

GREATER SUDBURY TRANSIT ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

The freedom to make choices is, in our mobile society, dependent upon the freedom to move.

— Colorado Transit

Aim

The aim of the Greater Sudbury Transit Accessibility Plan is to describe measures that Greater Sudbury Transit has taken and will take to identify, remove and prevent barriers to public access to Greater Sudbury Transit.

Objectives

The Greater Sudbury Transit Accessibility Plan describes the process by which Greater Sudbury Transit identifies, reviews and prevents barriers to public access to the Transit system and includes a list of barriers to be addressed and measures which will be undertaken to ensure barrier removal is completed as expeditiously as possible within the resources allocated to Greater Sudbury Transit services.

Description of Greater Sudbury Transit

The City of Greater Sudbury was created on January 1, 2001 combining the Region of Sudbury, the Cities of Sudbury and Valley East and the Towns of Walden, Rayside-Balfour, Onaping-Falls, Capreol and Nickel Centre into one municipality which spans 3,627 square kilometers and is the largest Ontario city by land mass. The City of Greater Sudbury is almost 2/3 the size of Prince Edward Island and has a population of 155,219.

Greater Sudbury Transit vehicles drive 2.55 million kilometers annually, providing 130,600 hours of service and 3.5 million passenger trips. Greater Sudbury Transit uses a fleet of 48 buses to deliver services across a route network that spans the community. The North/South route coverage is 45.7 km while the East/West route length is 68 km. While all of our buses have some accessibility features, there are currently 15 low floor buses in our service, all of which are scheduled on designated accessible routes which provide services to areas of high population density, post-secondary institutions, seniors residences and the hospitals/medical arts communities. A Request For Proposal is being issued for the purchase of new buses in 2003 and one of the evaluation criteria which will be used for the new vehicles is their accessibility.

Conventional transit services are supplemented by Handi-Transit. A Request For Proposal for the provision of Handi-Transit services in the new City of Greater Sudbury was issued in 2002 and will be implemented in the spring of 2003, at which time there will be one Handi-Transit service provider and centralized dispatch for the service. The successful service provider will be purchasing all new vehicles for the delivery of this service.

Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) was established by the Council of the City of Greater Sudbury as mandated by the Ontarians with Disabilities Act and is comprised primarily of persons with disabilities. The Accessibility Advisory Committee is to provide advice, to Council, on an annual basis about the preparation and implementation of two accessibility plans: the Greater Sudbury Transit Accessibility Plan and the Greater Sudbury Accessibility Plan.

The Members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee are:

Councillor Mike Petryna (Chair)
Elizabeth Lounsbury (Vice-Chair)
Bob Bannister
Nancy Baron
Earl Black
Shirley Childs
Councillor Ron Dupuis
Wendy Franklin

During the public input process, some individuals commented that membership on the Accessibility Advisory Committee should be expanded and enlarged so as to include representatives from all sectors of the community. The current Accessibility Advisory Committee members have been appointed to November 2003 at which time Council will be encouraged to consider this recommendation in appointing the next Accessibility Advisory Committee. In the interim, all meetings are open to the public and public input is welcomed by AAC members.

The Co-ordinator for the Greater Sudbury Transit Accessibility Plan is Caroline Hallsworth, General Manager of Citizen and Leisure Services. Other members of the staff team who have assisted the Accessibility Advisory Committee with their deliberations are:

Robert Gauthier	Supervisor of Transit Operations
Robert Johnston	Director, Transportation Services
Lisa McAuley	Executive Assistant, General Manager of Citizen and Leisure Services
Roger Sauvé	Manager, Greater Sudbury Transit
Kerry Scott	Administrative Assistant, Director of Transportation Services
William Price	Transit Supervisor/Transit Driver Trainer

Greater Sudbury Transit Commitment to Accessibility Planning

The City of Greater Sudbury is a growing, world-class community bringing talent, technology and a great northern lifestyle together. Our Mission is to provide excellent access to quality municipal services and leadership in the social, environmental and economic development of the City of Greater Sudbury. Amongst the values of the City of Greater Sudbury are a commitment to high quality service with a citizen focus and managing the resources in our trust efficiently, responsibility and effectively. One of the stated broad goals of the municipality is to promote the well-being of our citizens in a healthy, safe and stimulating community.

