

Our File/N/Réf.
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DATE: 8 March 1999

TO/DEST: Co-ordinator
Transit Services Committee

FROM/EXP: General Manager

SUBJECT/OBJET: **ACCESSIBLE TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE**
ANNUAL REPORT - NOVEMBER 1997 TO OCTOBER 1998

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

That the Transit Services Committee receive this report for information.

BACKGROUND

In June 1992, the Commission approved the establishment of the Accessible Transit Advisory Committee (ATAC) in accordance with specific Terms of Reference.

Mr. Jeffrey Alguire, Chairperson, is pleased to submit for the information of the Transit Services Committee, the ATAC Committee's sixth annual report covering the period of November 1997 to October 1998.

Approved by
M.J.E. Sheflin, P.Eng.

Accessible Transit Advisory Committee

Annual Report

November 1997 - October 1998

Accessible Transit Advisory Committee Annual Report, November 1, 1997 to October 31, 1998

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). Note that one member recently resigned; it is expected that his seat will soon be filled with one of the two ATAC alternates. 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 current membership has, and will continue to, fulfil this role.

Ten committee meetings were held during the year. In addition to this, some work was carried out by subcommittees, and we have contributed to OC 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, and the KPMG/IBI OC Transpo comprehensive review. We have recently been asked to participate in the environmental subcommittee and the reconstituted Accessible Transit Steering Committee, which we have begun to do, but the results of these activities are not part of this report because they did not substantively commence during the period that this report covers.

Communication with OC Transpo and Regional officials continues to improve. 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. Meetings with senior OC Transpo officials, and our collaboration on the "Helping you get on board" campaign have helped to foster this. 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 scheduling system
4. Para Transpo eligibility
5. KPMG/IBI Comprehensive Review
6. Light Rail
7. Conventional transit attendant card

The rest of the report will deal primarily with these items.

Conventional Transit Specific Items

Low-Floor Buses

The low-floor bus initiative has experienced both positive and negative developments this year. Equipment problems with the "telescoping" ramps that are intended to allow wheelchair users to board the 20 new low-floor buses have significantly delayed their deployment as wheelchair-accessible vehicles, although they have been used on the road without providing wheelchair access. More recently the ramps have been replaced after design improvements and subsequently the buses have been used to replace

Communibus vehicles when required. The Committee regrets the delays, but looks forward to seeing these buses deployed as wheelchair accessible vehicles on routes 6 and 18 in the not-to-distant future.

The 140 low-floor buses due to arrive in 1999 have flip-out ramps like those used by our standard Communibus vehicles. These ramps have proven much more reliable, so we do not expect similar problems with them.

On the positive side, ATAC strongly supports the initiative to accelerate the purchase of the low-floor buses as outlined in the draft document of August 25, 1998 entitled, "Improving Accessibility in Ottawa-Carleton." This is a positive step towards partially mitigating the affects of early delays in the purchase and deployment of low-floor buses.

In addition, ATAC appreciates the opportunity to review the buses in a hands-on manner, and we trust that our comments have been helpful. ATAC considers this a valuable exercise, and judging from feedback we've received, it would appear that OC Transpo does as well.

We have also been consulted by the OC Transpo training department with regard to operator training for the low-floor buses. The resultant training programs are well underway, and we hope that they will provide sufficient information and awareness to allow operators to effectively serve all customers - those with a disability and those without - while operating low-floor buses.

We expect that when low-floor buses begin to be used as wheelchair-accessible vehicles within the regular transit system, there will need to be significant promotion of that fact, both to let people with disabilities know what service is available and to ensure acceptance of the new buses and services by the general public. Without a high level of acceptance, the program could seriously falter. The foundation for this promotion is currently being laid through the early stages of the "Helping you get on board" campaign.

We look forward to the continued progress of the low-floor bus initiative, as we do view it as a significant part of "improving accessibility in Ottawa-Carleton."

CNIB Bus Passes

There was an unfortunate situation with respect to early discussions on the status of the CNIB bus passes. As we were about to consider this question in more detail, a communication problem left both the media and the CNIB with the errant impression that the (current) ATAC committee had taken a firm stand in favour of the elimination of free CNIB passes. We appreciate the Transit Services Committee delaying any consideration of this. If and when this issue arises again, we will provide input as required after appropriate and thorough consideration and consultation.

Light Rail

A member of ATAC sits on 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. The Chair of ATAC sent a letter dated August 31, 1998 to Councillor Holmes, Chair of the Transportation Committee, reflecting that recommendation.

We believe that there has been acceptance of the need for accessibility in the light-rail system. We will continue to work together with the rest of the light rail team to ensure that the pilot project, and any possible future expansion thereof, will be accessible to all, including those with disabilities.

Attendant Card

A proposal was put forward by ATAC last year to provide attendant cards to people who cannot use conventional transit without assistance but can do so with assistance. The idea is to allow an attendant of a fare-paying customer to travel free of charge on conventional transit. A similar service has existed on Para Transpo for a number of years.

Pursuant to this proposal, some follow-up work was done by OC Transpo staff with respect to program formulation. The result of this was brought back to ATAC and we strongly endorsed it. The proposal was then brought to the Transit Services Committee who approved the Attendant Card program for conventional transit at its meeting of May 27, 1998.

