

Document 1: Vehicle-for-Hire Accessibility Fund Summary of Public Consultations

Vehicle-for-Hire Accessibility Fund: Summary of Public Consultations

1.0 Project Overview

On April 13, 2016, City Council approved the report entitled “Regulating Vehicles for Hire in the City of Ottawa – Taxis, Limousines and Private Transportation Companies”. As part of its deliberations, Council delegated authority to the General Manager, Emergency and Protective Services (EPS) to establish a voluntary per-trip surcharge for accessibility to be paid by licensed Private Transportation Companies (PTCs), with any funds received from the surcharge to be directed to a dedicated reserve fund.

In July 2017, the City of Ottawa entered into an agreement with Uber Canada Inc. (hereinafter referred to as “Uber”), who agreed to pay a voluntary accessibility surcharge of \$0.07 per-trip to support accessible transportation in the City of Ottawa. This voluntary gesture took effect with the licensing of Uber on October 4, 2016. By the end of 2017, Uber had contributed approximately \$450,000 to the Vehicle-for-Hire (VFH) Accessibility Fund.

In April 2016, Council further directed that the General Manager, EPS establish a Steering Committee comprised of internal and external stakeholders to develop a consultation strategy with respect to how fees generated through the Vehicle-for-Hire (VFH) Accessibility Fund could be used to offset costs for a number of programs supporting accessible transportation. The VFH Accessibility Fund Steering Committee, chaired by the General Manager, EPS, is comprised of members from the City’s Accessibility Office, the Accessibility Advisory Committee, By-law & Regulatory Services, Transportation Services, and City Councillor Shad Qadri. The Steering determined that public consultations were necessary for generating ideas on how the funds could be allocated.

This document summarizes findings from the VFH Accessibility Fund public consultations that took place from December 2017 to February 2018.

2.0 Methodology

As per Council's direction, money from the VFH Accessibility Fund must be spent on programs and services that support accessible transportation in the city of Ottawa. The purpose of the VFH Accessibility Fund consultations was to obtain feedback from the public on how Council should spend this money.

The consultation process began on December 20, 2017 and continued until February 16, 2018. Feedback was obtained from 130 people using a combination of qualitative and quantitative consultation methods. Members of the public were invited to participate in one of five in-person sessions and/or complete an online survey. Feedback was also received by telephone and e-mail.

3.0 Evaluation Criteria

The Vehicle-for-Hire (VFH) Accessibility Fund aims to address the reality that many PTCs, such as Uber, cannot accommodate individuals who require the use of a power wheelchair or scooter. All feedback and ideas obtained through the consultation process were considered, however, as per Council's direction, money from the VFH Accessibility Fund must be spent on programs and services that support accessible transportation in the city of Ottawa. For the purpose of the VFH Accessibility Fund project and related consultations, these programs and services include:

- Accessible transportation services provided **directly** by wheelchair accessible vehicles such as OC Transpo, Para Transpo and taxis; and/or
- City and community-based programs and services that **support or enhance** the ability of persons of all ages with physical disabilities who require the use of a mobility device to move around the city regardless of the mode(s) of transportation used.

Further, ideas on how to spend money in the VFH Accessibility Fund must align with:

- The amount of money available in the VFH Accessibility Fund.
- At least one of the six Guiding Principles described in section 4.3.

4.0 Key Findings

4.1 Demographics

Feedback was obtained from 130 members of the public through in-person sessions, an online survey, telephone and email. Out of 130 participants, 57% use a mobility device/aid. Of these, 39% use an electronic wheelchair or scooter and 18% use a manual wheelchair, walker, or some other device/aid.

4.2 Top Modes of Transportation

Participants were asked to identify the top three modes of transportation they currently use to meet their transportation needs within the city of Ottawa, with '1' being the mode of travel most frequently used.

The modes of transportation were categorized by season, as follows:

Fall/Winter

1. Personal Vehicle
2. OC Transpo
3. Para Transpo

Spring/Summer:

1. OC Transpo
2. Personal Vehicle
3. Para Transpo

It is important to note that the top modes of transportation differed for individuals who use an electric wheelchair or scooter as follows:

Fall/Winter

1. Para Transpo
2. OC Transpo
3. Accessible Taxicab

Spring/Summer:

1. OC Transpo
2. Para Transpo
3. Accessible Taxicab

4.3 Guiding Principles

While participants were encouraged to share all feedback and ideas, as per Council's direction, money from the Vehicle-for-Hire (VFH) Accessibility Fund must be spent on programs and services that support accessible transportation in the city of Ottawa. To determine eligibility of feedback and ideas, a set of guiding principles were developed. Participants were advised that all feedback received through the VFH Accessibility Fund consultation process will be reviewed using six guiding principles. As part of the consultations, participants were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with each of the proposed principles. The majority of participants agreed with all six of the guiding principles as follows:

1. **Accessible:** Programs and services that support and/or provide transportation services, within the city of Ottawa, to persons of all ages who have physical disabilities that require the use of a power wheelchair or scooter to meet daily transportation needs. **82% Agreed**
2. **Safe:** Programs and services that further enhance the personal safety of individuals with mobility disabilities while using accessible public transportation services in the city of Ottawa. **90% Agreed**
3. **Available:** Programs and services that promote or enhance the availability of accessible transportation services for persons with mobility disabilities across all areas of the City, including rural zones and are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, regardless of weather. **87% Agreed**
4. **Affordable:** Programs and services aimed at ensuring that public transportation costs for individuals for persons with mobility disabilities is equal to or less transportation costs for individuals who do not have disabilities. **91% Agreed**
5. **Timely:** Programs and services aimed at ensuring individuals with mobility disabilities are able to access public transportation services in a timely manner (on-demand) that is comparable to services available to all other customers. **92% Agreed**
6. **Sustainable:** Programs and services that the City is able to implement and maintain using available resources including funds, information, and staff resources. **89% Agreed**

A total of 25 out of 26 participants from the in-person sessions agreed with all six of the guiding principles. Most agreed in theory, however, many expressed concerns that

some of the guiding principles may never be realized through the VFH Accessibility Fund. For example, Para Transpo could never become timely (on-demand) as there are currently not enough funds to purchase and operate the required number of Para Transpo vehicles for on-demand service.

Upon reviewing comments from survey respondents who disagreed with one or more of the guiding principles, it became clear that the survey question was not well understood by some. Many individuals answered the question as if they were being asked to agree or disagree on whether current modes of transportation met each of the guiding principles. This was not the case for the in-person consultations as the facilitator was able to clarify the intent of the question with participants.

4.4 Barriers to Accessing Transportation Services

As part of the consultation process, participants were asked to identify the top barriers that prevent them from using various modes of private and public transportation available in the city of Ottawa. The barriers identified by participants that spanned across all modes of transportation included:

1. **Availability:** Transportation services for persons with disabilities are not available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. People with disabilities must plan their travel and are not able to live spontaneously. This becomes particularly challenging in the event of an emergency after hours involving a friend or a loved one. Additionally, accessible transportation services are limited or unavailable in rural areas.
2. **Timeliness:** Persons with disabilities are unable to access public transportation services in a timely manner (on-demand).
3. **Affordability:** Participants noted that in general, people with disabilities have lower incomes making cost a barrier to accessing both private and public transportation services.
4. **Weather:** Snow, ice and rain can prevent disabled persons from accessing various modes of transportation. Participants identified a lack of snow clearing on sidewalks and at OC Transpo and Para Transpo bus stops as one of their greatest challenges.

Participants were also asked to identify barriers as they apply to specific modes of transportation. The top five barriers identified for individual modes of transportation are described below.

OC Transpo

1. **Affordability:** Many participants identified cost as a barrier to accessing services provided by OC Transpo.
2. **Not Accessible:** Participants expressed concern over the lack of space for electric wheelchairs and scooters on OC Transpo buses. Individuals on scooters reported that they are unable to take the bus, as there is not enough room for them to turn their scooter around to exit once they have boarded. Participants who walk with the use of a mobility device/aid also expressed concerns over the lengthy distance between bus stops.
3. **Driver Training:** Participants reported that drivers are not equipped with proper training required for interacting with and assisting individuals with disabilities.
4. **Availability:** Participants identified a need for buses to be available at all hours of the day. Participants also noted that OC Transpo services are limited or unavailable in rural areas of the city.
5. **Safety:** Participants reported that buses are often over capacity resulting in passengers having to stand. This can be unsafe for people with disabilities including those in wheelchairs.