The people of the City of Greater Sudbury support the rights of persons of all ages and abilities to enjoy equal opportunities and to participate fully in the life of the community. The preamble to the newly passed *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* states "that Ontarians with disabilities experience barriers to participating in the mainstream of Ontario society". Geographic distance and physical accessibility are two barriers that

prevent persons with disabilities from participating freely in all aspects of society and they are barriers that can be removed through the introduction of an accessible transit service to all areas of the community. The City of Greater Sudbury has removed geographic barriers between communities and is committed to the continued and strategic expansion of its area transit system so as to enable all citizens to have the freedom to move within our new city.

The goal of Greater Sudbury Transit is to be a public transit system that is accessible, integrated to the degree possible, that fully respects the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities and that provides appropriate alternatives for those who are unable to use even the most accessible conventional transit services. This goal is derived from the Ontario Human Rights Commission Consultation Report entitled "Human Rights and Public Transit Services in Ontario".

Based on these principles of integration and respect for dignity, it is our goal to integrate as many riders as possible on our accessible conventional transit system while providing a parallel system for those citizens who cannot access our highly accessible route system so that we can provide accessible transportation to the more than 95% of the residents of our new city who live within 2 kilometers of our service boundaries.

Barrier Identification Process

Greater Sudbury Transit has identified a barrier as a human made design flaw in the environment that prevents or hinders a person with a disability from fully participating in society or from accessing a service, in this case Transit.

The Greater Sudbury Accessibility Advisory Committee was appointed by Council in the fall of 2002 and adopted the following timeframes for Accessibility Planning:

December 2003 - First Meeting of the Accessibility Advisory Committee and development of a planning process and public consultation process for the first Greater Sudbury Transit Accessibility Plan.

January 20, 2003 - Public Meeting to identify barriers to access of Greater Sudbury Transit by persons with disabilities and to brainstorm for potential solutions for removal of these barriers.

February 2003 - Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting to review barriers and solutions identified at the public meeting and to set priorities and develop strategies and time frames for barrier removal and prevention

March 2003 - Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting to review the Greater Sudbury Transit Draft Accessibility Plan and to identify strategies to monitor progress in barrier removal and prevention.

April 2003 - Draft Greater Sudbury Transit Accessibility Plan for 2003 presented to Council for approval. Following approval, the communication portion of the plan will be activated.

Recent Barrier Removal Initiatives

Greater Sudbury Transit has a history of Transportation Accessibility Planning. The City of Sudbury introduced a Full Accessibility Implementation Plan in 1993. In the spring of 2001 a public consultation process was held to assist staff and the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Panel in developing a new Handi-Transit policy for Council's consideration. Three public meetings were held at different community venues and there was a series of dialogues with community agencies including the VON and CNIB. On August 14, 2001 the new City of Greater Sudbury adopted a Policy on Transportation for Persons with Physical Disabilities which phased in service level harmonization over a 5 year period.

Public Meeting - January 20, 2003

The Accessibility Advisory Committee recognized the value of soliciting input from citizens, and in particular from transit users, in identifying barriers to public access of Greater Sudbury Transit and accordingly scheduled a full day of public consultations on January 20, 2003. The goal of the meeting was to hear from all those interested in accessible transit systems in the City of Greater Sudbury. In particular, the Accessibility Advisory Committee indicated that it wished to identify barriers, be they physical barriers, information or communication barriers, attitudinal barriers, policies or practices, which make it difficult for a person with a disability to access Greater Sudbury Transit. For each barrier identified, the Accessibility Advisory Committee hoped also to receive suggestions as to how the barrier might be overcome.

The meeting was advertised in five different community newspapers in both official languages and in addition, letters of invitation were sent to 21 interested groups in the community. All participants were referred to the Ontarians with Disabilities Act website at <http://www.gov.on.ca/mczcr/accessibility/index.html> and to the Ontario Human Rights Commission Consultation Report on Public Transit website at www.ohrc.on.ca/english/consultations/transit-consultation-report.shtml for background information.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting was structured so that groups with similar interests could attend at the same time, so as to ensure a comprehensive discussion of related issues. Approximately 60 people attended during the course of the day and the schedule of the discussions was as follows:

9:30 a.m. - 10:45 a.m.	Physical and mobility disabilities
11:00 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.	Sensory impairments including hearing loss, speech disorders, and vision impairments
1:00 p.m. - 2:15 p.m.	Intellectual and learning disabilities, mental health

In addition, a number of written submissions were received by the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Through the public consultation held on January 20, 2003, the newly formed Accessibility Advisory Committee identified a number of barriers which could be rectified immediately.

