



P.O. Box 1749  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
B3J 3A5 Canada

**Item No. 11.3.1**  
**Halifax Regional Council**  
**February 23, 2021**

**TO:** Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed

**SUBMITTED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Councillor Mason, Chair of the Transportation Standing Committee

**DATE:** February 11, 2021

**SUBJECT:** **On Demand Private Accessible Transportation Service Contract**

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**ORIGIN**

January 21, 2021 meeting of the Transportation Standing Committee, Item 15.1.

**LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

Administrative Order One, Schedule 7 – Transportation Standing Committee Terms of Reference  
Section 6: Oversight and Input into Transit’s Strategic Plan and Direction

6. The Transportation Standing Committee shall:
- (a) review and oversee policy direction and long-term funding approach to promote and encourage Transit alternatives as outlined in the Regional Plan;
  - (b) review and oversee specific strategic planning directions related to Transit Services coming from the Regional Plan such as the five-year strategic plan, Accessibility Plan and the Ferry Plan; and
  - (c) promote and enable positive communication between communities, ridership, and the Council and Transit services to enable and support the Regional Transit service to the communities of the municipality.

*Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*, subsection 34 (3):

The Council shall provide direction on the administration, plans, policies and programs of the Municipality to the Chief Administrative Officer.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Transportation Standing Committee recommend that Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer include the procurement of an on demand accessible transportation, service as outlined in the January 7, 2021 report, for consideration as part of the Halifax Transit 2021/22 Budget and Business Plan.

**BACKGROUND**

At their January 21, 2021 meeting, the Transportation Standing Committee considered the staff report dated January 7, 2021 regarding on demand private accessible transportation service contracts.

For further information, refer to the staff report dated January 7, 2021.

**DISCUSSION**

The Transportation Standing Committee considered the staff report dated January 7, 2021 and approved a recommendation to forward to Halifax Regional Council, as outlined in the 'Recommendation' section of this report.

For further discussion on this item, refer to the staff report dated January 7, 2021.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

As outlined in the staff report dated January 7, 2021.

**RISK CONSIDERATION**

As outlined in the staff report dated January 7, 2021.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The agenda and reports of the Transportation Standing Committee are posted on Halifax.ca, and draft minutes of the meeting will be made available on Halifax.ca within three business days.

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

As outlined in the supplementary staff report dated January 7, 2021.

**ALTERNATIVES**

The Transportation Standing Committee did not provide alternatives.

For further information on alternatives as it relates to this item, refer to the staff report dated January 7, 2021.

**ATTACHMENTS**

**Attachment 1** - Staff report dated January 7, 2021

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Andrea Lovasi-Wood, Legislative Assistant, Municipal Clerk's Office 902.490.6732

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P.O. Box 1749  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
B3J 3A5 Canada

**Item No. 15.1**  
**Transportation Standing Committee**  
**January 21, 2021**

**TO:** Chair and Members of Transportation Standing Committee

**-Original Signed-**

**SUBMITTED BY:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dave Reage, MCIP, LPP, Executive Director, Halifax Transit

**-Original Signed-**

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Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** January 7, 2021

**SUBJECT:** On Demand Private Accessible Transportation Service Contract

**ORIGIN**

This is a staff-initiated report.

**LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

*Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*, 2008, c. 39

7A The purposes of the Municipality are to

- (b) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality;

79A (1) Subject to subsections (2) to (4), the Municipality may only spend money for municipal purposes if

- (a) the expenditure is included in the Municipality's operating budget or capital budget or is otherwise authorized by the Municipality;
- (b) the expenditure is in respect of an emergency under the Emergency Management Act; or
- (c) the expenditure is legally required to be paid.

**RECOMMENDATION ON PAGE 2**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Transportation Standing Committee recommend that Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer include the procurement of an on demand accessible transportation, service as outlined in this report, for consideration as part of the Halifax Transit 2021/22 Budget and Business Plan.

