

2. Paratransit Eligibility Assessments - Update

➤ D. Power, Manager Accessible Transit Services, provided the Commission with an overview of the GoBus Eligibility Assessments as follows:

(as of mid-June 2021)

Assessments Completed	480
New Applicants	158
Existing Customers	322
Approved (unconditional)	410
Denied	15
Conditional or Temporary	55
Accounts Closed	99
Appeals	2
Late Cancels and No-Shows	171

New Applications: 210

- 6 denied
- 152 approved
 - 121 permanent/unconditional
 - 13 conditional
 - 18 temporary
- 52 dormant

Existing Re-Applications: 322

- 9 denied (3 refused assessment)
- 313 approved
 - 289 permanent/unconditional
 - 16 conditional
 - 8 temporary

Overall Progress and Results

- 1,600 accounts to start (existing), 55% processed
 - 658 accounts sent to Horizon
 - 219 accounts closed
- Of the 658 submitted, 64% completed
 - 322 assessments done
 - 99 accounts closed
- Trip impacts from denials
 - 9 people denied
 - 13 people changed from full approval to seasonal or conditional eligibility
 - More than 775 trips (value approximately \$20,000)

Challenges

- Covid-19
- No-shows
 - Amended process to make reminder call at 72 hours before rather than 48 hours
 - If appointment not confirmed, automatically cancelled
 - Phone calls with "asap" appointments rather than letters with future appointments
- Out-dated customer contacts

Appeals

- 2 to date (1 recommendation upheld; 1 overturned)
- Identified opportunities to improve assessment process and questionnaires

2. Paratransit Eligibility Assessments – Update (continued)

- Commissioner Burton stated that she is concerned that the cost of performing the assessments might outweigh the savings on GoBus. The budgeted amount was \$144,500 to reassess existing clients and \$153,000 to assess new applicants (estimated 50 assessments @ \$85.00 per month for three years). The progress so far is a savings of more than 775 trips valued at approximately \$20,000. She is not comfortable with the process because of the small savings that has been achieved so far.
- D. Power responded that there is a certain amount of savings that we are not able to put a price tag on from the 52 dormant accounts as well as a deterrent for new people entering the system who do not meet the eligibility criteria.

ACTION: Commissioner Burton requested the budget versus actual figures in detail for a further discussion.

3. Update – RFP Paratransit Service Contract

- The RFP for the Paratransit Service Contract is currently out in the market – the bids are closing on July 30th. During the week of August 9th, the General Manager will organize a meeting of the Valuation Committee – Chair Walsh, Commissioner Morry, D. Power, Manager, Accessible Transit Services, Jason Hussey, Manager of Finance – Metrobus, and the General Manager – to process the bids. The General Manager will email the Commission with the recommendation and the results can be sent to the Purchasing Department of the City of St. John's in an expedited manner.
- Commissioner Burton raised concerns with reference to the tender for buses not going big enough with electrification buses – one bus – and how that will reflect on the City considering Halifax just announced that “HRM getting 60 new battery-operated, electric buses”. Halifax is expected to have its facility finished by 2023 with a “RFP issued later this summer for the electric buses with the aim of having all of them delivered by 2024.”
- The General Manager stated that the electric bus size that is used for GoBus were only approved for the Canadian market earlier this year. There are very few in service, if any, and they would be in testing mode. The GoBus fleet will be five years old in June of 2022, which is their life expectancy. If an order is placed for them immediately, they will not arrive until late 2022 so there is concern on the stability of the fleet at this point. Purchasing electric buses is the direction that we have to move to but we cannot wait for them to replace this particular fleet.
- Commissioner Burton's thoughts are that we are waiting a long time for them as it is (2022) and by the time we get that fleet things may have shifted more but we will not be replacing them again until 2027.
- The General Manager noted that funding for the tendered buses was applied for six months ago and word was just received that it is forwarded to the Federal Government so we are still waiting for an answer on the funding. If the process had to be started over for new funding for electric buses, which are three to four times more expensive than a regular paratransit bus, it will postpone the process until the end of the year. A tender cannot be run until funding is in place. The availability in the market is unknown.
- Chair Walsh questioned whether a bus is diesel powered or electric powered, why would that affect the funding? The General Manager responded that it is the scope of the funding and the amount. Electric buses are three to four times the amount of a diesel bus so funding was applied for the cost of diesel buses.
- Commissioner Akerele suggested that we apply for more funding in advance but the General Manager noted that funding should not be an issue – timing of the purchase is more the issue.
- D. Coffey questioned to what extent if all paratransit buses or our regular fleet of buses went electric, what other considerations would have to come into play – i.e. – staff training, infrastructure, mechanics training and purchasing extra buses – you can't just switch the buses without a plan. The General Manager noted that she is working with Edmundo Fausto, Sustainability Coordinator with the City of St. John's, to acquire the funding to hire a consultant to assist with the production of an Electrification Plan. He is currently working with NRCAN (Natural Resources of Canada) and FCM (Federation of Canadian Municipalities) looking for funding to complete the plan to put in place to move towards electrification. It is not a quick decision – it is one that requires a lot of planning.
- Chair Walsh questioned Council members about a resolution that was passed about declaring a climate emergency that the City would move towards not only electrification of the fleet of buses but also of the rest of the municipal fleet. Once the resolution was passed, plans should have been in place.
- Vice Chair Hanlon looks towards the General Manager's wisdom with regards to purchasing electric buses when the infrastructure is not in place.