BARRIER TYPE AND DESCRIPTION	ACTION TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIER
PHYSICAL BARRIERS	
Periodically, a non-accessible bus is used on a route that is designated as accessible. Not all operators are familiar with the protocol for providing transportation when the accessible bus is not available.	Greater Sudbury Transit provides regular training to all operators. As part of the 2003 training, the protocol for operators in this situation was reviewed. Operators will contact the supervisor to ensure either that an accessible bus is arriving immediately or that an accessible taxi is dispatched to the bus stop.
Current tie-down systems don't meet the needs of all wheelchair users.	As part of the daily maintenance routines, tie-downs will be cleaned to ensure that they are free of salt and fully operational. As tie-downs are replaced Greater Sudbury Transit will standardize to the Q-strait retractable hook system.
It is sometimes difficult for passengers with visual impairments to transfer between buses and move through crowds at the Transit Centre.	Greater Sudbury Transit provides regular training to all operators. As part of the 2003 training, a protocol was developed for this situation. Passengers may identify to the operator that they will require assistance at the Transit Centre, the operator will radio ahead and either a supervisor or the security staff will meet the bus and escort the passenger to their next platform. If Transit Centre staff are not available, the operator will assist the passenger.
Pedestrian and wheelchair passengers attempt to use the ramps at the same time, with some passengers attempting to move in the opposite direction of the wheelchair.	Greater Sudbury Transit provides regular training to all operators. As part of the 2003 training, a protocol was developed for this situation. Operators will announce the use of the ramp and at which door it is being used and ask that pedestrian passengers wait until the ramp is retracted before using that door.
COMMUNICATION/INFORMATION BARRIERS	
The Transit Information Line is not accessible for those with hearing impairments and the Transit Centre does not have publically accessible TTY service.	There is a TTY line at the Citizen Call Centre which may be used by those with hearing impairments to access transportation information. Alternatively, citizens may use the Bell Relay service. A TTY phone for public use is being installed at the Transit Centre.

BARRIER TYPE AND DESCRIPTION	ACTION TAKEN TO REMOVE BARRIER
COMMUNICATION/INFORMATION BARRIERS	
<p>Passengers with hearing impairments do not realize that the operator is making an announcement.</p> <p>In the event of an emergency when buses are stopped or re-routed, individuals who have hearing impairments, communication disorders and or cognitive disabilities may be at risk.</p>	<p>Greater Sudbury Transit provides regular training to all operators. As part of the 2003 training, a protocol was developed for this situation. Operators will stand-up, turn around and face passengers when making an announcement, particularly if that announcement is related to service delays or safety. In the case where service is re-routed or stopped, the operators will exit all passengers through the front door and verify that they are aware of the situation and have a transportation alternative. When necessary, the supervisor will be contacted to assist passengers with alternate transportation arrangements.</p>
<p>Alarms and signals are not accessible to all users.</p>	<p>The farebox system and stop requested signs have both visual and auditory signals. Fire alarms at the Transit Centre will be checked to ensure that they have both visual and auditory signals.</p>
<p>Passengers with visual impairments and cognitive impairments have difficulty knowing where the vehicle is en route.</p>	<p>Greater Sudbury Transit operators ensure that passengers disembark at the appropriate stop whenever the passenger requests assistance in identifying their destination.</p>
POLICY OR PROCEDURAL BARRIERS	
<p>Handi-Transit hours of services are not standardized and there is no evening and weekend services in commuter areas.</p>	<p>The Handi-Transit policy adopted in August 2001 phases in standardized service hours over a period of five years with annual incremental increases in resources and service hours.</p>
<p>Handi-Transit service hours do not meet the needs of Dialysis patients who are scheduled for three dialysis shifts across 6 days of the week.</p>	<p>Meetings have been held with the hospital's dialysis unit to explain the scheduling difficulties for Handi-Transit passengers. The hospital will endeavour to schedule patients within the Handi-Transit service hours.</p>
<p>Passengers with cognitive impairments have trouble paying their fares correctly. On occasion, they may have insufficient funds or have forgotten their pass.</p>	<p>Greater Sudbury Transit fareboxes count and display the fare paid as coins are deposited in the farebox. Greater Sudbury Transit has a policy that no passenger is ever stranded.</p>

Barriers Identified and Timeframes for Barrier Removal

The Accessibility Advisory Committee reviewed each and every item identified through the public input process and identified all those items which were barriers to public access of transit for inclusion in this plan. Items which are specific to a particular individual, such as the location of a bus stop in relation to their home address, will be addressed with the individual and have been included in the barrier identification process only if they apply to transit users as a group.