## **BACKGROUND**

There are currently two main types of accessible transportation services available to the public in Halifax for trips within the urban area:

- **Halifax Transit's Conventional Transit and Access-A-Bus (AAB) Service:** As of 2016, 100% of Halifax Transit's fleet is low floor accessible, providing improved access to transportation for many residents with mobility issues. For those unable to make use of the conventional transit network, Halifax Transit also operates Access-A-Bus service, which provides door to door, shared ride public transit service to approved clients. The service is heavily subsidized by the municipality in order to offer it to the client at the same fare as the conventional transit service. The Access-a-Bus service typically needs to be booked in advance. The client application process can also be restrictive to those who require temporary accessible transportation service.
- **Private Accessible Transportation:** This is offered by privately owned taxi operators and bus services/charter vehicles who provide door to door, on demand service. In 2019, there were 16 accessible taxi owner licenses, this has since decreased to eleven.<sup>1</sup> It is presumed that some of this decline is due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. However, this cannot account for the total decrease as the number of licensed vehicles has continued to decline sharply since 2015 when there was a high of 57 licensed accessible taxis.

The high capital and operating costs of accessible taxis, combined with the requirement to charge the same meter rate as conventional taxi service, has meant there is little incentive for the industry to provide this service. Several staff reports, as well as the *Taxi and Limousine Vehicle for Hire Industry Review*<sup>2</sup>, have previously described, in great detail, the challenges of operating an accessible taxi service in Halifax. An overview is provided here:

- Capital costs – an accessible taxi vehicle is typically a converted van with a ramp. These vehicles cost between \$35,000 - \$50,000 and have a shorter life span than other vehicle types.
- Extra time to pick up passengers – with fewer accessible taxis, the distance travelled to pick up a passenger is typically further. This increases the time and kilometers spent with no paying passenger in the vehicle.
- Additional time assisting passengers - this includes additional time assisting the passenger to the vehicle, deploying/stowing the ramp, and tying down or releasing the mobility device. This negatively impacts revenues during busy times of the day.
- Higher operating costs - Larger and heavier vehicles mean higher fuel consumption, and more moving parts translate to higher maintenance costs for the accessibility components.

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<sup>1</sup> There are currently approximately 840 active conventional taxi licenses in HRM.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/190212rc1433.pdf>

The Province offers an *Accessible Transportation Assistance Program* which assists inclusive transit services to purchase accessible vehicles or convert existing vehicles. From 2010 through 2013, these grants were provided to taxi owners to help fund the purchase of accessible vehicles. Though this program was able to assist in enabling eight new accessible taxis in HRM, there were no programs (provincial or municipal) in place to support the taxi industry with the high operating and maintenance cost of accessible vehicles and therefore this program did not provide a long-term solution to the accessible taxi availability issue. The province has since modified this grant program to exclude taxis in order to reallocate the funds to community based accessible transit solutions operated by the not for profit sector. Those wishing to procure an accessible taxi have found it difficult to do so without this up-front cost assistance.

In a further effort to expand the availability of accessible taxis, in 2015 HRM staff recommended changes to By-law T-1000 and Administrative Order 39 requiring all new taxi licenses issued in HRM to be accessible.<sup>3</sup> The Transportation Standing Committee directed staff to prepare a report outlining the results of public and industry consultation. The report completed by Halifax Global Inc. showed that over 85% of taxi drivers who were on the wait list for a conventional taxi license would not act to acquire an accessible license if this change to the by-law were implemented.<sup>4</sup> Though the consultants maintained that misunderstanding of the by-law changes were driving these responses, and that the municipality should proceed with the implementation of the changes, the Transportation Standing Committee had concerns with the findings presented in the report and defeated a motion to implement this change on October 22, 2015.<sup>5</sup>

Following the February 12, 2019 presentation of the *Vehicle for Hire Licensing Program Review* to Halifax Regional Council, a motion that the CAO “request the Mayor write a letter to the Province to request the required amendments to the *HRM Charter* to enable the Municipality to provide business grants for vehicle purchase or conversion and to provide a subsidy, per trip fee, to all accessible taxi license holders” was put and passed.<sup>6</sup> The Mayor’s letter was sent to the Province on April 16, 2019. A response was received on May 16, 2019 stating that the Province was reviewing the request. To date, no commitments from the Province have been made relative to making the requested legislative amendments.