We support this program as it will allow more people with disabilities to access conventional transit in a fair way; it is logical that this service be available on conventional transit, especially as we are trying to encourage the use of conventional transit by people with disabilities whenever possible.

Para Transpo Specific Items

Fare Structure

The current OC Transpo universal 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.

In this context, we have looked at the question of what would be a more appropriate fare structure specifically for Para Transpo, having been directed by the Transit Services Committee to do so. A presentation including our recommendations in this area will be made to the Transit Services Committee early in 1999.

We recognize that it has taken longer than originally expected for ATAC to come forward with recommendations in this area, but we needed to take the time necessary to give appropriate consideration to this very important item, and to seek input from other Para Transpo customers. We hope, therefore, that the Transit Services Committee will be receptive to our proposal.

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 about 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.

The learning process and the efforts to tailor the system for use in Ottawa-Carleton have progressed at a slower rate than initially expected. Testing is ongoing, including "live" on-the-road tests on some Saturdays, with varying

results. We have been regularly kept up-to-date on the progress of this by Pat Larkin, Director, Para Transpo and Andy Versteeg, Head of Operations, Para Transpo. Software upgrades have been applied, and Para Transpo staff members have been working closely with the vendor to rectify problems.

Despite the delays, ATAC is still very hopeful that the system will in time fulfil expectations for service improvement. The Trapeze system has been implemented by some other Transit properties, and in an open forum discussion with KPMG/IBI representatives, they seemed to recognize its potential.

Eligibility

It is intended that Para Transpo eligibility will be a greater consideration for ATAC in 1998-1999, and that we will come forward to the Transit Services Committee with related recommendations before the end of that operational year. This is another very important issue to which we must give significant effort and consideration. It is expected that other relevant organizations will also be consulted by OC Transpo about this issue.

While significant work on this is slated for 1998-1999, one related item warrants mention here. We have had some preliminary discussions about this. In the course of these discussions, we heard from representatives of the Civil Liberties Association and the Royal Ottawa Hospital on the issue of providing Para Transpo Service to people with psychiatric disabilities. Related discussions are ongoing between Royal Ottawa Hospital staff and OC Transpo staff.

ATAC looks forward to contributing to discussions surrounding eligibility, as this goes to the core of what we want Para Transpo to be in future, and of Para Transpo's ability to effectively serve its customers. Besides what we want Para Transpo to be, however, another question that is always relevant is that of funding. We recognize that as we formulate recommendations, we will have to be cognisant of funding realities. We also realize that eligibility proposals made for today's environment may not be entirely appropriate for a future time when a large proportion (eventually all) of the conventional fleet is low-floor. The work of the Accessible Transit Steering Committee (on which ATAC has representation) will hopefully help define future directions.

Budget Considerations

At the 1998 Transit Services Committee budget meeting, additions to the Para Transpo budget in the amounts of \$100 000 in 1998 and \$200 000 in 1999 were approved. These additions are being taken from the Para Transpo Operating Reserve. While we are thankful for these increases, it is important to note that we still have a significant trip refusal rate at Para Transpo, a refusal rate that remains a concern to ATAC and the people whom we represent.

While we expect some mitigation of this from the new computerized scheduling system, and in the longer term from the low-floor bus initiative, we must be vigilant in ensuring the lowest refusal rate possible both now and in the future. Funding is clearly a major component to consider here. We will endeavour to assist by making responsible recommendations concerning the Para Transpo fare structure and eligibility, but we look to the members of the Transit Services Committee to consider if anything further can be done in terms of increased funding. We recognize that the factors of fare structure, eligibility, funding and level of service are all interconnected. Let us work together to reach appropriate solutions.

General Item - OC Transpo Comprehensive Review

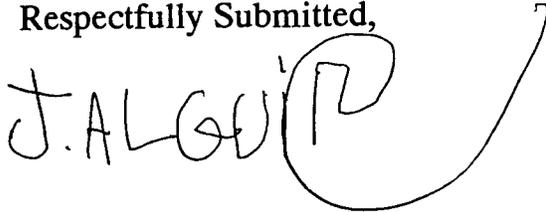
On the whole, our involvement in the KPMG/IBI OC Transpo Comprehensive Review has been productive and the review appears to have been useful. ATAC, however, does take issue with the statement in a draft of the KPMG/IBI report that our Para Transpo refusal rate is acceptable. While one may say it's an industry norm, if in fact it is, this must not be called 'acceptable' since it is **not** acceptable to Para Transpo customers in general.

Concluding Remarks

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 (Director, Para Transpo), Andy Versteeg (Head of Operations, Para Transpo and ATAC Secretary), all who made presentations to and had discussions with ATAC at its meetings (including several OC Transpo staff members), and the Transit Services and Transportation Committee members who have supported us and been open to our input. We appreciate the extension of the term of our current membership for another year, because this will allow us

to address important issues quickly as we move toward a new level of transit accessibility in the region. I look forward to an interesting, thought-provoking and successful year for ATAC in 1998-1999.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. ALGUIRE". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end of the name.

Jeffrey C. Alguire

Chair, Accessible Transit Advisory Committee

February 3, 1999