Some of the items raised in the public meeting were discussed by the Accessibility Advisory Committee and deemed not to be barriers to access of public transportation. For example, some individuals expressed concerns regarding the frequency of service to area hospitals. Staff advised the AAC that Greater Sudbury Transit services to all hospitals are available every 30 minutes, with more frequent service available during peak daytime periods. The AAC deemed that there was regular and frequent service to the three hospital sites. Similarly, some individuals expressed concerns about the requirements to book Handi-Transit in advance and expressed the opinion that there should be a process that allows for emergency bookings. Staff advised the AAC that while passengers are required to book trips two days in advance, exceptions are always made for medical appointments and to attend funerals and that whenever schedules and resources allow, shorter notice trips are accommodated.

There were two interconnected issues relating to attendants that the Accessibility Advisory Committee discussed in some detail. Firstly, there were requests made for Handi-Transit drivers to escort passengers into buildings, particularly at the hospital sites, so as to ensure that the passengers reached their ultimate destination. The Accessibility Advisory Committee reviewed the role and mandate for public transportation systems and recommends that the current practice of escorting passengers to the building entrance and ensuring that the passenger is able to get into the building is an appropriate role for a transit service provider but that to have the transit operator escort passengers to a particular office or service area within a building would create delays for other passengers using the service and was beyond the role of a transportation system. Some groups who work with individuals with dementia advocated for these passengers to be allowed to access Handi-Transit so that they might ride without an attendant. In reviewing safety and accessibility issues for all passengers, the AAC recommends that the Handi-Transit system is not an appropriate transportation solution for passengers with dementia as the vehicle operator can not ensure that the passenger remains seated, seatbelted and safe during the ride and as the transit operator is not responsible for escorting the individual passenger once they disembark from the service vehicle and enter the destination point. Essentially, the issue is not one of functional ability to access conventional transit, but rather one of the need for an attendant. Therefore Greater Sudbury Transit will implement assistive measures to facilitate ridership by attendants on conventional transit, including the provision of training passes for attendants and a review of an attendant or escort pass program for ambulatory passengers with special needs.

Another issue that was raised was the unique transportation needs of those in a medically fragile condition and those for whom medical conditions make long trips uncomfortable and unsafe. While every effort is made to schedule trips as efficiently as possible and with a view to ensuring that all passengers have a reasonable ride time, it is not appropriate for a public transportation system to provide either medical care en route or to provide private individual door-to-door service that does not include other passengers or destination points.

Transit fares can be a barrier to access and recommendations were made at the public input meeting and in correspondence received that the fare structure recognizes the unique needs of different groups within the community and that any transit fare increases be reasonable and whenever possible do not exceed the rate of inflation or social assistance increases. Of particular concern was the transit fare and transfer policy as it applies to children and adults who are dropping children off at daycare. Greater Sudbury Transit staff will review children's fares, family passes and fares and adult transfer policies from other transit properties and bringing a report to Council in 2003-2004 recommending an appropriate fare structure for children, students and families as well as a protocol for re-boarding transit after daycare dropoffs.

In prioritizing barriers to be addresses in 2003 and 2004, the Accessibility Advisory Committee considered that all barriers which can be removed or addressed at little or no cost should be of highest priority, as should those barriers which have a significant impact on persons with disabilities ability to access Greater Sudbury Transit.