Council also passed a recommendation during this meeting that the CAO “prepare a supplementary report relative to regulating Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) such as Uber or Lyft”. When this report returned to council January 14, 2020 a motion was approved that Halifax Regional Council “direct the Mayor write a letter to the Province to request the required amendments to the *Motor Vehicle Act* to enable the Municipality to charge Transportation Network Companies a per-trip fee.”<sup>7</sup> A portion of this per trip fee would be assigned to an accessibility fund which the municipality could use to fund accessibility programs. The Province’s response indicated that they would not be changing the *Motor Vehicle Act* to enable this per trip fee.

Previous efforts to increase the number of accessible taxis available within Halifax Regional Municipality have not been successful. An additional option to improve access to on demand accessible transportation service has been explored and is discussed below.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://legacycontent.halifax.ca/boardscom/SCtransp/documents/151022tsc911.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://legacycontent.halifax.ca/boardscom/SCtransp/documents/151022tsc911consultant.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://legacycontent.halifax.ca/boardscom/SCtransp/documents/151022tsc.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/c190212mins.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.halifax.ca/city-hall/regional-council/january-14-2020-halifax-regional-council>

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Program Objectives**

The objective of this initiative is to establish a framework to ensure that accessing on demand transportation service for passengers with mobility devices is comparable to the experience of ambulatory passengers accessing taxi services. This means that vehicles are available, clients are able to book a trip on demand, vehicles are dispatched in a comparable timeframe as conventional taxis, and passengers are charged the same rates.

### **Proposal Description**

One option which was presented in the *Vehicle for Hire Licensing Program Review* is for the municipality to procure accessible taxi services. In this option, a contract would be established between HRM and a provider, and the provider would offer private, accessible, on demand, door to door service to clients at a standard taxi rate as any other taxi, but would also receive revenue from HRM, collected as per the terms of the contract. The rate paid by HRM would be agreed upon through the procurement process, thus providing operators with a reliable income to offset the additional costs of offering such a service. An additional benefit of this model is that it would also allow HRM to require, that the provider meet service standards similar to those experienced by ambulatory taxi users for similar trips.

This model is intended to address the current obstacle of accessible vehicle availability by increasing the financial viability for the provider to have accessible vehicles ready to dispatch. Through engagement with stakeholders and the public, the municipality would establish service standards, such as dispatching timeframes, which must be met by the provider. The service provider would own and operate the service as per the contract, and be responsible for intake, dispatching, providing the service, meeting service standards, and reporting data to the municipality.

The nature of the service model described above differs significantly from conventional transit which offers a shared, fixed route, fixed schedule trip for a fixed fare; and from Access-A-Bus which offers a shared, demand responsive, pre-booked trip for a fixed fare. This proposed service would be indistinguishable from taxi service to the passenger – an on demand, metered fare trip.

### ***Service Standards***

For the service to be successful, it will be important to clearly outline the expectations of the municipality through the procurement process. It is in the intent that the vendor would be required to adhere to the licensing requirements of the applicable legislation based on the type of vehicle that will be operated under the service, whether it be the *Motor Carrier Act* or Administrative Order 39. Service standards will further refine when and where service must be available to potential passengers, recognizing that a balance must be struck between service levels, and available funding.

In order to provide the best level of service to the user, on demand transportation service would be procured from one provider where users would have one resource for trip requests and so that standards reflecting when and where vehicles are operated, and in what quantity, can be contractually required. The following key standards would be outlined in a sole vendor contract and would be refined through engagement with the public and stakeholders:

- **Span of Service:** the expectation is that service will be available all day and into late night, possibly later on weekends to facilitate more spontaneous trips.
- **Level of Service:** based on past usage and demographic information, it is anticipated that the service will be required to provide a minimum of approximately 5-10 concurrent trips during peak times. Vehicle availability could potentially be reduced during off-peak times, based on demand.
- **Service distribution:** it is anticipated that the service will primarily operate in densely populated urban and suburban areas of the municipality. The intent is that the proportion of on demand

accessible transportation available reflect that of existing taxi service available to ambulatory users. As a starting point, all trips originating within the urban and suburban areas will be required to meet the span and level of service standards, while those outside of this area will not.

