



MEETING OF THE ST. JOHN'S TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

REGULAR BUSINESS

A meeting of the St. John's Transportation was held on Friday, August 28, 2020 at Noon at the Metrobus Transit Centre, 25 Messenger Drive, St. John's. The meeting was streamed live via Webex.

Present at the meeting were:

Ian Froude	Chair/Councillor
Shawn Skinner	Vice Chair
Hope Jamieson	Commissioner/City Councillor
Derek Coffey	Deputy City Manager, Financial Management
Kirsten Morry	Commissioner
Paul Walsh	Commissioner
Judy Powell	General Manager
Donna Power	Manager of Accessible Services
Linda Ryan	Administrative Assistant

Absent:

Dave Lane	Commissioner/City Councillor
Colleen Galgay	Commissioner
Kevin Breen	City Manager

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 Walsh that the agenda for this meeting date be approved.
- It was moved by Vice Chair Skinner and seconded by Commissioner Morry that the minutes of the Commission meeting of July 23, 2020 be adopted as distributed.

III. BUSINESS ARISING

1. COVID-19—Update

➤ MASKS/PHYSICAL DISTANCING ON TRANSIT

- On August 17th, Eastern Health announced that masks would be mandatory in indoor public spaces effective August 24th. A call was held with Dr. J. Fitzgerald on August 20th to discuss implementation of mask requirements and seating capacity on public transit.
- For safety reasons, Transit Operators are exempt from wearing masks when seated behind the closed barrier, particularly those who wear glasses while driving and where fogging could impair their vision in operating the bus.
- The passenger seat located behind the Transit Operator is blocked and not available to customers for physical distancing.
- When passengers are wearing masks, physically distancing on board is not required; however, they are encouraged to do so where possible (when there aren't full passengers loads on board the bus).
- Promotion is being done in educating transit customers about the mandatory mask policy. Compliance is high, and the percentage of riders wearing masks is notably increasing.
- Transit Operators are not expected to police this item other than a friendly reminder to customers. If an individual refuses to wear a mask based on a medical condition, the Transit Operator will accept their word.



1. COVID-19—Update (Continued)

➤ **RIDERSHIP/MAXIMUM PASSENGER LOADS**

- Also effective August 24th, the seating restriction on board transit has been increased from a maximum of 19 passengers to full seating capacity (35-40 passengers depending on the model of the bus and considering the seat located behind the Transit Operator is blocked to maintain the required physical distance from the driver).
- Standing passenger loads are not permitted under the new guidelines.
- The recently announced increase in the passenger limit is timely in that the previous 19-passenger limit was beginning to cause some problematic issues on specific routes, particularly during mid-afternoon. In the week leading up to the change, ridership increased and approximately 22 persons per day were being left at transit stops.
- Metrobus ridership is currently at 55-58 % of pre-COVID-19 levels. With the re-opening of schools, some post-secondary institutions and offices in September, it is anticipated that ridership will increase to 60-65% of normal levels. Return to a full fall schedule in September is expected to accommodate any further potential increase in ridership on core routes (with 15 minute service in peak periods). Ridership levels continue to be closely monitored.
- GoBus ridership is currently approaching 50% of pre-COVID-19 ridership levels.

2. GoBus Eligibility Assessments

- As per recommendations contained in the Dillon report, all existing GoBus customers and new applicants are required to participate in the eligibility assessment process.
- Since eligibility assessments began last fall, a number of interruptions (Snowmageddon, COVID-19 Pandemic, etc.) have hampered the process. Horizon resumed assessments, however, on June 8th and has implemented all appropriate COVID-19 precautions, as per provincial public health directives. Horizon staff are working to reschedule all missed appointments and efforts are being made to assess any new applicants as quickly as possible.
- At the request of the Commission at its July meeting, Donna Power, Manager of Accessible Services provided an update on GoBus Eligibility Assessments and answered members' questions pertaining to the backlog.
- It was particularly noted that there has been a significant increase in the number of assessments completed in July,
- Feedback from GoBus users has been varied. Some are unsure of the reasons for the assessments; however, most individuals are agreeable to the process and understand the reasons for it. GoBus users report that Horizon assessors are friendly and accommodating.
- The Manager of Accessible Services has met with Horizon staff to discuss opportunities to explore further circumstances under which people can use regular transit in hopes of creating more conditional eligibility. Some individuals may be granted GoBus use on a temporary basis due to a specific injury, for example, rather than full eligibility. Enforcing appropriate conditions may not always be possible, but all options are being explored.
- The Manager of Accessible Services will engage in further discussions with Horizon on the need to achieve a greater volume of assessments and identify any issues that need to be addressed to improve the process further going forward. Commission members were encouraged to see the progress made in July and look forward to the outcome of the conversations with Horizon in achieving the necessary volumes.
- The Manager of Accessible Transit regularly reports on this item in her monthly statistical report. July statistics are noted below:

GOBUS ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENTS		
JULY 2020		
(NOT FINALIZED)	July	Totals to Date
Assessments completed	64	148
New applicants	11	55
Existing customers	53	93
Approved (unconditional)	46	119
Denied	5	7
Conditional/Temporary approval	12	21
Accounts closed	10	27
Missed Appointments (No-shows/late cancels)		11 (No-shows/late cancels)

IV. NEW BUSINESS

1. Provincial Bus Pass Program for Income Support Recipients

- Discussions have continued with the Department of Immigration, Skills and Labour and Metrobus to finalize implementation details for the innovative bus pass program.
- The new initiative, in partnership with the City and the Province, is to be effective October 1st.
- The Province has committed to provide bus passes to approximately 10,000 income support clients in the St. John's metro region (St. John's, Mount Pearl and Paradise).
- Metrobus staff have prepared and loaded all cards for the program and these have been delivered to the Province who will distribute the cards via Canada Post with clear directions on their activation and use.
- The impact on ridership and peak travel times is unknown at this point, and with load restrictions in accordance with COVID-19 pandemic guidelines, experience will tell.
- The Province is investing approximately \$1.2 million in 2020-21 and a further \$1.575 in fiscal year 2021-22. A revenue cheque will be issued to Metrobus from the Province on a quarterly basis.
- The pilot program will be evaluated following the two-year period and this evaluation will inform future delivery.
- It is hoped that the initiative will help lessen individual inequality and have positive impact for individuals and families in the region who currently receive income support through improved access to transit for employment, medical appointments, local businesses and shopping centres, as well as participation in all forms of community life.

2. Strategic Directions

- The Implementation Review Sub-Committee (Dillon Report) met on August 12th to discuss next steps in the strategic planning process and the organization's direction over the next five (5) years.
- The Chair shared a summary of conversations (previously contributed by Commission members plus Sub-Committee members and staff), applicable to the strategic direction of Metrobus and GoBus, as well as considering recommendations from the Dillon Report, for further discussion and potential ratification.
- The Chair noted that the intent of the modified format and content, as tabled below, is to draw attention to the core overarching priorities. The 'Supported By' and 'Inspired By' are foundational pieces; the 'Overarching Priorities' are those that the organization would be most held accountable to achieving.

Metrobus/GoBus Five-Year Strategic Directions

Overarching Priorities

1. **Riders and Ridership:** We must be innovative and proactive in finding and creating ridership growth on Metrobus while managing the growing demands on paratransit (GoBus) to ensure the service is reliable for years to come. We must also recognize that we are essential to the thousands of people that use the service weekly and that we operate a public service that ensures our city and communities function effectively.
2. **Increase Customer Focus:** The experience of the rider (existing and new) drives decision-making. We will work every day to provide an inclusive service that exceeds customer expectations.

Supported By

1. **Increase Operational Efficiency:** We will increase operational efficiency through a continuous improvement program; finding ways of doing things more efficiently and effectively. This is essential to maintaining current funding sources and attracting additional support.
2. **Improve Employee Satisfaction:** To become a team of inspired employees, we need to start at "home" and provide the support and resources needed to build employee satisfaction so that all employees want to contribute to the team's efforts and enjoy the team's successes.

2. Strategic Directions (Continued)

3. **Enhanced Partnerships:** We will focus on building productive relationships and developing tangible programs and projects with key partners, including the provincial government, other municipalities and post-secondary institutions.

