buses with functioning air conditioning whenever possible. When buses with non-operational air conditioning must be utilized to meet service requirements, they are typically assigned to early morning routes when temperatures are cooler.

In addition to repair efforts, a pilot project is underway to enhance operator comfort by installing new ventilation systems within the driver's compartment. This is particularly important as many buses now have protective barriers around the driver's area. Following consultations with union representatives, Halifax Transit is also testing adjusted temperature settings to optimize both comfort and system performance. Staff have been advised to keep windows closed while the air conditioning is operating, as open windows can reduce system efficiency.

All buses are equipped with top windows that passengers may open. Riders are encouraged to only open these windows when the air conditioning is not functioning or has been turned off. The air conditioning systems can be challenged at times to maintain a comfortable temperature due to the frequent opening of doors at bus stops, particularly on routes with heavy ridership; this is further exacerbated by any windows that are opened, making the systems ineffective, or causing stress and damage to the air conditioning.

Maintaining cleanliness remains a top priority. Each bus undergoes a comprehensive interior cleaning every 75 days, which includes windows, floors, walls, seats, and the driver's area. Staff follow a detailed checklist and initial each completed task to ensure thoroughness.

Additionally, each evening prior to entering service, buses pass through a servicing process where staff inspect oil and tires, empty fareboxes, sweep floors, remove trash, clean spills, and wash the exterior. This routine helps ensure buses remain clean and comfortable for all passengers.

Halifax Transit recognizes the importance of providing a cool and clean environment, particularly during the summer months, and remains committed to upholding and enhancing these standards daily.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No financial implications at this time.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As Halifax Transit staff continue to work through these issues, stakeholder engagement is key, including ongoing meetings with ATU executives, direct conversations with Bus Operators to understand their daily experiences, and gathering feedback from riders to ensure their concerns are heard and considered.

ATTACHMENTS

None

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