- Reporting: monitoring of the program and making evidence-based decisions is a key in the growth of this program and therefore vendors will be required to have a Global Positioning System and regularly provide reports to HRM with trip specific data.
- Dispatch Technology: it will be required that vendors have both telephone and electronic trip booking options.
- Training: required training will be outlined during the procurement process, the specific training required will be determined through ongoing consultation.

Staff recognize that, due to the low number of existing accessible vehicles within the municipality and unknown levels of interest from applicants beyond the municipality, there is a risk that no one vendor may be able to fulfill all requirements listed above. Should there be no proposals meeting the requirements listed above, staff will revise the standards noted above, and initiate a new procurement process such that it would allow multiple service providers, including those currently operating within the municipality, to be contracted at the same time to ensure the supply and delivery of on demand accessible transportation.

The service standards which were listed above will be more difficult to enforce with multiple vendors, therefore staff would continue to engage with transportation providers to determine how the above service standards may be adjusted so that they can maintain their intent and be administered to ensure high quality service for passengers.

#### *Implementation Timeline*

Upon receiving direction from Regional Council and pending budget approval, it is anticipated that the procurement process can commence, and the program launched within ten months, with a targeted start date in fall 2021. This timeline may vary based on the length of time required to negotiate the contract with the vendor, and the time required by the vendor to launch service, including any vehicle purchases or fit-up. It is likely that the roll out will be phased in as more vehicles become available.

#### *Reporting*

Halifax Transit will provide a report to Regional Council one year following the start of the service to provide insight into how well the service was able to meet the service standards. The report will also outline any recommendations staff have to improve the service based on observed demand, successes, challenges, and budget availability. Additional high-level updates will also be provided through Halifax Transit's quarterly report to Transportation Standing Committee.

#### **Potential for Integration with Paratransit**

The purpose of this program is to ensure that on demand accessible transportation is available to residents in Halifax allowing more autonomy and agency to users. The service provides a different service to the pre booked service provided by Access-A-Bus as it will be a private, door to door trip, offered at the metered taxi fare rate. Therefore, it is not expected that this program will reduce the usage of the existing Access-A-Bus service offered by Halifax Transit. However, as indicated in the *Access-A-Bus Continuous Improvement Plan* there is the potential for integration of the services to provide better mobility options for residents.

Specifically, the availability of accessible transportation may allow Halifax Transit to use excess capacity within the procured service to supplement AAB during peak times. In this situation, if an AAB client is requesting a trip that cannot be accommodated by an AAB vehicle, the on demand accessible transportation service could be dispatched for the trip. Further discussions about process and logistics can occur once the service has launched, and capacity is evaluated.

## Cost

Based on the requirement to provide 5-10 concurrent trips it is expected that a minimum of 10 vehicles are required. Although the costs may vary significantly depending on how competitive the procurement process is, it is anticipated that annual costs to the municipality for a 10-vehicle operation will be in the range of \$280,000 - \$600,000 per year for a minimum of a five years. This cost includes a full-time staff member to administer the program, work with the vendor in order to resolve any service issues, and undertake ongoing monitoring and reporting,

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Although it is not expected that this service would be as heavily subsidized as a municipally operated service such as Access-A-Bus, it is clear that the industry would require financial support in order to offer the service described above. The successful proponent would collect fares from passengers, consistent with HRM Administrative Order 39 Respecting Taxi and Limousine Regulation. In addition, they would invoice HRM an agreed upon amount to be available on a stand-by basis. This amount would be agreed upon through the procurement process. This program cost is estimated to be between \$280,000 - \$600,000 annually. If approved, the funding amount estimated for 2021/22 will be included in the proposed Halifax Transit 2021/22 operating budget. There would be no capital expenses associated with this project.

