

**Accessibility Town Hall Event**  
**November 21, 2023 6:30 p.m.**  
**Halifax Central Library Paul O'Regan Hall**

Good evening everyone,

My name is Dave Nantau, and I am the Supervisor Bus Operations for the Access-A-Bus division at Halifax Transit.

Thank you for having me. I am happy to be here to share some of the exciting progress Halifax Transit has made over the past year.

We acknowledge there is always room to grow & learn when it comes to improving accessibility within our city, and we are committed in doing so.

At Halifax Transit, our mission is to provide a safe, reliable and sustainable transit system for all. This requires consistent attention to accessibility and a passionate commitment to continuous improvement in this area. Tonight, I will speak of just a few initiatives Halifax Transit has been focusing on to improve accessibility and customer experience.

## **Infrastructure & Bus Stops**

Improving accessibility for all customers is an ongoing priority for Halifax Transit, including infrastructure and bus stop accessibility.

At Halifax Transit, our goal is to create a fully accessible network by 2030. We are happy to share that as of November 21, 2023, 71% of Halifax Transit's active stops will be classified as accessible. We continue to work diligently to

meet the goals set by the Halifax Accessibility Strategy and the Province's Access by Design.

Accessible bus stop upgrades for the 2023 construction season included installing new stops, upgrading undersized bus pads and installing sidewalk connections to intersections. This year, Halifax Transit installed and upgraded 45 bus stops within the municipality

In collaboration with internal and provincial stakeholders we have also been reviewing the CSA National Standard for Accessible Design for the Built Environment to develop a new accessible bus stop standard in Halifax for future bus stop design, development, and improvements.

## **Public Communication & Education**

At last year's Accessibility Town Hall, we shared with you that Halifax Transit had designed and launched a new travel training pilot program targeted to various audiences.

Since 2022, the Accessibility Travel Training Program has partnered with Prescott Group, New Leaf Enterprises, Regional Residential Services Society, Club Inclusion, CNIB, and other community partners serving individuals with disabilities and accessibility requirements. This program is truly a community-led effort.

Accessibility Travel Training is currently available in a variety of options, including multi-day group sessions, single day sessions, and one-on-one travel training. Each session is tailored to the organization or individual's needs. Sessions include classroom instruction covering transit basics and trip planning, as well as practical opportunities to ride transit in a simulated or real-time environment. Participants also visit transit terminals with Halifax Transit staff.

The Accessibility Travel Training has been very well received to date and this past year, we facilitated 15 Group Accessibility Travel Training Sessions, and 2 Individual ride-along sessions.

In addition to Accessible Transit Travel Training, we also launched a travel training module for Seniors and successfully facilitated 9 group sessions with middle school, high school and university or college students.

It has been so exciting helping participants of the program overcome their fear of using conventional transit, and hearing stories of how this has supported their independence, provided options when travelling through the municipality, and changed their lives for the better.

To support the travel training program, Halifax Transit also developed **Customer Mobility Travel Tools** which include the Bus Hailer Kit, Passenger Support Cards, and Mobility Cards to support individuals with varying cognitive, visual, mobility, and other impairments and/or difficulties. Our goal is to implement these free travel tools in new year.

## **AAB**

Access-A-Bus has made substantial progress in the past year with the installation of Mobile Data Terminals (Or MDTs) on every vehicle, as part of the Access-A-Bus Continuous Improvement Plan.

This new technology helps track where each AAB vehicle is in real-time and provides us with valuable data that allows us to be more efficient and flexible with meeting our clients travel needs. It provides our Trip Reservationists with a more realistic view of system performance and accommodates the

potential for clients who need to book a same-day trip. With this change, we will be able to help more people at the same cost.

In the coming months, Access-A-Bus will launch an online booking system which will provide customers another option to book their trip.

The priority for Access-A-Bus over the next year is to reduce the number of clients on the Wait List each day, and eventually, to eliminate the Wait List entirely. We are also reviewing the client application renewal time frame, which includes converting the Access-A-Bus application to an online webform.

## **Extra Care Taxi**

An important goal of the municipality is to support accessible communities and equitable transportation for all. Since the launch of Extra Care Taxi in 2022,

The municipality's support of an accessible taxi service is based on feedback from residents, visitors and service providers, as well as the municipality's Accessibility Strategy.

Extra Care Taxi launched in July 2022. The company provides accessible taxi service in the region, in partnership with Halifax Regional Municipality.

Passengers pay the standard taxi rate for their trips, and the municipality provides ongoing funding to Extra Care Taxi to help support the high costs of offering an accessible taxi service.

Extra Care Taxi has 10 accessible vehicles available for service and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week,

throughout the municipality. Since the launch of the service in July 2022, Extra Care Taxi has fulfilled approximately 18,000 trips up to the end of October 2023. In October, they fulfilled an average of 53 passengers trips per day, an increase of 203% over the average of 17 passengers a day seen in October 2022.

Extra care taxi continues to meet the passenger wait times, arriving within 15 minutes more than 40% of the time and arriving within 30 minutes more than 80% of the time consistently.

Bookings can be made by phone, online, or through the Extra Care Taxi App. Since the launch, customers who are local residents, as well as visitors, have provided their positive feedback about the service stating that the drivers and dispatchers were kind and knowledgeable, that the app for bookings and payment was easy to use, and how much they appreciated the different options available to book a trip. Overall residents & visitors are very grateful for this service.

## **HFXGO**

Halifax Transit launched its mobile fare payment app, HFXGO, earlier this month on November 2. The app allows riders and residents to purchase tickets and passes from the convenience of their own home using their smartphone. The HFXGO fare payment app supports VoiceOver and other accessibility functions such as Zoom, Magnifier and Speak Screen.

Passengers can still purchase paper tickets and passes at a retail partner or customer service center, or use cash fare, but are not longer limited to these options.

Our goal within the next year is to begin transitioning some of our programs to the app as well, starting with the Affordable Access Transit Pass. Doing so will help to remove costly travel barriers and improve access to the program.

## **Fleet Electrification Project**

Another important upgrade to Halifax Transit is the introduction of electric buses. The fleet electrification project aligns with municipal, provincial and federal climate targets and will help to achieve the goals and actions as outlined in the municipality's climate change plan, *HalifACT* as well as the *Province's Sustainable Development Goals Act*.

Regional Council approved the purchase of up to sixty (60) 40 ft BEBs and chargers, thirty (30) of which will arrive in the 2023/24 budget year, and thirty (30) to arrive in 2024/25. The electric Nova Buses are similar to our existing Nova Bus vehicles but will have an electric motor instead of a diesel motor and will also include permanent Operator safety shields.

They will be able to accommodate up to 36 seated passengers – the same seated passenger capacity as diesel 40ft Nova buses - and will use the Q-Pod wheelchair restraint system with three securement straps and a shoulder belt.

As well as being equipped with our standard accessibility features, stop announcements, low floors, and ramps. Other accessibility features on the electric buses include a designated space for a service animal, Acoustic Vehicle Alerting System, which generates sound to warn nearby pedestrians to the presence of the bus, and quieter operation that will improve the audibility of stop announcements.

## **Closing**

On behalf of all my Halifax Transit colleagues, thank you for the opportunity to share these exciting initiatives to improve accessibility for Halifax Transit customers. We welcome any feedback and suggestions you may have so we can work together to help support a safe, accessible, and inclusive transit experience for all. Thank you.