

OTTAWA-CARLETON REGIONAL TRANSIT COMMISSION
COMMISSION DE TRANSPORT RÉGIONALE D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT
RAPPORT

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DATE: 14 February 2000

TO/DEST: Co-ordinator, Transit Services Committee

FROM/EXP. General Manager

SUBJECT/OBJET: **ACCESSIBLE TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE**
ANNUAL REPORT - NOVEMBER 1998 TO OCTOBER 1999

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

That the Transit Services Committee receive the Accessible Transit Advisory Committee's Annual Report for information.

BACKGROUND

In November 1999 the Transit Services Committee appointed 12 members to serve on the Accessible Transit Advisory Committee (ATAC) for a two year period ending in October 2001.

At its meetings of November 1999 and January 2000, the ATAC Committee, as per their terms of reference, elected a committee Chair and Vice Chair. I am pleased to advise the Transit Services Committee that Jeffrey Alguire has been re-elected as Chair and Mr. Michael O'Riain, a new member of the Committee, has been elected Committee Vice-Chair.

Mr. Alguire, Chairperson, is pleased to submit for the information of the Transit Services Committee the Committee's Annual Report covering the period November 1, 1998 to October 31, 1999.

Approved by
Gordon Diamond

Accessible Transit Advisory Committee

Annual Report

November 1998 - October 1999

Accessible Transit Advisory Committee

Annual Report, November 1, 1998 to October 31, 1999

Introduction

The Accessible Transit Advisory Committee (ATAC) was created in 1992 by an act of the Transit Commission. The goals and objectives of the committee (as taken from the Terms of Reference) are:

Goals

- To improve the accessibility of the regular transit service to mobility-impaired persons, without degrading service for other customers

- To improve the quality of service provided by Para Transpo to the maximum extent possible commensurate with available funding

Objectives

- To represent mobility-impaired persons and to advise OC Transpo of their transportation needs

- To monitor the provision of all transportation services provided by OC Transpo as they relate to mobility-impaired persons

- To provide liaison between OC Transpo and its customers who are mobility-impaired

Of the 12 members of the committee, nine represent Para Transpo users and three represent mobility-impaired persons who use OC Transpo's conventional transit services (again, as per the Terms of Reference). One aim in selecting members is to have a representation of the needs of people with different kinds of mobility impairment in order to be able to advise OC Transpo on a wide range of requirements for transit accessibility. I believe our membership has, and will continue to, fulfill this role.

Eleven committee meetings were held during the year. In addition to this, some work was carried out by subcommittees, and we have contributed to OC Transpo and Regional committees as appropriate. Some of the initiatives and committees we have contributed to are: the Regional Transit Advisory Committee, the Light Rail Sounding Board, the KPMG/IBI OC Transpo comprehensive review and the Accessible Transit Steering Committee.

Communication with OC Transpo and Regional officials has improved. We have tried our best to make ourselves available for discussion of relevant issues, and we believe that these efforts are productive. Consultation is happening in more areas and people are coming to better recognize ATAC's value. We also appreciate the support of certain Regional officials and of the Transit Services Committee.

Prominent topics for us this year have been:

1. Low-floor conventional transit introduction
2. Para Transpo fare structure
3. Para Transpo computerized scheduling system
4. Para Transpo eligibility
5. Para Transpo Medical Bookings and Trip Prioritization
6. KPMG/IBI Comprehensive Review
7. Light Rail
8. Narrowly Averted Para Transpo Operators' Labour Disruption and Contingencies

The rest of this report will deal primarily with these items. Before proceeding with this, however, we at ATAC wish to acknowledge again the tragedy that occurred at OC Transpo on April 6, 1999. To the families of Clare Davidson, Brian Guay, David Lemay and Harry Shoenmakers, as well as to their friends and co-workers at OC Transpo, go our deepest condolences.

Conventional Transit Specific Items

Low-Floor Buses

The low-floor bus initiative is moving forward. There were some early problems associated with the ramps and with respect to failures to deploy the ramps when requested. While this was frustrating for some members of the community, we acknowledge that the situation has improved significantly. We believe that these problems were in significant part due to training and/or equipment problems. Given that this initiative was in its very early stages, the problems shouldn't be considered overly surprising. ATAC expects continued improvement in the months ahead, and will continue to monitor developments in this area.