Para Transpo

1. **Availability:** Participants identified a need for Para Transpo vehicles to be available at all hours of the day. Participants also reported that Para Transpo does not provide rural-to-rural trips.
2. **Timeliness:** Participants expressed a desire for on-demand Para Transpo services. Participants also expressed concern over long wait times.
3. **Booking Processes:** Participants noted that it is often difficult to reach staff to book Para Transpo and expressed a desire for a self-serve online booking system. Participants reported limited flexibility when making changes to pre-planned trips and noted inefficiencies in service such as prohibiting carpooling with other clients who have a similar pick up/drop off location.
4. **Affordability:** Para Transpo's Taxi Coupon Program allows registered customers to take an accessible taxicab at 40% off the regular fare as an alternative to taking Para Transpo. Many participants reported that even with a 40% discount, taking an accessible taxicab was not an acceptable alternative to Para Transpo as the cost

was too high. Further, many participants noted that there is a maximum allowance of taxi coupons per customer and expressed a desire to increase this limit.

5. **Not Accessible:** Participants reported that the elevators and ramps of Para Transpo vehicles are often non-functioning or difficult to use, making them not accessible by some customers.
6. **Driver Training:** Participants reported that Para Transpo drivers are not equipped with proper training required for interacting with and assisting seniors and individuals with disabilities.

Accessible Taxicabs

1. *Affordability:* Participants reported that fares associated with accessible taxicabs are too expensive – even with a Taxi Coupon Program discount. Participants noted that in general, people with disabilities have lower incomes than people without disabilities and cannot afford to take an accessible taxicab.

2. *Availability:* Participants reported that it is difficult, and in many cases, impossible, to get an accessible taxicab 24 hours a day – especially in the late evening and early morning. Many participants believe there is not enough accessible taxicabs available. Participants also noted that they believe accessible taxicabs do not want to drive to rural areas making it difficult for rural customers to access this service.

3. *Timeliness:* Participants expressed concern over long wait times for accessible taxicabs and expressed a desire for on-demand accessible taxicab services. Participants reported that in many cases, after ordering an accessible taxicab, the taxicab did not show up.

4. *Not Accessible:* Some participants reported that accessible taxicabs are unable to accommodate their mobility device due to space and size restrictions.

5. *Driver Training:* Participants reported that Para Transpo drivers are not equipped with the proper training required for interacting with and assisting individuals with disabilities.

Uber/UberAssist

1. **Not Accessible:** The top barrier participants identified to accessing Uber/UberAssist is that the vehicles cannot accommodate electronic wheelchairs, scooters and some walkers. Further, some participants reported that many Uber drivers do not allow service animals.
2. **Affordability:** Many participants identified cost as a barrier to using Uber and UberAssist. Some participants expressed concerns that Uber allows for surge pricing in times of high-demand.
3. **Payment System:** Participants noted that Uber/UberAssist is an app-based service that some individuals with disabilities find difficult to use. Further, participants also identified the requirement for a cell phone and a credit card as a barrier to accessing Uber/UberAssist services.
4. **Availability in Rural Areas:** Participants reported that Uber/UberAssist offers limited service in the rural areas and is unreliable for rural customers.
5. **Safety:** Participants expressed concerns over personal safety and security when using Uber/UberAssist. Concerns regarding information protection and a lack of security cameras were reported as barriers to accessing Uber/UberAssist services.

Walk with Use of Mobility Device/Aid

1. **Weather:** Snow, ice and rain can prevent individuals who are able to walk with the use of a mobility device/aid from moving around the city and accessing various modes of transportation. Participants identified a lack of snow clearing on sidewalks as the primary barrier to getting around.
2. **Safety:** Participants expressed safety concerns when having to share space with bicycles on sidewalks and walking paths. Some individuals also identified inadequate lighting as a barrier to walking at night.
3. **Non-Accessible Sidewalks:** Participants reported that improper curb cuts make it difficult to access sidewalks and entrances to businesses.
4. **Infrastructure:** Participants identified poor traffic and infrastructure design as a barrier to walking with the use of a mobility device/aid.

5. Construction: Participants reported that poor planning for mobility-restricted users during periods of construction is a barrier to walking with a mobility device/aid.

4.5 Ideas for Improving Accessible Transportation through the Vehicle-for-Hire Accessibility Fund

The last question of the survey and the in-person sessions asked participants to identify how they think the City should spend funds to support accessible transportation in the city of Ottawa. Participants were asked to rank their ideas from 1 to 5, with 1 being their favourite idea. Participants were reminded that as per Council's direction, money from the VFH Accessibility Fund must be spent on programs and services that support accessible transportation in the city of Ottawa. Further, all ideas must align with the amount of money available in the VFH Accessibility Fund and at least one of the six Guiding Principles.

The following list of ideas are ranked in order of the amount of times they were identified by participants. All ideas will be reviewed using the evaluation criteria described in section 3.0. Only those ideas that meet at least one of the six Guiding Principles will be considered.

