



## MEETING OF THE ST. JOHN'S TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

### REGULAR BUSINESS

A meeting of the St. John's Transportation was held on Thursday, April 30, 2020 at Noon virtually online via GoToMeeting.

Present at the meeting were:

Ian Froude	Chair/Councillor
Shawn Skinner	Vice Chair
Dave Lane	Commissioner/City Councillor
Hope Jamieson	Commissioner/City Councillor
Kevin Breen	City Manager
Derek Coffey	Deputy City Manager, Financial Management
Colleen Galgay	Commissioner
Paul Walsh	Commissioner
Kirsten Morry	Commissioner
Judy Powell	General Manager
Jason Hussey	Manager of Finance, Metrobus
Linda Ryan	Administrative Assistant

### I. PROCEDURAL

- The Chair called the meeting to order.
- L. Ryan recorded the minutes of the meeting.

### II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA/MINUTES

- It was moved by Vice Chair Skinner and seconded by Commissioner Lane that the agenda for this meeting date be approved.
- It was moved by Vice Chair Skinner and seconded by Commissioner Galgay that the minutes of the Commission meeting dated February 27, 2020 be adopted as distributed.

### III. BUSINESS ARISING

#### 1. COVID-19—Update

##### ➤ EMPLOYEE SAFETY MEASURES

- Safety shields to protect transit operators from COVID-19 virus transmission were designed, fabricated, installed and tested on all buses in the fleet.
- Maintenance employees worked together to design and install the units. The design specifications have been shared at the request of other transit systems across the country that are considering installing similar units on board transit buses for their respective operators.
- Metrobus transit operators are appreciative of the safety shields which have served to reduce their stress on the road having to interact with customers during the pandemic.
- Redundant shifts have been implemented in the Maintenance Department, such that if a shift is required to isolate due to an employee contracting the virus, the schedule enables the garage to remain operating. Staff members in other departments are working staggered hours as well to reduce employee interaction.
- Reminders about reporting of symptoms and contact with positive Covid-19 cases were circulated to all employees. Response kits and procedures were distributed throughout all areas of the Metrobus offices and placed in company vans to deal with potential situations where an employee starts to experience Coronavirus symptoms at work.
- Supports, such as employee wellness resources, were shared with employees including EAP information, and resources were forwarded to managers and supervisors about managing in uncertain times.
- PPE kits were prepared for transit operators' use on wheelchair accessible buses when securing and unbuckling securement straps for mobility devices since it requires the operator to breach social distancing guidelines. Maintenance employees are required to wear full PPE when doing bus changes.

## **1. COVID-19—Update (Continued)**

### **➤ PUBLIC SAFETY**

- With the reduction in the number of passengers permitted on board buses, as per provincial directives, notices were placed in bus interiors and transit shelters for customers' information.
- Eastern Health contacted Metrobus on April 11<sup>th</sup> and advised that a person who rode transit two (2) days earlier, on April 9<sup>th</sup>, had tested positive for COVID-19. The two (2) transit operators involved were tested; their results were negative but the employees were required to self isolate for 14 days.
- Staff members were asked by Eastern Health to assist with contact tracing through m-Card pass use. Vice Chair Skinner suggested the City's legal counsel be consulted regarding the Commission's obligation and liability in this instance.

### **➤ BUDGET/ECONOMIC IMPACT**

- Additional budgetary expenses, including cleaning and disinfectant and sanitizing products, are being incurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It appears, at this time, that budgetary savings on the GoBus side of the operations might offset losses on the Metrobus side. The Finance Manager is further reviewing this item and the General Manager will report at the next regular business meeting.

### **➤ INDUSTRY PRACTICES AND SUPPORT**

- Metrobus and GoBus ridership has declined by 80-85%, similar to that experienced by transit systems nationwide. As the industry responds to this unprecedented global event, the public transit community has come together to support one another in the face of this pandemic.
- The General Manager continues to participate in CUTA's weekly "COVID-19: Innovative Solutions for Public Transit" webinars for information and best practices sharing among transit systems across the country. The seminars provide a medium for CUTA members to share their strategies and solutions in the face of COVID-19.
- Topics such as physical distancing, for example, continue to be challenging for systems and there has been much conversation nationally about this.
- It has been discussed also with other transit systems about not moving to free fares. Some systems have moved to rear door boarding and free fares, and are experiencing an increased number of nonessential riders (those who are riding without a specific destination) because of it. The challenges of physical distancing on board and the capacity to carry essential travelers have proven difficult. Once barriers are installed, they will be reintroducing fares.
- On April 24<sup>th</sup>, the General Manager attended a conference call of CUTA's regional chairs to begin planning for transit economic recovery efforts and rebuilding public transit after the critical COVID-19 stage. A Recovery Task Force was subsequently assembled to lead this initiative. The General Manager is a member representing transit systems in the Atlantic Canada region.
- As a result of the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, transit systems across the country are suffering staggering losses, in the millions of dollars each week. CUTA is advocating for federal government emergency funding relief so that systems can maintain operations during this challenging time.
- Additionally, CUTA is asking that transit systems be placed on the priority list for procurement of cleaning agents, disinfectants and PPE equipment for transit operators, and reimburse transit systems for the costs of these unforeseen expenses once the pandemic is over. CUTA is working with the federal government to raise awareness of the industry's plight and is contacting provincial and territorial governments to ensure access to the funding support needed to keep vital services running for Canadian communities.