The 4- year estimated financial implications are summarized as follows:

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2024/25</b>
<b>Operating – R637</b>	\$290,000	\$600,000	\$600,000	\$600,000
<b>Capital - Order</b>				
<b>OCC – Cost Centre</b>				
<b>Reserves – Cost Centre</b>				

## RISK CONSIDERATION

There is a risk that there will not be one vendor who has the required number of accessible vehicles or capacity to deliver this service within its fleet. A secondary procurement process may be required should the initial process yield no acceptable offers.

Should HRM be required to proceed with a multi-vendor contract there is a risk of having standards that are more difficult to administer. It is also likely that there will not be a centralized dispatch system or reporting body which are likely to complicate administration. This means that accessible transportation users are likely to have to call multiple service providers to book a trip. This does not differ from existing practices by accessible or ambulatory transportation users and therefore staff do not feel this will impede the success of the system.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholder engagement sessions were also held with both members of the accessibility community and providers of existing taxi services to ensure that the recommendations for service standards as outlined in this report considered the perspectives of both groups. Some key takeaways from those engagement sessions are provided in Appendix A.

Additional engagement with the broader community is intended to support the establish of service standards during the procurement stage of the program.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no environmental implications associated with the recommendations of this report.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

The Transportation Standing Committee may recommend that Regional Council direct staff to not pursue subsidization of on demand accessible transportation at this time.

The Transportation Standing Committee may recommend that Regional Council direct the CAO to submit an additional request for an amendment to the HRM Charter to allow grants to private taxi businesses.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Appendix A: Stakeholder Engagement Sessions Summary

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Morgan Cox, Project Planning Coordinator, Halifax Transit, 902.490.6621

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### **What we heard from Accessibility Stakeholders**

Through stakeholder engagement, a total of 25 accessibility advocates, representing more than 15 different organizations, provided their feedback in response to questions relating to how existing accessible transportation is working for users, what an ideal taxi-like system might look like for Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), and what requirements might be important if HRM were to procure taxi-like services. The following is a summary of these comments.

#### **Key points:**

- Accessible transportation should reflect what is available to others:
  - Users should be able to make trips at any time of the day.
  - They should expect a similar wait time to a passenger who does not require accessible services.
  - Users should be able to get to their destination regardless of whether their trip is deemed essential (medical/work/school) or social.
- The availability of accessible taxis should allow passengers with disabilities to act spontaneously, with autonomy and agency.
- The relationship between clients and drivers is important for private transportation. Respondents felt that existing drivers are doing a great job and that these drivers should be supported.
- Transportation services are utilized on a regular basis; daily to weekly.

### **What we heard about existing accessible transportation services in HRM:**

#### Challenges

- Trips requiring accessible transportation are unable to be accommodated at least once a week.
- Basic needs like getting to the hospital in urgent but non-emergency situations is very difficult due to availability of transportation.
- There has also been confusion about how to get to a Covid-19 testing centre if you don't drive.
- Accessible transportation users have an increased burden of needing to plan their lives more fully in order to accommodate the limited transportation options. More available transportation throughout the day can help with this.
- Trips reflect those of standard transportation users and tend to be higher at peak as people travel to and from work, or appointments, making it very difficult to find transportation during these times.
- Organizations tend to forgo off site activities due to the difficulty booking transportation and individuals are excluded from social engagements as medical appointments tend to be prioritized. This can have a profound impact on the mental health of individuals.

#### Existing on demand services

- Taxis tend to be used for shorter distance trips, trips outside of the Access-a-Bus service area, spontaneous or short notice trips, and for trips which require pick up and/or drop

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off at specific times as they tend to be able to get trips with shorter time frames with this service.

- Taxis are used more regularly by those who are ineligible for Access-a-Bus.
- Taxi service benefits those from outside of the municipality as well as tourists.
- Little access for users outside of the urban core.
- Taxis can be quite expensive.
- Rurally accessible transportation tends to focus on transportation of seniors making access for younger people difficult.
- Taxis are inconsistently available, it is likely that there would be more demand if the service was more readily available.
- Low income options should be available for private services.
- A relationship tends to be formed between accessible taxi users and drivers. Drivers tend to go above and beyond working irregular hours to assist their regular customers.