Inspired By

1. **Create A Transit Supportive Culture:** We need to improve the image of public transit within our community and create a broader culture of transit-oriented mobility. This starts with a focus on youth, changing travel behaviour early with the goal of creating life-long customers. We must be perceived as an indispensable municipal service – as important as snowclearing and waste management.
2. **Environmental Protection and Sustainability:** Public transit has a significant role to play in supporting environmental sustainability. We must show internal leadership by reducing our own carbon footprint and promote the use of sustainable mobility as an alternative to travelling in a single occupant vehicle.

Strategic Projects

These are the immediate-term priority strategic projects that align with the organizational goals:

1. GoBus Sustainability: RFP and contract development; integration of Metrobus and GoBus operations and brand
 2. Execution on Income Assistance Bus Pass Program
 3. Comprehensive Capital Plan Development with a focus on renewal, shelters, electrification, and accessibility of Metrobus. This also includes determining how these improvements will be funded, including the federal and provincial funding programs and consideration of fares.
 4. Execution on the FTN Network (focusing on the core/backbone network)
 5. Enhancing communication and marketing to current and new customers: including onboard, online, and in the system
 6. Pursue transit opportunities for individuals 12-18 years of age (junior/high school) and university/college students via u-pass.
- Upon agreement on the direction, the following items will be further discussed:
- Capital list and debate the prioritization based on agreed to strategic directions
 - Proposed Service Standard changes for discussion this fall (based on recommendations in the Dillon Report)
 - 2021 Operational Plan once the Commission agrees to the direction/priorities
 - CEO Performance Objectives for 2021
- Vice Chair Skinner noted that while he understands that regional transit is not of priority in the strategic planning document, he would like the Commission to remain open for any potential discussions with the Province and other municipalities should the opportunity arise. Other members were in agreement.
- D. Coffey stated that the City is more than willing to entertain the concept of regional transportation but the leadership has to come from other municipalities and not the Commission.

ACTION: It was moved by Commissioner Walsh, seconded by Commissioner Morry and unanimously carried that the document be adopted as presented.

3. Virtual CUTA Conference

- In this pandemic year, CUTA will be holding its first virtual conference from November 16-19.
- Preliminary topics include:
- Funding and financing your transit system
 - Health and safety on transit
 - Zero emission vehicle (ZEV) technology
 - Diversity and inclusion in transit
 - Technology shaping the future of transit
 - Planning our cities for the future
- Members were encouraged to watch the CUTA website for updates of finalized content and advise of their interest in participating.

4. Financial Statements

- The financial statements for the month of July, 2020 were tabled and reviewed.
- It was noted that 2020 has been a challenging year in that ridership on both conventional transit (Metrobus) and specialized transit (GoBus) has dipped at a greater percentage than current service levels; and while revenues have declined, expenses remain the same.
- However, due to reduced operating expenditures on the GoBus side, \$1 million in combined savings is anticipated at year-end. Typically any savings or budgetary surplus is used to pay down the Commission's capital debt.
- D. Coffey advised that with a surplus of this magnitude, Council would have to be apprised and any savings at Metrobus could be used toward the City's deficit in other areas.
- At this point, Vice Chair Skinner reference Commissioner Lane's suggestions relevant to transit advertising and promotion (made via email), to encourage citizens to use transit and specifically targeted toward those who have never used transit before.
- The General Manager cautioned that fall travel patterns first need to be determined to ensure the system can meet the demands placed upon it prior to beginning any aggressive marketing campaign targeting new riders.
- The Chair noted that in the next two (2) months, there will be a better sense of back-to-school ridership levels and the uptake on the low income bus pass program, and this item can be revisited at that time, keeping in mind the Commission's long-term trajectory of its strategic goals.

5. Executive Summary (Regular)

- The Executive Summary for the month of July, 2020 was tabled for members' information.

V. OTHER (Information/Community)

- There was no other business to discuss at this time.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

- There being no further regular business to discuss the meeting be adjourned at approximately 1:15 PM.
- Live streaming ended followed by an in-camera business meeting of the Commission.
- The next regular business meeting of the Commission will be held on Thursday, September 24, 2020 commencing at Noon.

Respectfully submitted,

Ian Froude
Chair

Linda Ryan
Administrative Assistant