Routes 18, 6 and 5 are now designated as fully accessible and the accessibility of the conventional system is expected to continue to improve as more low-floor buses arrive. All of this is viewed positively by ATAC. However, we are seeing one undesirable side-effect. Some members of ATAC who regularly use the conventional system are reporting that buses are filling up more often than usual, meaning that both people with and without disabilities are waiting longer for buses with room for them to board. Our representative on RTAC has said that this is a matter of significant concern for that committee as well. ATAC fears that this situation could

cause a backlash, particularly in the non-disabled community, which could have a negative impact both on the low-floor bus initiative and on OC Transpo's ability to reach its longer-term ridership objectives. Admittedly, all this is due in part to the better-than-expected increase in ridership attained over the course of the year. In a sense, it might be said that OC Transpo is becoming a victim of its own success. However, something must be done to ensure that the current positive momentum is not lost. This may involve increasing bus frequency on the busiest routes.

It has also been noted by some members of ATAC that they have encountered people who don't understand the purpose of the new buses with fewer seats. However, when it is explained, most people respond positively. This would seem to indicate the need for increased advertising and promotion of the new buses. Not only would this increase awareness on the part of the non-disabled community, but it could also be used as a vehicle to communicate to people with disabilities about the status of conventional transit accessibility and to encourage those who can to try out our new buses with improved accessibility. The foundation for the required promotion has been laid through the "helping you get on board" campaign, but ATAC believes that more visibility is required, and that this need for visibility in the community will continue for some time as we make the transition to a low-floor bus fleet.

Light Rail

A member of ATAC was a member of the Light Rail Sounding Board. We have been emphasizing that all stations and trains involved in the pilot project (as well as any potential light rail system beyond the pilot project) must be fully accessible to people with various kinds of disability.

We acknowledge the approval of the pilot project, and we are hopeful that light rail will fulfill its promise as a positive development for transit in the region. However, ATAC is very disappointed that the Bayview station will not be made fully accessible right from the start. Nonetheless, we will continue to fully participate in the project, advising the project team on accessibility requirements whenever it is necessary to do so. It continues to be our aim that this project, as well as all other initiatives related to public transit in the region, be developed in such a way as to maximize accessibility for all Ottawa-Carleton residents, so that we can all enjoy the benefits of the ease of mobility which transit improvements are intended to provide.

Para Transpo Specific Items

Fare Structure

The current OC Transpo conventional service fare structure is intended in large part to attract higher ridership. While this is very much appropriate for the conventional part of the system, Para Transpo addresses some very different realities. Because it is much more expensive (about \$20/passenger trip) to run Para Transpo, and because of limited funding for the service, we face

the problem of insufficient capacity to accommodate the demand for the service.

Of course, our first choice would be for there to be enough resources available to allow Para Transpo to accommodate all trip requests from those who cannot use the conventional service, without having to employ demand management strategies. However, since the response we have received from the Transit Services Committee indicates that this is not possible, we have looked at ways to best allocate the limited resources so as to provide the best service possible to those who need it most. One of the items we considered is the Para Transpo fare structure. The other two are the new cancellation policy and Para Transpo eligibility, both of which will be discussed later in this report.

In an environment of limited resources, the Para Transpo fare structure can be used as a motivator to encourage all customers to use the conventional service whenever possible. However, this must be done without making the cost of Para Transpo prohibitive for those who have no other transportation option. To that end, after significant discussion both in our Fares Subcommittee and at full ATAC meetings, it was proposed that concession fares be removed on Para Transpo. However, feedback from OC Transpo was essentially that this proposal was thought premature, given that the low-floor conventional buses are not yet widely available. The Transit Services Committee accepted OC Transpo's recommendation to require a top-up on Para Transpo when using the Senior's Pass, regardless of the time of day. The top-up is one ticket at most times and two tickets when traveling before 9:00AM on weekday mornings (note that the weekday early morning fare is more expensive for everyone on Para Transpo, as it has been for some time, with the intent being to encourage people not to travel before 9:00AM whenever possible, so as to ensure availability of service for those traveling to work during "rush hour"). Note that assistance is available for seniors requiring frequent trips for medical treatment and for whom the extra cost represents a hardship.

This change seems to have had some positive affect on the general availability of service, though we are continuing to monitor the situation. We reserve the right to bring forth proposals related to fare structure again, should we observe that a change in fare structure would have a significantly positive impact on the overall provision of Para Transpo service. Particularly, it is expected that this issue will be revisited once the low-floor buses are in wide operation and we have had an opportunity to evaluate their full impact.

