



REGULAR MEETING MINUTES – MAY 26, 2022
Meeting of the St. John’s Transportation Commission
Thursday, May 26, 2022 , 12:30 PM
25 Messenger Drive

Attended:

In Person

- | | |
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| • Paul Walsh | Chair |
| • Ian Froude | Vice-Chair/City Councillor |
| • Maggie Burton | Commissioner/City Councillor |
| • Lynn Zurel | Commissioner |
| • Ron Ellsworth | Commissioner/City Councillor |
| • Judy Powell | General Manager |
| • Derek Coffey | Deputy City Manager, Financial Management |
| • Linda Ryan | Administrative Assistant |

Online via WebEx

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------|
| • Kirsten Morry | Commissioner |
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Absent with Regrets:

- | | |
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| • Tolulope Akerele | Commissioner |
| • Kevin Breen | City Manager |

I. PROCEDURAL

Chair Walsh called the meeting to order at 12:30 PM.

L. Ryan recorded the minutes of the meeting.

II. AGENDA—MAY 26, 2022 (Continued)

MOTION: To approve the agenda for this date as circulated

Moved: Vice Chair Froude

Seconded: Commissioner Burton

Carried

III. MINUTES—APRIL 28, 2022

Vice Chair Froude and Commissioner Burton complimented on the comprehensiveness of the minutes.

MOTION: To approve the minutes from the April 28, 2022 meeting as circulated

Moved: Commissioner Ellsworth

Seconded: Commissioner Burton

Carried

IV. BUSINESS ARISING

1. 2021 Financial Audit

- The audited draft financial statements for the year ending December 31, 2021 were adopted by the Commission at its previous meeting on April 28, 2022.
- Chair Walsh and Vice Chair Froude signed the final copies of the 2021 audited financials as prepared and forwarded by the auditors.

2. LIFT Program

- On May 9th, a media event was held at the Metrobus depot to announce changes to the Free Bus Pass Program for Income Support Recipients. Among those in attendance were: The Honourable John Abbott, Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development who made the announcement on behalf of the Province. Kelly Heisz spoke on behalf of the Seniors NL, and Councillor/Vice Chair Froude spoke representing the St. John's Transportation Commission. Also in attendance were Councillor/Commissioner Maggie Burton, MHA-Mount Pearl North Lucy Stoyles and other government staff members.
- Minister Abbott publicly announced his government's commitment to fund the expansion of the low-income bus pass program to a broader group of users that will now include seniors over the age of 65 who are receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement, and youth receiving services from the Youth Services Program effective June 1, 2022.
- It is estimated that an additional 2,000 residents will avail of the program. To date, 79 seniors and 13 GoBus customers have visited the transit centre with the required documentation to avail of the bus pass program; an uptake is expected in the coming weeks. The program is intended to provide access to community services for citizens who otherwise cannot avail of them due to transportation costs and enhance their overall quality of life. Feedback to date has been positive and many have expressed their appreciation.
- The contract with the Province has been signed at the annual cost of \$2.1 million.

V. NEW BUSINESS

1. General Manager's Report

COVID Update

- [Public Health Guidelines](#)
There were no changes to this item in April.

1. General Manager's Report (Continued)

- **Ridership**

Metrobus ridership in April continues to climb, nearing pre-pandemic ridership levels at 99% of April 2019.

- **GoBus Ridership**

GoBus ridership in April 2020 remained steady at 65-70% of 2019 ridership levels.

Discussion

Confidence in the GoBus System

Commissioner Zurel questioned why GoBus ridership is not increasing, similarly to Metrobus ridership. She asked if people might not be comfortable with the requirement for the eligibility assessment process, or if there is some element of the reduction in ridership consequential of people who were previously availing of Gobus not meeting the eligibility requirements to qualify as users in 2019. The General Manager indicated that this could be a factor; she indicated that it was expected that ridership would have increased faster than it has.

