

**MEETING DATE:** NOVEMBER 28, 2005

**SUBJECT:** Extension For Accessible Distance-Based Taxi Service Contracts: Wheel-Trans Operations

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Commission approve:

1. A six (6) month extension to the six accessible distance-based taxi service contracts from January 1, 2006 to June 30, 2006;
2. An increase of \$7,300,000 to the overall contract upset limit for accessible distance-based taxi service from \$53,464,800 to \$60,764,800 and the allocation of authorized funds to the existing contractors for services rendered as follows:

Able Atlantic:	\$1,100,000 increase,	from \$ 8,470,800 to	\$ 9,570,800
Beeline Taxi:	\$ 900,000 increase,	from \$ 5,317,400 to	\$ 6,217,400
Celebrity Taxi:	\$1,600,000 increase,	from \$12,725,200 to	\$14,325,200
Royal Taxi:	\$1,600,000 increase,	from \$11,513,100 to	\$13,113,100
Scarborough City Cab:	\$1,000,000 increase,	from \$ 7,012,200 to	\$ 8,012,200
Toronto Para Transit:	\$1,100,000 increase,	from \$ 8,426,100 to	\$ 9,526,100

3. Staff report back to the Commission by April 30, 2006 on the recommended approach for improving the overall quality of service to Wheel-Trans customers provided by small capacity accessible vehicles.

## **FUNDING**

Sufficient funds for accessible taxi service have been provided in the proposed 2006 Wheel-Trans Operating Budget.

## **DISCUSSION**

In Spring of 2000, a Request for Proposals (RFP) was developed for the supply of accessible distance-based taxi service for specialized transportation on behalf of Wheel-Trans registrants. These contracts were awarded to the following companies: Able Atlantic Taxi, Beeline Taxi, Dignity Transportation (Celebrity Taxi), Royal Taxi, Scarborough City Cab and Toronto Para Transit for a five-year period commencing July 1, 2000 to June 30, 2005 in the total upset limit amount of \$22,667,000. An option for two, one-year extensions under the same terms and conditions is provided for under these contracts.

At the May 14, 2003 Commission Meeting, authority was received to increase the total upset limit by \$22,897,800, for service up to June 30, 2005 bringing the total upset limit amount to \$45,564,800.

At its June 2005 meeting, the Commission authorized an extension of the existing contracts to December 31, 2005 increasing the upset limits to \$53,464,800 and exercising six months of the two-year contract option. The Commission also directed staff to investigate the feasibility of setting up a non-profit corporation to provide dispatch services. Working with the City of Toronto staff from the Municipal Licensing and Standards Division (MLS), consultations were held with stakeholders from the taxicab industry and representatives and advocates for people with disabilities. Based on

these consultations, by-law changes were introduced in October 2005 that increase the amount of driver training and require accessible taxi drivers to provide additional assistance to persons with disabilities.

The inconsistent quality of service provided by accessible distance-based taxi contractors has been an ongoing issue for Wheel-Trans customers. While the recent by-law changes are designed to improve the overall service, fundamental issues such as driver selection criteria, on-street supervision, providing an appropriate level of compensation to the drivers and the availability of accessible taxis in the community need to be addressed before the industry will realize any significant improvement in the quality of service provided.

Drivers operating small capacity accessible taxis already receive a significant amount of training from both the MLS and the Commission. The provision of additional training will be of little use unless there is supervision and by-law enforcement. Under the terms of the current Wheel-Trans contract, drivers are already required to provide the level of assistance that has been included in the new by-laws. Despite these contract requirements, driver performance has been inconsistent.

Wheel-Trans customers often do not complain because of the importance of transportation and the fear of losing this link to the community. However, customers have expressed concerns about drivers talking on cell phones, using laptop computers, and eating while operating the vehicle. Other areas of complaint consist of not being escorted to and from the accessible door, mobility devices not being properly secured, drivers being rude to customers, aggressive driving, not showing up at all or showing up late for rides, damaging mobility devices, operating dirty vehicles, and failing to speak to customers in English. Contractors have been required to address each of these complaints and service suspensions have been imposed for repeated and/or serious infraction. The MLS have been made aware of by-law infractions. Despite these actions, the inconsistent quality of service continues and, without significant changes to the taxi industry, there is no reason to believe that service will improve.

The industry needs to consider change that will attract individuals already sensitive to the needs of individuals requiring accessible service the most. To attract drivers with the necessary skills, the level of compensation needs to be in keeping with the provision of these important services. This may require an overhaul of the method by which drivers are compensated.

Wheel-Trans already pays a significant premium to compensate the accessible taxi contractors for the higher cost to purchase and operate these vehicles. This does not address the need within the general community for additional service at a fair and equitable meter rate. In this regard, the City could consider regulating an appropriate level of accessible taxi service within the community in general.

Improvement in the availability and quality of service for customers using accessible taxis will not be seen until these fundamental issues have been addressed. The development of a single source responsible for driver selection, supervision, and compensation would go a long way to addressing these issues.

To-date, staff has been unable to identify a non-profit corporation to provide dispatch services for drivers of accessible taxis. The prospect of having more direct control over dispatching accessible taxi service is appealing; however, this approach has potential risks which could compromise the cost/benefit of operating small capacity accessible vehicles. Any arrangement would also certainly require direct driver supervision in order to improve the quality of service. Again, this direct control of accessible taxi drivers would place any such organization at the risk of entering into an

employment relationship. If this occurred, the cost of delivering accessible taxi service to Wheel-Trans customers would increase without necessarily addressing the multitude of issues including the availability and quality of service to the general community.

The extension of these contracts will provide Wheel-Trans the opportunity to develop a Request for Proposals that addresses the service quality issues and at the same time explores options for the provisions of small capacity accessible service.

The recommended increase of \$7,300,000 to the accessible distance-based taxi upset limits will provide approximately 35% of total trips for the extension period from January 1, 2006 to June 30, 2006. The allocation of this additional funding will continue to be based upon the Contractor's vehicle availability and geographic service areas. These revised contract limits may also be adjusted based upon service performance.

## **JUSTIFICATION**

Small capacity accessible vehicles are an integral part of the overall Wheel-Trans service plan, providing approximately 35% of all customer trips. While offering a lower cost alternative to buses during off-peak periods, accessible taxis also provide substantial service during the peak hours. The requests set forth in this report remain consistent with the proposed 2006 Wheel-Trans Operating Budget and projected fleet requirements, and will provide a sufficient level of service to the end of the extended contract period of June 30, 2006.

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November 8, 2005  
18-15-15