1. Increase the number of accessible vehicles.
2. Make a percentage of Para Transpo vehicles available for on-demand service.
3. Allocate all or a portion of the funds to not-for-profit and community agencies, such as community resource centres, to expand accessible transportation services in rural areas.
4. Provide additional training to taxicab dispatchers and drivers on accessibility issues and how to interact with and assist individuals with disabilities.
5. Equip all Para Transpo vehicles and accessible taxicabs contracted by Para Transpo with a GPS tracking system and develop a Smartphone app for Para Transpo customers so they can track the arrival of their ride.
6. Improve Para Transpo booking and payment processes including, but not limited to:
 - Increasing the number of staff available to answer telephone calls from customers.
 - Integrate the Para Transpo, OC Transpo and Taxi Coupon Program payment systems.

- Develop a self-serve online booking system.
 - Allow for carpooling.
 - Provide rural-to-rural service.
 - Provide customers with a user manual for accessing Para Transpo Services.
7. Reduce the cost of taxi coupons.
 8. Improve the Taxi Coupon Program by:
 - Increasing the maximum allowance of taxi coupons per customer.
 - Removing the requirement to pre-order taxi coupons with individualized information including the Para Transpo account number to eliminate steps for individuals with disabilities including those with visual impairments.
 9. Priority snow removal at OC Transpo bus stops, Para Transpo pick up/drop-off locations and sidewalks.
 10. Para Transpo to provide transportation of multiple customers to various seasonal events and special outings.
 11. Implement a model similar to UberWAV and/or UberACCESS to connect Uber customers with licensed paratransit drivers and curb-to-curb service in vehicles that are equipped with hydraulic ramps or lifts.
 12. Provide incentives for taxicab drivers to pick up more accessible fares, in the urban and rural areas including:
 - Financial assistance to make more taxicabs accessible.
 - Offer taxicab drivers a flat rate for all accessible fares.
 - Allow taxicab drivers to turn on the meter before assisting customers.
 13. Improve integration between various modes of public transportation to provide seamless service/transition for customers.
 14. Take legal action against Uber.
 15. Incorporate accessibility when building and repairing curb cuts and ensure sidewalks are level with store entrances.
 16. Provide training to OC Transpo drivers on accessibility issues and how to interact with and assist individuals with disabilities.
 17. Coordinate City-wide snow removal contracts for improved efficiency.

18. Develop and implement a notification system for OC Transpo buses to notify drivers when someone with a disability is waiting for their bus to ensure the bus stops for them.
19. Heat all bus and LRT stations.
20. Modify/maintain OC Transpo bus ramps to make them more accessible for wheelchairs/scooters.
21. Arrange for Seniors Day in Ottawa to take place on any day of the week to reduce crowds on public transportation on specific days.
22. When planning for construction, consider how people with mobility disabilities will be impacted.
23. Provide Uber drivers with incentives for making their vehicles wheelchair accessible.
24. Increase the amount of the voluntary accessibility surcharge for Private Transportation Companies (PTCs).
25. Make the voluntary accessibility surcharge mandatory for Private Transportation Companies (PTCs).
26. Make all public transportation in the city of Ottawa scent-free.
27. Establish a separate fund that individuals with mobility disabilities can access to support them with transportation costs.
28. Provide more information on the various transportation options available to individuals with disabilities.
29. Purchase new seatbelts for OC Transpo customers who require the use of a wheelchair.
30. Increase the amount of designated space on OC Transpo buses for mobility devices.
31. Establish a fund for the modification of personal vehicles of people with disabilities.
32. Provide business owners with a tax deduction for making their entrances accessible.
33. Allocate space on the City's website for people to share their personal thoughts on how the City can improve accessibility.

The consultation process revealed that individuals with disabilities face unique challenges when it comes to accessing private and public transportation. Most of the ideas identified by participants for improving accessible transportation align with the barriers described in section 4.4.

5.0 Next Steps

The Vehicle-for-Hire (VFH) Accessibility Fund consultations provided a lot of information about the types of challenges people with disabilities face when it comes to accessing private and public transportation. The consultations also generated many innovative ideas for improving accessible transportation in the city of Ottawa through the VFH Accessibility Fund.

All feedback received through the VFH Accessibility Fund consultation process will be reviewed and assessed by the VFH Accessibility Fund Steering Committee using the evaluation criteria described in section 3.0. Staff will work with various departments across the organization to determine feasibility of implementing the ideas and develop recommendations on how to spend the funds. The General Manager, Emergency and Protective Services will include these recommendations in a staff report to the Community and Protective Services Committee and Council for consideration and final approval.