Commissioner Ellsworth advised that there remains a lot of concern among users about shared rides on taxis, and that individuals are still choosing not to be mobile yet for this reason. He noted that reportedly, some users are not going out because of lost confidence in the system. This was confirmed in speaking with Kim White, the former Executive Director of the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities–Newfoundland Labrador (COD-NL), who now works with the community centres and is still very active in the disability community, and Tom Babcock of The Hub. Both confirmed that they are hearing from users at the centres, that the confidence in the system is still not there and users fear that if they go out, they won't be able to return home afterwards on the GoBus system.

Commissioner Ellsworth informed that he has reached out to COD-NL and asked that their members be encouraged to get out in the community using the GoBus system. He has personally offered that if people have difficulty in getting home, they can call him to work something out.

He further identified that GoBus users see the purchase of the new software technology as having damaged the system, and it will take some time to rebuild the confidence piece. He suggested that once the weather improves and is more conducive to travel, ridership will likely build; but, for now, GoBus users need more time to have renewed trust in the system.

1. General Manager's Report (Continued)

Discussion

Confidence in the GoBus System

Commissioner Burton inquired regarding the estimated number of wheelchair only users at peak times compared to the number of ambulatory users. She referenced the April 2022 Executive Report--GoBus:

"...Part of this issue is the number of wheelchairs booked during peak times versus the number of buses and wheelchair taxis available at those times."

She further asked if there is perhaps a sense of what those balance issues are (number of users and vehicular types). The General Manager advised that of the approximately 500-550 GoBus passengers carried daily, approximately one-third are wheelchair only users. Commissioner Burton wondered if this might be part of the dependability issue.

Commissioner Ellsworth indicated that he does not think so since MVT and Newfound Cabs are working better together. He noted while there are still some issues, space is made available for wheelchairs; and the issues surrounding permanent bookings have also been resolved, so it's uncertain if this is part of the problem or not, although it may be a contributing factor. The General Manager noted that the same space exists currently that has always been there and there has never been an issue previously in this respect.

Commissioner Burton noted there remains an issue with VIA around scheduling and accommodating vehicle-specific ambulatory customers on taxis for individuals who can ride in a mini-van only. Customers are, at times, being scheduled to an incorrect vehicle resulting in service interruptions. VIA, the software provider, has been unable, up to this point, to isolate these trips to ensure they are placed on the correct differential vehicle.

Commissioner Ellsworth noted the validity of Commissioner Burton's point in that previously, Newfound Cabs staff manually juggled the vehicular manifest for wheelchair and ambulatory users. Newfound Cabs has since added dedicated wheelchair accessible vehicles using the new GoBus (VIA) scheduling technology. There are concerns that potentially too many ambulatory riders are scheduling to the wheelchair vans, while an excessive number of chairs are being sent on the offline printed manifest.

The General Manager advised that VIA has come up with a solution for VAN bookings, reducing the number of ambulatory rides scheduling to these vehicles. Commissioner Burton noted that this should help. The General Manager further advised, however, that VIA has not yet been able to resolve the issue surrounding the car-only requirement. The problem is posing a challenge for the software developers as they don't see a fix for CAR only bookings without significantly compromising scheduling efficiency.

1. General Manager's Report (Continued)

Discussion

Confidence in the GoBus System

The problem is being tracked and the provider is trying to find a solution to using the software differently than it was planned. It was noted that this exercise in building the necessary additional features for the GoBus service is helping the provider build an improved product.

Commissioner Burton noted that there have been up to this point, few denials under the eligibility system. She suggested that as the current contract with Telus Health Services nears its end, a results breakdown be provided to understand if there is an actual need for the process after all.

Commissioner Zurel offered that proof of eligibility is a deterrent to any potential misuse of the system; and there is comfort in knowing that the people who use the service deserve to have it, and there are no ill feelings because someone could potentially be taking a spot from someone else who might need the service.

Radio System

- The current radio system used by Metrobus and the City's Public Works Department uses two (2) towers for coverage: one is located on Kenmount Hill and the CBC tower on Shea Heights. In 2021, CBC provided notification that their tower on Shea Heights will be de-commissioned in July 2022. Subsequently, as a replacement, an agreement was made with NTV for use of their tower at Shea Heights.
- Following a meeting held on April 7, 2022 between all service providers, a contract with NTV was signed.
- The move of the radio system to the new NTV tower location will occur June 17th – 22nd, 2022.