Cancellation Policy

Early in the year, the same-day cancellation rate for Para Transpo was approximately 15%, and even higher for "regular bookings" (that is, trips going from the same pick-up location to the same destination on the same day at the same time at least once a week, where it is not necessary to call and arrange the transportation repeatedly each time it is needed). Unfortunately, same-day cancellations usually mean that someone else who could have used the service is denied the opportunity to do so, because it is not easy to reallocate trips that are cancelled on the day of service. Having been informed of this situation, and wanting to make the

most efficient use possible of existing resources in order to minimize trip refusals, we discussed with Mr. Pat Larkin (Manager, Para Transpo) an OC Transpo proposal intended to discourage same-day cancellations in order to increase the efficiency of the service. We realize that same-day cancellations are not always avoidable (for example, sometimes one might feel well on the day the transportation is arranged, but then feel ill on the day of service and choose to stay home), so the target is not to eliminate them, but rather to minimize them. After our discussions, ATAC endorsed the proposal with a minor modification. The modified version, which was approved by the Transit Services Committee, can be found in the appendix.

In the initial implementation, officials are being somewhat more lenient than the official policy calls for, focusing on those who cancel more than 50% of their trips. The idea is to start with those who cancel most often first, to make them aware of the detrimental affect their actions are having on the service and to encourage these people in particular to change their approach in using Para Transpo. In due time, it is expected that the implementation will evolve to conform more strictly to the stated policy.

The policy appears to be having a positive impact on the number of same-day cancellations, but it would probably be best to defer a detailed analysis to next year's report, given that the statistics available now are not sufficient for this purpose. When next year's report is written, we will have numbers to analyze that will reflect service impact over a longer time frame, which will increase their statistical relevance to an appropriate level.

Eligibility

As noted in our 1997-1998 annual report, it had been intended that Para Transpo eligibility be a significant issue for consideration by us in 1998-1999, and that we come forward to the Transit Services Committee with related recommendations before the end of the operational year. Unfortunately, given all the issues that we were involved in this year, we have not progressed to the point where we have something to present at this time, however we do have a commitment to come forward with a proposal in 1999-2000, and on behalf of the committee, I affirm this commitment. In parallel with this effort, there is an initiative of the Ontario Community Transportation Association (OCTA) to evaluate eligibility criteria and registration options from a province-wide perspective. We hope that the two efforts will compliment each other and lead to the development of suitable eligibility criteria and a corresponding registration process for Ottawa-Carleton. This is a very important issue to which we must give significant effort and consideration. It is not an easy issue to resolve, because we must address the issue of limited resources together with the understanding that those who cannot use conventional transit, but would be able to use the parallel system, should have access to that system.

ATAC looks forward to more discussions surrounding eligibility, as this issue is fundamental to the definition of what we want Para Transpo to be in future, and to Para Transpo's ability to effectively serve its customers. In addition, we realize that eligibility criteria will likely have to evolve somewhat as the level of accessibility of conventional transit increases. We will attempt to provide some guidance on

the process of managing the evolution of the criteria as part of our proposal. However, we recognize that no matter how accessible the conventional transit system becomes, there will always be a need for a strong parallel service. Any discussion of the evolution of Para Transpo eligibility based on the accessibility improvements associated with the conventional service must proceed with two goals in mind:

1. to allow more people the freedom associated with the less restrictive scheduling of the conventional service, and
2. to improve service for those who must continue to use the parallel service.

In other words, the target of conventional transit accessibility must be improved freedom and service for the community of people with disabilities, and not cost-cutting with regard to the parallel service.

Medical Bookings and Trip Prioritization

Some concern was raised about people who do not require van service (and hence can only begin requesting service at 9:00am the previous day while others begin at 7:00am) having trouble obtaining rides for some medical appointments. This concern is legitimate. Nobody wants to see anyone miss a necessary and long-awaited medical appointment, particularly an appointment with a busy specialist.

We had some discussion about trip prioritization, but there is a strong reluctance on the part of ATAC to endorse an initiative that encourages people with disabilities to identify trip purpose, given that there is no need or compulsion for those without disabilities to do the same. Essentially, it is an issue of privacy. This is why some parallel transportation systems (including Para Transpo) have moved away from trip prioritization over the last decade, and this rationale is still valid today. There was also some concern that the prioritization of medical trips would lead to more demand for such trips from people who are now using alternate means of transportation. Under current budget limitations, this would likely result in very few non-medical trips being available for those who do not require a van. In the face of all these realities, the conclusions of our discussion were:

1. that prioritization should be instituted only as a last resort, after the cancellation policy has had its affect and the process of allocating regular bookings has been reviewed, and
2. that the definition of the term “medical trip” for the purpose of any such prioritization must be very strict (ie. to and from hospitals or doctors’ offices).

