

## **Executive Summary**

On Tuesday, January 12, 2016, Council was provided an overview of the evolution of Handi-Transit (Specialized Transit Service) in the City of Greater Sudbury to date since pre-amalgamation. Resolution CC2016-03 directed staff to amend the application process and review processes and Mobility Training options.

The *Transit Action Plan: Better Routes, Better Schedules, Better Service*, was approved by Council through Resolution CC2019-43 on February 12, 2019. Resolution 2019-45 directed staff to conduct planning required for infrastructure improvements and service level changes.

This report provides Council with an update on service level improvements being implemented to the Specialized Transit Service. It also recommends further initiatives related to changing the Service Mandate and Eligibility process as well as strengthening service policies in order to provide a more accessible and efficient service. There are no financial impacts as a result of the recommended changes. The service level is supported through contract and recommended mandate, eligibility and policy changes.

## **Background**

Through contracted service, the City of Greater Sudbury Specialized Transit Service provides door-to-door demand responsive para-transit service to persons who have physical disabilities and are unable to use the conventional transit service. Service is provided in an area that extends three kilometers beyond the conventional transit and TransCab systems. The service currently operates with fifteen (15) specialized accessible buses, supplemented with conventional taxi services when necessary to serve approximately 3,000 active clients. The service contains five (5) service areas and provides approximately 130,000 passenger trips annually.

## **Analysis**

Changing demographics and legislative changes is expected to lead to an overall increased demand for specialized transit services. Between 2011 and 2016, the number of residents over 65 years of age increase by 2.3%, making up 18.4% of the total population in Greater Sudbury. The Province of Ontario estimates that "by 2035, 40% of our consumer base will be people with disabilities". Enacted in 2005, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act sets out the standards that must be followed to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities. Transit Services continues to develop and implement changes with steps toward building an accessible Ontario.

The Transit Action Plan recommends changes and enhancements to the service following a process evaluation using various sources, including community priorities.

Community priorities were identified through engagement with front-line transit staff, passengers and the public. This analysis also took into consideration existing long-term Greater Sudbury community plans (Official Plan, Transportation Master Plan, Greater Together: Strategic Plan, etc). Extensive public engagement was conducted with residents and community groups, including Community Action Networks, members of the Accessibility Advisory, Senior Advisory and Sustainable Mobility Panels. Stakeholders provided ideas on how Greater Sudbury's Transit Service could be improved which was shaped into three key themes specifically related to Specialized Transit Services: Bookings, Eligibility and Coordination of Services. Opportunities for improvement will require strategies that offer residents spontaneity of travel, remain inclusive and part of the community and help foster dignity while providing expanding opportunities through a more connected transit system.

Appendix A- "Transit Action Plan- Identified Community Priorities" of this report will inform further on community priorities identified through the Transit Action Plan along with the corresponding opportunity for improvement.

### **Contracted Service Level Improvements**

The City of Greater Sudbury operates Specialized Transit Services through a contract secured with a private company that uses smaller buses to provide services. A new five (5) year agreement has been signed with STC- Leuschen, and provides the City with a variety of service level improvements. The following are key additions to the service effective from July 01, 2019 through to June 30, 2024.

- Aligning with the community priority of "Booking", beginning July 01, 2019, dispatch hours will be expanded from 5-days per week to 7-days per week. Service level enhancements will be made to add 3.5 hours of in-person dispatch response (7am-9pm). All in-person dispatch will be bilingual.
- Aligning with the community priority of "Coordination of Services", effective August 01, 2019, 15 new low-floor buses will be added to the Transit Fleet. The implementation of low-floor buses will reduce loading and unloading times, therefore improving service delivery. The new buses will improve overall client comfort and independence. Further, in support of efficiencies, low-floor buses will achieve reduced down time associated with ramp equipment failure during winter months.
- The contract will provide improved communication and tracking of collisions and incidents involving the Specialized Transit Service through a "Rapid Response Notification System" called **WeCAIR** (Web-enabled customer-accessible incident report). This system includes all incident and collision response procedures and will ensure timely response to incidents with key data for follow up.