Electrification Plan

- The required Non-Disclosure Agreement with the Canadian Urban Transit Research and Innovation Consortium (CUTRIC) has been signed.
- Details on the specific types of data required by CUTRIC, as well as next steps are expected soon.

1. General Manager's Report (Continued)

Goulds Detour

- Six (6) areas of construction that began in Goulds in the past several weeks are ongoing and impacting service. Some of the areas of roadway under construction are expected to last well into the fall. Traffic is reduced to a single lane in these areas; and, at times cannot pass through at all.
- Due to the delays and unpredictability of travel throughout the areas, a detour has been established that, unfortunately, means bus stops on the main road between Walsh's Lane and Doyle's Road cannot be serviced while construction remains in the area.
- Since transit buses cannot maintain a predictable schedule in the area at this time, customers are being encouraged to take an earlier bus in order to make their connections.
- As construction concludes, adjustments will be made to the detour, where feasible, in order to reduce the impact on transit customers.

2. Executive Summary

The Executive Report for April 2022 was tabled for members' information.

3. April 2022 Financial Statements

The Financial Statements for the period ending April 30, 2022 were tabled and discussed. The following items were noted:

Transit Advertising

- Commissioner Zurel commented that she was pleased to see transit advertising revenue is on the positive side for the month of April.

3. April 2022 Financial Statements (Continued)

Diesel and 2022 Deficit

- Commissioner Zurel acknowledged the continued escalating price of diesel fuel in comparison to the budgeted cost for 2022. She suggested that a financial re-forecast be part of the financial package at the July business meeting of the Commission as six (6) months of information will be available up to that point. She emphasized the importance of being transparent with the City in light of its commitment to Metrobus with respect to its potential deficit at the end of the fiscal year.

Charters

- Commissioner Zurel noted that charters appear to be priced modestly and that Metrobus should not lose monies on this aspect of the service. The General Manager informed that a fuel surcharge was recently added to the price of charters.
- A meeting of the Marketing Committee will be scheduled soon to discuss the marketing of charters, as well as a number of other items, including marketing of the Community Bus service.

GoBus–No Shows, Taxis

- Commissioner Zurel noted that the number of GoBus cancellations/no-shows appear to be high during April. She had expected that with the new booking system, this number would have decreased, and asked if lack of confidence in the system could be a contributing factor. The General Manager responded that cancellations/no-shows are typically high, although she agreed that this could be the case; with the new system intended to be accommodate more on demand bookings, customers are still booking well in advance.
- Commissioner Zurel noted also that the number of taxi rides appears to be higher than normal in April and asked if this might be a cause for concern. The General Manager responded that the exact reason for this is unknown at this time, but a contributing factor could be attributed to challenges in recruiting and training staff, which many employers are finding challenging during this time.
- Commissioner Ellsworth added that because the wrong vehicle showed up, some no-shows might not be valid and customers may have to re-book their rides.

3. April 2022 Financial Statements (Continued)

GoBus–No Shows, Taxis

- It was noted also that eligibility assessment no-shows/late cancellations are charged if cancellation is not made within a specified timeframe (at least the day prior to the scheduled booking). There have been some customers who have repeatedly missed their appointments and, if not for valid reasons, these individuals will be charged a fee. Carolyn Mills, Manager of Accessible Transit, will follow up with these individuals.
- Commissioner Ellsworth suggested that, for some customers, it could be related to weather or anxiety issues in fear they might lose their service. The General Manager informed that efforts are made to accommodate persons for this reason; for example, support persons, such a family or interpreters are permitted to attend the assessment with the customer.
- Commissioner Zurel suggested that once the previously discussed issues improve, it might be beneficial to work with customers to help them better understand the system in order to help restore confidence in the service.

VI. OTHER BUSINESS

There were no additional business items to discuss at this time.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Business concluded at approximately 1:00 PM. The next regular business meeting of the Commission is to be held at Noon on Thursday, June 30, 2020 at the Metrobus Transit Centre.

MOTION: To adjourn the May regular business meeting of the Commission
Moved: Vice Chair Froude
Carried

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Paul Walsh
Chair

Linda Ryan
Administrative Assistant