There was also a discussion about whether or not a separate medical transportation system should be provided, without affecting existing Para Transpo funding. Fundamentally, though, the target is more general: to provide service for medical trips without requiring trip prioritization and without detrimentally affecting service to other passengers.

We will look at the process for allocating regular bookings in the coming year, in addition to monitoring the impact of the cancellation policy and addressing the question of Para Transpo eligibility. We hope that making adjustments in some or all of these areas will permit us to avoid the question of trip prioritization while still making the necessary service available for medical trips. I am confident that in the interim, while such adjustments are being considered, the Para Transpo management team will try their best to accommodate the most important medical trips when no other transportation option exists.

Computerized Scheduling System

In 1997, the Transit Commission approved the purchase of the Trapeze computerized scheduling system for Para Transpo. It was expected that after a period of learning how to operate the system and use it effectively, this decision would result in increased productivity for Para Transpo and allow for more passenger trips to be accommodated as the service tried to address excess demand.

It has taken longer to tailor the system for use in Ottawa-Carleton than initially expected. Use of the system on a full-time basis did not begin until June 1999. The implementation of this new system, combined with an unusual amount of road construction, resulted in lower productivity levels in 1999. Hence, the money that was allocated from reserves to increase service in 1999 served only to maintain existing service levels. Fortunately, given that the old productivity level is now being attained with the new system, the total service provided in 2000 should increase commensurate with the increase in funds that has been allocated to Para Transpo operations. There is hope, as well, that as Para Transpo staff gain more experience with the system and Trapeze addresses some of the concerns about the behaviour of the software that staff have raised, the productivity level can increase further. However, ATAC will be monitoring results associated with the scheduling system with great interest this winter, given that we really won't have the full picture of the functioning of the system until we see statistics related to its operation in winter.

Narrowly Averted Para Transpo Operators' Labour Disruption

In March, 1999 a Para Transpo operators' labour disruption was narrowly averted. However, the fact that we came so close to a disruption is disturbing to ATAC, and I'm sure it is disturbing to many in the community who have disabilities, especially to the significant number of people who have access to no method of transportation other than Para Transpo. Although we have begun and will continue to cooperate with other organizations in an attempt to establish contingency plans for use in the event of a disruption in future, such plans would likely be extremely minimal in nature. Fundamentally, all parties involved (operators, contractors, OC Transpo and the Transit Services Committee) have a responsibility to maintain a parallel transportation service on an uninterrupted basis, particularly for those who don't have access to other forms of transportation. ATAC would be happy to participate in any activities deemed to be productive in finding solutions to the potential problems that would be caused by

a labour disruption. Should Transit Services Committee members have ideas as to how this issue should be addressed, we would welcome input and discussion.

Budget Considerations

At the 1999 Transit Services Committee budget meeting, the \$100,000 addition to the Para Transpo operating budget (relative to the 1998 level), brought forward during 1998 budget deliberations, was confirmed. As noted earlier in this report, it did not result in increased service in 1999 because of productivity problems associated with the early phases of implementation of the new scheduling system. Productivity is now back to its previous level and will hopefully improve further, so we would hope to see at least some additional service in 2000, apart from that which will result from further budget increases.

Jumping ahead now to the 2000 budget year (technically, the 2000 budget should be outside the scope of this report, but I am taking a small liberty in mentioning it here in order to provide a more complete view), an additional \$240,000 was added to the operational budget for Para Transpo (apart from the increases required under the terms of the contract extension signed with the contractor), including \$65,000 for a pilot project in which taxis will be used to provide some of the service. While we applaud these initiatives to provide much needed service, we are uncomfortable with the fact that all the additional money is coming from Para Transpo reserves. At this rate, by sometime in late 2001, the reserves will run out. This will create an issue in future budget deliberations. ATAC's focus in these deliberations will continue to be on the provision of the needed level of service, and we would hope that the future decision makers will heed our advice in this area.

General Item - OC Transpo Comprehensive Review

Our involvement in the KPMG/IBI OC Transpo Comprehensive Review has been productive and the review appears to have been useful. The final report makes recommendations concerning low-floor buses and the accessibility of the conventional system that have contributed to the formulation and acceleration of our conventional transit accessibility program, a program which ATAC firmly supports. There were also recommendations in regard to the parallel system, including comments on eligibility, demand management and integration with the conventional system. Some of these recommendations will be useful to us in our discussions about these issues in the coming year.