### Access-A-Bus

- Access-a-Bus trips are provided at a lower cost which supports those unable to afford taxis services, although it tends to be used by individuals for repeated trips or those which can be booked in advance.
- It is advantageous for groups to use Access-a-Bus due to the size of the vehicles.
- Things like travelling for business meetings may not allow the flexibility to make multiple stops for other passengers on your Access-a-Bus trip.
- Access-a-Bus must be booked well in advance and available trips may mean you arrive very early to your destination and leave very late. Taxis tend to narrow this window but many times taxis are unavailable when called and it is unknown when accessible taxis may be available.

### Stakeholder suggested standards for an on demand accessible transportation service:

- Vehicles should be spread across the municipality and should not congregate downtown.
- Service should be available in rural areas of the municipality.
- Wait times for trips should be similar to those experienced by standard taxi users.
- Vehicles should be available on holidays with additional capacity on special events.
- Service should be available at all times.
- It was understood that medical needs would be prioritized, but also noted that without capacity in the system people can become socially isolated which has an impact on mental health.
- Having phone, app & online options to reserve a trip but also the option to hail on street (though it is expected this would be used less than the other options).
- Allow clients to book and select a preferred driver to maintain the relationship. Consistency components are important within the existing accessible transportation systems. If training differed between drivers, this may entice some clients to choose to wait longer for service from a preferred driver, or from one based on high ratings from other users. However, selecting a preferred driver should not increase the overall wait time.

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- Payment options should extend beyond digital and credit cards and knowing the approximate/actual cost of the trip from an app or technology within the vehicle can help those with visual impairments (this is true for all vehicles accessible or otherwise).
- Being provided audible location updates throughout the trip could be helpful to some.
- Training for all members of the organization should be mandatory, while encouraging knowledge sharing and ongoing training opportunities.
- Travel training for users.
- Though operating transportation service in the most densely populated areas makes sense due to demand, it is important to keep in mind that housing costs here can also be higher, which may force people to live outside of this area due to financial barriers. Accessible transportation should be available in more affordable areas of the municipality to support independence.

### **If additional capacity was available in the system, increased use of private on demand accessible vehicles could be encouraged by:**

- Communicating why accessible taxis are beneficial and available for use by ambulatory customers, ensuring that the communications use plain language and video.
- Defining the term “accessible” within this context.
- Having drivers who are well suited to work with users who may have a variety of disabilities and supporting them via training.
- Having a centralized resource for contacting a service, whether this be a list or centralized dispatch.
- Ensuring that capacity remains in the system to continue to encourage the use.
- Having communication technology available within the vehicles to assist with communicative disabilities.

It was noted that it is important to provide an integrated approach and that one solution can not meet all needs. Shifting trips between private on demand service and Access-a-Bus could help to increase the capacity of services. Although, if trips were shifted from Access-a-Bus to taxis, it should be considered for these trips to cost the passenger a bus fare instead of a taxi fare.

### **What we heard from Taxi Stakeholders**

Five members of the taxi industry, both brokers and accessible taxi drivers, provided comments in response to questions relating to how existing accessible transportation is operating, what the barriers of entry are for accessible taxi operators, what a system might look like if Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) were to support the industry by procuring service, and what requirements might be important for this system. The following is a summary of these comments.

#### **Key Points:**

- The costs to purchase and maintain an accessible taxi is high.
- The demand for accessible trips is low compared to conventional service however many trips are being booked directly through the drivers therefore the demand is not accurately captured.
- Accessible taxis have the potential for more non-revenue time than conventional taxis.
- Having an on demand transportation system that services both ambulatory and non-ambulatory passengers is advantageous to operators.

#### **What we heard about existing accessible transportation services in HRM:**

##### Area serviced

- Taxi demand, for both accessible and conventional services, generally follows population density, however, socioeconomic factors as well as areas with a high proportion of low-income housing tend to have a higher proportion of taxi use.
- Accessible taxi demand is equally distributed across the municipality and doesn't tend to be higher in any particular area.
- All of HRM is serviced although suburban and rural areas have a reduced level of service due to the reduced demand.
- Previous taxi zoning was helpful to accessible service providers as it limited the amount of deadheading required to pick up passengers. Removal of the zones have reduced limitations on how the fleet is dispatched, although the historic patterns of where each company has operated has stayed the same due to the relationship with the company/operator.