- The contract will provide for improved service delivery and customer service through improved communication, tracking and resolution information of customer complaints.
- Aligning with the community priority of “Coordination of Services” and to better align specialized service with the conventional system, the contract provides for Operator Uniforms that will be the same as those worn by Conventional Sudbury Transit Operators. This provides optic-unity of transportation services provided by the City of Greater Sudbury and improved professional image of Specialized Transit Services.
- Aligning with the community priority of “Coordination of Services”, the contract allows for future consideration of an enhanced web-based Trip Request System to allow for spontaneity of travel as envisioned by the Transit Action Plan. This system may be scalable for use within the specialized and conventional transit system to request and embark on multimodal trips in real time.

## **Recommendations**

In addition to service level enhancements and efficiencies identified through the Transit Action Plan and achieved through new contract delivery, Staff have identified and recommend further initiatives related to changing the Service Mandate and Eligibility process as well as strengthening service policies in order to provide a more accessible and efficient service.

### **1- Recommended Amendments to Mandate and Dynamic Eligibility Process**

The current mandate for Specialized Transit Services in the City of Greater Sudbury is “to provide transportation persons who have physical disabilities and are unable to use the conventional transit system”. As referenced in Appendix B- “Definition of *Disability- AODA and Human Rights Code*”, the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act, 2005, c.11 (AODA)* and the *Human Rights Code, R.S.O. 1990, c. H.19* each define “disability” the same.

The current mandate is not inclusive to all types of disabilities as defined by both the AODA and Human Rights Code and limits access for those that have a disability that may not be physical for Ontarians with Disability Act (AODA). Staff recommend that the City amend the mandate for specialized transit services and remove the current reference to physical disability as being the only disability that prevents access to conventional services.

If made in isolation, the change in mandate may increase demand on the service, and capacity constraints may become increasingly challenging. When this change is coupled with an enhanced, more accurate eligibility process, the change in mandate ensures that an applicant's needs are met upon initial

application. Currently, applicants are denied services based on their disability not meeting the “physical disability” requirement. The denial often proceeds through the current appeal mechanism which prompts the matter to be heard at the Hearing Committee. Once the application for appeal is received by Clerk’s, once forwarded to Transit, Staff resolve the matter outside of formal process by contacting them personally and determining their needs. An amended eligibility process would capture these instances upon application as opposed to upon appeal. It is the most equitable and cost effective way of serving the mobility needs of individuals who have no other mobility choice than to rely on the Specialized Transit Service. Staff recommend the implementation of a dynamic eligibility process.

In line with the requirements of the AODA, and in order to categorize eligibility accordingly, Staff recommend that the City should adopt and implement a more conversational and objective assessment process. This process can use formal assessment and/or conversation with the applicant to best identify the personal environmental barriers which prevent them from taking the conventional bus for some or all of their trips, thereby aligning services with needs.

Based on the needs identified for an individual, the reservation agent will have the information required to compare the client’s abilities and limitations with access barriers in the fixed route transit environment for that trip, and would then decide what service is required for the individual trip (Conventional, OnDemand, Specialized or a combination of).

Upon receiving Council direction to change the service mandate, Staff will have amendments made to the current By-law (2002-199A) with regards to “Eligibility Criteria” to remove reference to “physical” disability criteria in exchange for mandate wording that is both non-discriminatory towards specific disabilities and more inclusive. Further review will be completed to ensure the by-law corresponds with organizational roles and responsibilities and further aligns with service level delivery.

In conjunction with recommended changes to the eligibility process and to support efficiency in the service level, Staff will complete a reassessment of all current rider accessibility similar to the review completed in 2014. This exercise will support aligning riders with the level of service required, whether Unconditional, Conditional or Temporary.

## **2- Updated Service Policies**

Given the high demand for Specialized transit service, it is critical for clients to call and cancel any trips they do not require. To accomplish this, Staff

recommends the development of clear and concise cancellation policies with related outcomes to violations in order to support efficiencies and reduce resources being sent where they are not needed.

Clearly defining terms such as “Standing Order” and “Late Cancellation vs. No Show” as well as outlining a simple stepped infraction process will support a more efficient service level while assisting to ensure clients receive the transportation services they require.

Below are recommended guidelines for issues of “late cancelation” or “no show”:

1 <sup>st</sup> Infraction	Rider will receive a call from the Service Provider inquiring what events led to the Late Cancellation or No-Show event. The Rider will be educated on all related Ridership Policies and potential next steps for further issue.
2 <sup>nd</sup> Infraction	Rider will receive a written letter outlining (as a reminder) all related Ridership Policies and a warning of potential suspension or cancellation to a Standing Order, or service.
3 <sup>rd</sup> Infraction	Rider would receive notice of suspension or cancellation of Standing Order or service. The Notice will include steps required to reinstate their ridership.