Concluding Remarks

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that Para Transpo celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1999, and that an event was held in recognition of that milestone. It was appropriate to celebrate, as we have come a long way in those 25 years. However, we still cannot take accessible transit for granted in

Ottawa-Carleton.

ATAC will continue to work for the betterment of accessible transit in the region with the aim that all those with disabilities who require accessible transit will be provided with an appropriate level of transit service.

I would like to thank all those who have made the successes of this year possible. I would especially like to thank all the ATAC members, Pat Larkin (Manager, Para Transpo), Andy Versteeg (Head of Service Operations, Para Transpo and ATAC Secretary), all who made presentations to and/or had discussions with ATAC at its meetings (including several OC Transpo staff members), and the Transit Services Committee members who have supported us and been open to our input. I would like to specifically thank those who left the committee at the end of the 1998-1999 year for their years of service and valuable contributions. Finally, I would like to thank Councillor Byrne for her involvement in the selection of new ATAC members, and to welcome the new members to the team. ATAC looks forward to their involvement, and to the influence of the new perspectives they will bring. I believe we have a solid team that can well represent those with disabilities in the region, and advise OC Transpo with regard to their needs in relation to public transit. I look forward to an interesting, thought-provoking and successful year for ATAC in 1999-2000.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jeffrey C. Alguire, Chair

Accessible Transit Advisory Committee

February 3, 2000

PARA TRANSPRO
REGULAR BOOKING
LATE CANCELLATION/NO-SHOW POLICY

The following policy applies to any Para Transpo customer who exceeds one or more of the following conditions over any 28 day (4 week) period.

1. Maximum of ten regular booking late trip cancellations*.
2. Maximum of three regular booking no-shows*.
3. Maximum of 25% of regular booking trips cancelled and/or no-showed.

*Cancellations and no-shows are recorded on a single trip basis. A “round” trip is two single trips.

Policy Actions

Dependent upon the number of times a customer has exceeded the policy limits, different policy actions are taken.

The policy actions are as follows:

4. First letter is a warning.
5. Second letter within six months results in a one week suspension of regular bookings.
6. Third and each subsequent letter within twelve months, results in a one month suspension of regular bookings.

Cancellations and no-shows are not allocated to a customer when the Para Transpo service arrives after the 30 minute scheduled pick-up window.

Any cancellations which are determined by Para Transpo to be due to unusual circumstances (i.e. Para Transpo declares a snow emergency) will not be used in determining if a customer has exceeded the conditions of the policy.

Customer Appeals Process

Since it would be impossible to document every circumstance which would constitute an exception to the policy as part of the policy itself, an appeal process is available to Para Transpo customers. The appeals process is detailed below:

For the first policy action, the customer who wishes to appeal must telephone Para Transpo to resolve their appeal with the Supervisor of Administration and Customer Service, whose decision is final.

For the second and subsequent policy actions, the customer must appeal in writing to ‘Para Transpo Administration’. In cases where a resolution cannot be achieved to the satisfaction of both parties, the appeal will be referred to an appeals panel consisting of a senior Para Transpo representative and a member of the Accessible Transit Advisory Committee. The panel will convene approximately once a month to resolve outstanding appeals.

Appeals must be received by Para Transpo within 10 days of the issuance of the letter of suspension. Appeals relating to the second or subsequent policy action letter must be made in writing, to the attention of “Late Cancellation/No-Show Appeal” care of:

**Para Transpo Administration
1500 St. Laurent Blvd.
Ottawa, Ontario
K1G 0Z8**

Failure to appeal will result in the automatic application of the appropriate policy action. The customer’s appeal documentation shall include the customer’s name, registration number, address, telephone number, and a statement explaining the reason for the appeal.

From the time an appeal letter is received until the decision of the appeal panel is issued, the customer will continue to have access to the regular booking process.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Late Cancellation

A late cancellation is any trip cancelled on the day of service or the day before after 5 p.m., except as noted as “Policy Exceptions”.

No-Show

A no-show occurs when the vehicle arrives within the 30 minute pick-up window at the designated pick-up location and either the trip is cancelled by the customer at the door, or the driver cannot locate the customer, except as noted in the "Policy Exceptions".

Policy Action

Warning letter or withdrawal of a type of service which is applied to a customer who fails to comply with the conditions of the policy.

Policy Exceptions

Cancellations that result from the arrival of the vehicle after the scheduled 30 minute pick-up window or that occur in circumstances determined by Para Transpo as unusual and unavoidable such as high cancellation days caused by a snow storm, etc.