##### Demand

- There is currently very low portion of overall taxi trips that require an accessible taxi (5-25 trips per broker per month, however, this number does not include calls made directly to the driver).
- Accessible trips are not denied unless there are no accessible vehicles logged on. Brokers are unable to control what hours accessible taxis are available as drivers are able to make their own schedules.
- The demand for taxis generally follows transit demand where peak times are higher (approximately 7:30-10:30 am and 4:00-7:00pm). There are some instances where late evenings can have very high demand, however, if passengers have regularly found that they have been unable to get trips home late in the evening due to availability, they may

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be less likely to go out. In the future, there may be an increase in evening demand if additional services were available.

- It benefits accessible taxis to have both ambulatory and non-ambulatory passengers. Taxis which operate serving only non-ambulatory passengers run the risk of having a large proportion of down time and/or time deadheading (driving to a location with no paying passenger). Ambulatory trips generally require less boarding time, which allows more trips to be completed throughout the day. Due to the higher demand of ambulatory trips, taxis are able to combine ambulatory and non-ambulatory trips to increase the amount of time they are operating with a passenger. That being said, accessible taxis ensure that trips are only filled for ambulatory users if no one in the queue requires an accessible vehicle.
- Most trips are currently being booked on the phone either via the broker or directly with drivers. It was felt that many people were phoning to book their trip as opposed to requesting a trip on the app, as they were able to question if any accessible taxis were currently available via the phone. Automated phone systems have received positive feedback as well.
- Booking apps do not currently allow you to select a driver, only a vehicle type.
- Pre-booked reservations are only done by some taxi brokers. Pre-booking allows the broker to get trips fulfilled as quickly as possible. Others do not take pre-bookings due to the uncertainty of their accessible fleet availability.

### Why there are so few accessible taxis in HRM:

- The cost to convert or buy a vehicle is very high and funding sources have been removed. It costs nearly \$50,000 per vehicle and all vehicles need to be under 10 years old. Therefore, buying an older van to convert into an accessible taxi may be slightly less expensive up front, but the operational lifespan will be shorter with less chance to recuperate these up-front costs.
- The operating/maintenance costs are high due to the additional requirements on the vehicle. These vehicles are required to carry significantly more weight than your average vehicle. Additional weight has been added in the form of the ramp and most electric wheelchairs are upwards of 200 lbs. Many of these vehicles are not purpose built to regularly carry this weight, so additional reinforcement has also been added to the frame. This adds additional weight and potential failure points. This also increases the fuel cost. Additionally, if a ramp requires repair, this is an extra cost to the accessible taxi owner not required by conventional taxi owners and hinders their ability to serve their customers until it is repaired.
- Due to the low demand for accessible trips, there are often long wait times for a request and there is an increased possibility of deadheading. If the demand increases slightly, the increase in deadhead trips and wait time may further increase the per trip costs, however, if the demand increased significantly and the deadheads could be reduced this could improve the number of fares per day and improve the financial viability of the service.
- The time to serve one client is generally longer for an accessible trip than an ambulatory trip as the time spent deploying the ramp and securing a wheelchair is not required for ambulatory trips. Some of this time, would also be non-revenue time. Therefore, for two trips with the same passenger, fare may have very different costs from the requested

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time to the time the passenger has disembarked the taxi and the ramp has been returned to its position for travel.

- A similar door-to-door service is offered at a lower cost to the user by Halifax Transit.

### **How can HRM support private on-demand accessible transportation:**

- Financial support for vehicle purchase.
- Financial support for on-going maintenance.
- Regular, consistent funding so that there is guaranteed revenue for providing accessible service despite the low demand.
- Municipal purchase/ownership of vehicles.
- Legislative changes specific to accessible taxis.
- Provide training.
- Facilitate contracts with organizations.
- Create a program where there is more control over when accessible taxis are operational.
- Form a working relationship between Access-a-Bus and private providers to help fill client trips.
- Support the drivers who are currently providing the service and help to increase the demand for accessible trips.