BARRIER TYPE AND DESCRIPTION	STRATEGY FOR REMOVAL and/or PREVENTION	RESPONSIBILITY, TIMETABLE & RESOURCES REQUIRED
PHYSICAL BARRIERS		
Snowbanks at bus stops, intersections and curbs make it difficult to access Transit vehicles.	Ensure that snowbanks are removed at bus stops and Handi-Trans drop-off points and that the path between the bus stop and the intersection is cleared.	Manager, Greater Sudbury Transit will review resources available for snow clearing and review service delivery models to ensure timeliness in snow removal at bus stops. If necessary a budget increase will be addressed in 2004.
Not all routes are serviced by accessible buses.	Increase the number of routes with accessible buses by ensuring that all new buses purchased are accessible buses. Review the maintenance cycle for all buses with lifts to ensure that lifts are always functional. When possible, the extending ramps will be replaced with flip ramps which are more reliable. Route schedules will be reviewed to ensure that maximization of access.	Manager, Greater Sudbury Transit will ensure that the RFP for buses purchased in 2003 includes accessibility criteria. Manager, Greater Sudbury Transit will be responsible for periodically reviewing bus allocation and route design to ensure maximization of access using existing fleet. Over the 10 - 15 year cycle of fleet renewal, all routes should be serviced by accessible buses.
Bus stops are not highly visible	Use high contrast colours on bus stop poles. Use high contrast colours on bus stop signage. Locate bus stop poles near sidewalks so that they can be detected by long cane users.	Manager, Greater Sudbury Transit to ensure that as bus stop signs and poles are replaced consideration is given to implementation of high contrast signage. Proactive review in 2003-2004 of bus stop poles and signage at destinations used frequently by low vision users to ensure that these bus stops are highly visible.

BARRIER TYPE AND DESCRIPTION	STRATEGY FOR REMOVAL and/or PREVENTION	RESPONSIBILITY, TIMETABLE & RESOURCES REQUIRED
INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION BARRIERS		
Transit Centre signage, particularly the platform signs and destination signs over the bus front window are difficult to read for persons with visual impairments.	Use high contrast, preferably black on white, signage with large, clear print. Hang signs at eye level so that individuals can approach and read the signs. Install tactile braille signage on Transit Centre platforms. Review bus numbering/naming system for ease of visibility. Ensure consistency of platform assignment.	Manager, Greater Sudbury Transit to conduct signage review in consultation with community users during 2003. Funding for new signage program to be included in 2004 budget.
Transit schedules are difficult to read and understand.	Review text and layout of schedules for simplicity. Print large-print and braille versions of the schedules. Greater Sudbury Transit is committed to ensuring that passengers get to their destinations. Information staff are directed to spend whatever time is required with passengers to ensure that they understand the transit schedule and how to reach their destination. Greater Sudbury Transit provides ridership training for groups and individuals with special needs.	Manager, Greater Sudbury Transit to review schedules with key community groups in 2003 and consider alternate schedule formats. Any requests for new funding to support alternate format schedules will be included in the 2004 budget. Greater Sudbury Transit staff to continue to promote the ridership training program and to reinforce our commitment to customer service.
ATTITUDINAL BARRIERS		
Operators are not aware of the needs of passengers with special needs.	Ensure that operator training includes modules on sensitivity training. While some speakers recommended identification of those with special needs through a special system of passes, other users felt that forced identification of special needs passengers stigmatized those who are trying to integrate in the community. At the request of passengers or their legal guardian, include information on crew guides relating to special needs passengers who regularly use that route (ie. destination information). Provide a mechanism for voluntary self-identification.	Greater Sudbury Transit provides regular training to all operators. Sensitivity to special needs passengers was included in the 2003 training and will incorporate into all new operator training and ongoing training programs. In 2003 the Manager, Greater Sudbury Transit will implement a system of coloured pass holders, with information cards, for those passenger who choose to self identify and will review the passes currently in use to ensure consistency of pass design for different types of pass.

Review and Monitoring Process

Each year, the Accessibility Advisory Committee will review the barriers listed in the previous year's plan to measure the extent to which barriers have been removed and prevented as described in the Accessibility Plan. The Accessibility Advisory Committee meets regularly and includes in its discussions ongoing review of issues as they arise pertaining to access to Greater Sudbury Transit. Discussions will be held with community partners and advocacy groups to ensure that the Greater Sudbury Transit Accessibility Plan is implemented in accordance with their stated needs.

Communication of the Greater Sudbury Transit Accessibility Plan

The Greater Sudbury Transit Accessibility Plan was presented to the Council of the City of Greater Sudbury for their approval on April 10, 2003. The plan will be made available on the City of Greater Sudbury Website and will be sent by e-mail or regular mail to all participants in the planning process who have indicated that they wish to receive a copy of the plan. The City of Greater Sudbury will work with the Canadian Institute for the Blind to make alternative format copies of the plan available to those who require it. The release of the Greater Sudbury Transit Accessibility Plan is the subject of a City of Greater Sudbury Press Release.