3. Update – RFP Paratransit Service Contract cont'd

- Commissioner Burton opined that she doesn't feel that every effort was made to get a percentage of the new fleet electrified or hybrid. The General Manager noted that the discussion in June's Commission Meeting stated the funding is for up to 18 gas buses. Depending on the impact that the on-demand Software will have on the requirements for buses so the tender will be for between 14 and 18 buses as the new software will make the GoBus system more efficient and 18 buses may not be required. More information will be available mid-late fall once the software is up and running. If we lower the quantity of buses needed, once information is received with regards to electric buses, the availability and the requirements we can prepare for them – we may be in the position to tender for a quantity of electric buses.
- Chair Walsh informed that he became aware that there was work being done with regards to transit as it relates to the province's work with accessibility legislation. The General Manager and D. Power, Manager, Accessible Transit Services attended a meeting with Aisling Gogan, Assistant Deputy Minister, Policies & Programs, Department Children, Seniors & Social Development and Terry Jean Murray, Director (Acting) of the Disability Policy Office with regards to specifications of buses that would meet legislation requirements.
- Commissioner Burton questioned if a tender is active, can you choose not to release it. D. Coffey responded that generally yes with limitations but it can be done. Commissioner Burton would like an urgent meeting with municipal/federal/provincial representatives to talk electric buses.
- The General Manager stated that she supports what Commissioner Burton is saying but the concern is that we will not have any paratransit buses to run next year. The availability of purchasing gas buses is a concern because of the microchip issue as plants are closed, it is unknown if this fleet will make it through for delivery next year.
- Commissioner Zurel noted that a compromise needs to be made with awarding the tender for no more than 14 diesel buses and making a commitment to get our name on the list to get the electric buses with infrastructure is necessary.
- Chair Walsh would like urgency placed on a plan for any vehicle going forward that needs to be ordered would be electric.
- The General Manager stated that the Canadian government announced a landmark new regulation that would ban gasoline and diesel vehicle sales by 2035. There are a lot questions around the new buses on the market – ie. – the quantity of kilometres they can travel on a charge, you don't replace buses one for one as the fleet has to be larger for charging purposes which would be part of the electrification plan.
- Commissioner Morry questioned the amount of time it would take to get an electrification plan in place with the General Manager advising that it could be done by year end or early 2022. She also advised there is discussion in the industry on the paratransit side because these buses are fairly new to market.

ACTION: The General Manager is to provide an update from CUTA via email to the Commission.

D. Power left the meeting.

4. Tender – Van

- For the completeness of minutes, the van tender was cancelled and reissued for a hybrid van. This tender closes on July 30th. The General Manager will conduct an e-Poll prior to the next Commission meeting on August 26th.

5. Bus Stop Announcements

ACTION: It was moved by Commissioner Burton and seconded by Commissioner Morry and carried unanimously that a document is to be prepared with regards to App based Stop Announcements in order to get the input from the Inclusion Advisory Committee. Once completed, it is to be brought back to the Commission for discussion.

- The General Manger requested time for the preparation of the document as she would like to contact Natalie Godden, Manager, Family & Leisure Services, Community Services Department, to ensure the system that is being considered would be beneficial to both Metrobus and the City. The staff at Metrobus are tied up presently in other projects – ie. – the fare collection upgrade, On-Demand Software, etc. and research into the technology that is available

5. Bus Stop Announcements cont'd

presently has to be researched in order to make sure that the newest technology is being considered. The General Manager will aim for the September Commission meeting.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

1. Financial Statements - June, 2021

- Commissioner Zurel noted on the Statement of Revenue - Passenger Revenue is down in June \$30,000 but on the year overall it is up compared to budget \$27,000. What happened in June? The General Manager responded that 2021 was a very difficult year to budget with the uncertainty. Estimates were made with respect to the impact of Covid as well as the Lift Program.
- Commissioner Zurel made two requests – (1) – In the Monthly Financial Report – pages 5/6 Ridership Stats and Revenue Rider Stats – can a column be added comparing 2021 percentages to 2019 which would give us a better idea of where we are pre-Covid? (2) On Page 12 – we need 2019 data to be incorporated into the analysis – ie. – cash revenue down 5.4% from 2020 while cash ridership is up 7.2% - 2020 can be kept but augment it with 2019 comparisons.

2. Executive Summary (Regular) - June, 2021

- The Executive Summary for the month of June, 2021 was tabled for members' information.

3. Regatta Day Service

- There will be a Sunday service running on Regatta Day – Wednesday, August 4th. Typically, Regatta Day is our busiest day but people are discouraged to travel to Quidi Vidi Lake on that day.

4. Electric Buses

- This item was discussed under “Update – RFP GoBus Service Contract”.

V. OTHER (Information/Community)

- Commissioner Burton brought it to our attention that a bus she was on did not have the new farebox sticker with the “children under 12 ride for free” on it. We will have Maintenance look into it.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

- There being no further regular business to discuss at this time, the meeting adjourned at approximately 1:08 pm.
- Live streaming of the public meeting ended immediately followed by an in-camera business meeting of the Commission.
- The next regular business meeting of the Commission will be held at in the **Training Room at Metrobus, 25 Messenger Drive** at Noon on August 26th, 2021.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Walsh
Chair

Joan Mahon
Recording Secretary