The Service Provider will run monthly reports to aid City Staff with policy enforcement.

## **Next Steps**

Staff will return to Committee in the Fall with an update on the following areas which will further enhance the Specialized Transit Service provided.

### **1-Growth of Mobility Training**

Staff will review capacity to grow the Mobility Training Program with consideration for any impact on time required by staff to book and provide the training. Examples of groups that could benefit from travel training are high

school and elementary students, residents with physical, cognitive or learning disabilities, new residents of the community, those faced with a sudden change where they are unable to drive. Supported by an easier to use conventional system, training these customers, allows for services to be used in the most cost effective manner and protects specialized service for customers who have no other travel options due to more constricting nature of their disabilities.

## **2-Re-designed Appeals Process**

Moving from the current panel process for appeals, Staff will be working to develop and implement a formal appeal process that allows a subject matter expert to determine the transportation needs of an applicant. This process has proven successful in other municipalities and will allow specific inclusion of a third party subject matter expert to make objective recommendations in support of resolution.

## **References**

Handi Transit Report to Council- January 12, 2016

<https://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=agenda&action=navigator&id=938&itemid=9708&lang=en>

Greater Sudbury Transit Action Plan- Better Routes, Better Schedules, Better Service- Report to Council- February 12, 2019

<https://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=agenda&action=navigator&id=1312&itemid=13582&lang=en>

The Path to 2025: Ontario's Accessibility Action Plan

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/path-2025-ontarios-accessibility-action-plan#section-1>

Census Profile, 2016 Census- City of Greater Sudbury

<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=3553005&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&Data=Count&SearchText=Greater%20Sudbury&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&GeoLevel=PR&GeoCode=3553005&TABID=1>

Focus on Geography Series, 2011 Census- City of Greater Sudbury

<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-cma-eng.cfm?LANG=Eng&GK=CMA&GC=580>

## Appendix A

### Transit Action Plan- Identified Community Priorities

<b>Community Priority</b>	<b>What We Heard Through Public Engagement</b>
<b>Bookings</b>	Reduce lead time before travel, which is usually 48 business hours.  Make it easier to reserve by allowing trips to be booked 7 days a week as opposed to 5.
<b>Opportunity for Improvement</b>	
Dispatch and booking times are established through a third party contract. The request for proposal for the new service requested an extension of dispatch hours and alternatives for reducing booking lead times in order to meet this identified priority.	

<b>Community Priority</b>	<b>What We Heard Through Public Engagement</b>
<b>Eligibility</b>	Consider improving and expanding the eligibility process
<b>Opportunity for Improvement</b>	
<p>Eligibility needs to consider the Accessibility for Ontarians and Disabilities Act (AODA) and adopt the same definition of "disability" used by the Human Rights Code (to include cognitive). The City's mandate should be revised to include all types of disabilities that prevent a person from accessing the Conventional Transit System. This would include a more robust eligibility assessment process to evaluate an applicant's individual barriers and provide access to the service on a trip by trip basis.</p> <p>The current eligibility process includes three types of categories which are required under the AODA: Unconditional, Conditional and Temporary. Under the current assessment process, there is a missed opportunity as most applicants fall under the Unconditional category. A new assessment process could include a phone conversation component between the Applicant and Staff to better determine the needs of the Applicant and encourage increased Conditional eligibility assignment. This new process would be required to ensure mobility services align directly with the needs of the rider as it relates to the type and duration of services required.</p>	

Community Priority	What We Heard Through Public Engagement
<b>Coordination of Services</b>	Provide more options for passengers by making it easier to also use TransCab and the accessible Conventional Transit services, encourage their use, and provide travel training.
Opportunity for Improvement	
<p>Improve the Eligibility process to allow reservation agents to compare the client's abilities with known environmental barriers in order to assess what service, or combination of, is best suited for their trip (Conventional, Transcab or Specialized). For passengers requiring the use of Conventional or Transcab services, based on the eligibility assessment results, provide travel training to support the applicant and increase their comfort level in using all systems.</p> <p>Providing this support will allow for spontaneity of travel opportunities that allow Transit users to make their own mobility choices based on their barriers.</p>	

## **Appendix B**

### **Definition of Disability- AODA and Human Rights Code**

*“disability” means,*

- (a) any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,
- (b) a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,
- (c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,
- (d) a mental disorder, or
- (e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997; (“handicap”)