### **ACTION:**

- The Chair will request the City to adopt a motion at its April 27<sup>th</sup> Council meeting in favour of CUTA's request for emergency funding relief for Canadian transit systems.
- An advocacy letter requesting federal action in support of CUTA's position will be prepared and forwarded to The Honourable Marc Garneau on behalf of the Commission.

## **1. COVID-19—Update (Continued)**

### **➤ SERVICE SCHEDULES**

- MUN students comprise approximately 30% of Metrobus ridership. At this point, it is unknown whether or not Memorial University will open for in-person classes in the fall; although, some institutions across the country have already decided on virtual lessons only.
- Summer and fall works schedules are generally picked in the same timeframe by transit operators. Plans, at this time, are to move to a regular summer service at the end of June, but there are challenges:
  - The availability of maintenance parts for transit buses is becoming an issue due to the shutdown of many manufacturing plants, and this is severely impacting the supply chain.
  - Additionally, staffing schedules/levels necessitated by physical distancing is challenging in completing repairs and general maintenance work.
- In cautiously working toward a regular schedule in September, this, too, will bring some challenges:
  - Current staff shortages due to retirements, sickness, lack of new recruits and deferred in-house training programs for new replacement transit operators will make it tight for fall staffing.
  - Delivery of the new Vicinity buses, originally scheduled for August, is delayed also because of manufacturing plant closures due to COVID-19.

## **IV. NEW BUSINESS**

### **1. Draft Financial Statements—Audit 2019**

- The Finance Committee (Chair Froude, Vice Chair Skinner, D. Coffey, Deputy City Manager—Financial Management, the General Manager and Metrobus Manager of Finance J. Hussey), met prior to the Commission meeting of this date to review the 2019 draft financial statements as prepared by the Commission's auditors, BDO. The draft financials were approved by the Committee for presentation to the full Commission.
- J. Hussey presented an overview of the highlights of the statements for the Commission's information.
- It was noted that BDO representatives had complimented Metrobus on the excellent teamwork and cooperation by its Finance Department in completing the audit. Vice Chair Skinner congratulated and thanked J. Hussey and his department for its timely completion in alignment with J. Hussey's personal goals for the audit.

#### **ACTION:**

It was moved by Vice Chair Skinner, seconded by D. Coffey and carried unanimously that the draft financial statements for the fiscal year ending 2019 be adopted as presented by the auditors.

### **2. Tender—Tires**

- The tender for tires closed on April 24<sup>th</sup>; a single bid was received from GCR, who is the current tire supplier.
- The General Manager tabled a schedule of the current prices plus bid prices. There is little or no change in the pricing of most purchased tires.
- Based on the bid received, the General Manager recommended that GCR continue as tire provider for the supply of new bus tires, along with retreading and purchase of suitable casings for retreading.
- Commissioner Walsh questioned why only one bid was received for this item. He indicated he would be interested to know the number of companies that inquired and those that picked up the tender specifications. The General Manager will check into this item.

#### **ACTION:**

Commissioner Walsh moved and Commissioner Morry seconded, that the tender be awarded to GCR as the only bidder; the motion was unanimously accepted.

### **3. Community Bus**

- The General Manager informed that a cheque in the amount of \$85,000 has been received from the Province to subsidize the Community Bus service for the current year, 2020.
- This item will be further discussed at the in camera meeting following the regular business meeting of this date.

### **4. Financial Statements**

- The financial statements for March, 2020 were tabled and reviewed.

### **5. The Link**

- The Link partners decided not to continue the service in Summer, 2020. Several factors influenced this decision:
  - The Railway Coastal Museum ownership was transferred to the City of St. John's, who was already a partner.
  - GeoCentre ownership was transferred to Memorial University.
  - The private Hop-On, Hop-Off had an impact.
- The Chair suggested this item be reviewed again during future strategic planning discussions.

### **6. Transit Priority**

- Metrobus was recently notified that the City has completed its portion of the work on this project and it is currently operating.
- Traffic congestion is not a problem at this time, however, due to less people travelling on City streets during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Training of transit operators in using the Transit Priority system is deferred as the Metrobus Driver Trainer has been reassigned to road duty since all classroom and on-the-road training has been also been deferred.
- It was noted that Melanie Shea, Financial Accountant with the City, has been in conversation with Province and advised that funding for this item remains unaffected during COVID-19.
- Nationally, CUTA has given a blanket extension for project interruptions based on COVID-19 considerations.

### **7. Financial Statements—March, 2020**

- The monthly financial statements for the period ending March 31, 2020 were tabled and reviewed.

### **8. Executive Summaries: (Regular)**

The Executive Summaries for the months of February and March, 2020 were tabled and reviewed.

## **V. OTHER (Information/Community)**

### **1. Virtual Meetings**

- Regular business meetings of the Commission are normally held on the last Thursday of each month. Special meetings are called as needed.
- Because, due to provincial restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, members cannot attend meetings in person, all future meetings will be held virtually until further notice.

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**REGULAR BUSINESS**

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### VI. ADJOURNMENT

- There being no further regular business to discuss at this time, the meeting adjourned at approximately 12:45 PM, immediately followed by an in-camera business meeting of the Commission.
- The next regular business meeting of the Commission will be held on Thursday, May 28, 2020 commencing at Noon. Meeting access information will be provided to members at a future date.

Respectfully submitted,

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Ian Froude  
Chair

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Linda Ryan  
Administrative Assistant