

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION REPORT NO.

MEETING DATE: December 17, 2008

SUBJECT: PUBLIC FORUM ON ACCESSIBLE SERVICES

ACTION ITEM:

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Commission:

- 1) Note that:
 - Two public forums were held on May 20, 2008 and October 22, 2008 to provide an opportunity for members of the public to provide input and suggestions on accessible services at the TTC;
 - The forums, which were undertaken jointly with the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transportation (ACAT), and were attended by Commissioners and TTC Senior Management, fulfill one of the commitments made by the TTC in response to the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario Order regarding the provision of stop announcements on the surface systems;
 - The forums were generally well attended, and the TTC received over 300 comments and suggestions regarding ways of improving its service which have been documented and are being acted on;
 - TTC staff, in conjunction with ACAT, plan to hold an annual forum on TTC accessibility issues, with the next forum planned for May 2009; and,
- 2) Forward this report to City Council, Metrolinx, and the Ontario Human Rights Commission and the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario.

FUNDING

This report has no effect on the TTC's operating or capital budgets.

BACKGROUND

The TTC has a comprehensive, ongoing program of improving the accessibility of its services. The TTC prepares an "Accessible Transit Services Plan" annually, the most recent of which was presented to the Commission in May, 2008. It documents the status and progress on making all TTC services accessible. The current "accessibility plan" is posted on the TTC's web site at:

[http://www3.ttc.ca/PDF/Transit Planning/accessible transit services plan 2007 status report.pdf](http://www3.ttc.ca/PDF/Transit%20Planning/accessible%20transit%20services%20plan%202007%20status%20report.pdf)

As a result of complaints made against the TTC related to stop and station announcements, the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario issued an Order requiring the TTC to undertake three annual public meetings to obtain public comments on the TTC's accessible services. The 2008 Public Forum was undertaken jointly with the Commission's Advisory Committee on Accessible Transportation (ACAT), with involvement from TTC Commissioners and TTC senior staff.

The first of these forums was held on May 20, 2008, and was well attended by over 400 people. Many people spoke at the meeting, and staff recorded comments, received written submissions from many of the attendees, and obtained an audio tape of the session. At the meeting, concerns were expressed that the meeting arrangements did not allow for effective input from people who are deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing. While American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters and an FM broadcast system were provided at the meeting, some attendees suggested that continuous captioning should have been provided as well. For this reason, a subsequent "open meeting" was held on October 22, 2008, to address these concerns.

This report summarizes the results of these two forums, and provides an update on the actions being taken to respond to the comments received.

DISCUSSION

Conduct of the May 2008 Public Forum

To make the forum as effective as possible, extensive advanced planning was undertaken to identify an appropriate venue and ultimately chose the CNIB facility on Bayview Avenue -- to arrange for appropriate equipment and support, and to extensively advertise the event. The notice for the event, which is shown in Appendix A, was published in the METRO newspaper and sent directly to a wide range of agencies, institutions, and organizations in the city. Posters advertising the meeting were mounted in TTC subway stations, and announcements about the meeting were made on the TTC's electronic message boards and on the subway PA system. In addition, Wheel-Trans included an announcement of the meeting on its reservations phone greeting messages and on the "Rideline" interactive telephone system. A media event was also held prior to the meeting.

The meeting, which was held on the evening of May 20, 2008, was jointly chaired by TTC Chair Adam Giambone and ACAT Chair Penny Lamy. Also in attendance were a majority of the Commissioners, ACAT members, and TTC's Senior Management including Chief General Manager Gary Webster.

Staff provided an initial presentation to the audience, outlining the status of accessibility initiatives at the TTC. However, the primary focus of the meeting was to provide an opportunity for attendees to speak about their concerns and suggestions related to accessibility issues. The comments and concerns raised at the meeting were documented at the time by TTC staff, and all attendees were provided with a questionnaire soliciting written comments. The completed questionnaires were collected at the end of the meeting. An email address was provided to receive comments and individuals and organizations were requested to provide additional written comments, via email or traditional mail

following the meeting. The formal comment period for the forum was extended into mid-July. The results of the input received are summarized below.

Follow-up Open Meeting on Accessibility Issues

At the May, 2008 forum, American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters assisted with communications, and the microphones used were connected to a standard FM broadcast system. However, these arrangements were seen, by some, as inadequate, in particular because there was no continuous captioning of the proceedings. It should be noted that the OHRC guidelines do not call for both ASL and captioning at meetings.

In response, the TTC agreed to hold a follow-up meeting, targeted at people who are deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing, at which both ASL and continuous captioning would be provided. This meeting was held on October 22, 2008 at the University of Toronto's "89 Chestnut" conference facility. The meeting was arranged with the assistance of the Canadian Hearing Society which provided information about the event to their client groups and provided advice on accommodation and arrangements for the meeting. The meeting was attended by the Chair of the TTC, four members of the ACAT Executive, the Chief General Manager of the TTC and a number of senior TTC managers. Approximately one dozen members of the public attended, some of whom had been at the previous session.

The format of the meeting was identical to the May, 2008 meeting, with an initial presentation and a period for comments and questions. Five questionnaires were returned with written comments, and these comments have been included in the summary information provided below.

Summary of Input Received

Comments were recorded for 42 speakers at the May, 2008 meeting and, subsequently, staff received a total of 85 written responses. While many respondents provided comments on more than one issue, often more than one person provided the same comment or suggestion. The ACAT Executive Committee assisted staff in reviewing and summarizing the results. In total, 305 individual comments and suggestions were recorded and summarized.

Table 1 shows the number of comments received, grouped into four categories, Wheel-Trans services, conventional services and facilities, corporate/policy issues, and comments on the forum itself. Most of the comments received on the public forum were very positive. While some new insights and perspectives were presented, many of the comments advocated for the types of changes contained in the TTC's Accessibility Plan, including improving Wheel-Trans services, adding accessible buses and streetcars, and making stations accessible. Many of the comments received are similar to previous input and recommendations made in the past by ACAT members to staff and the TTC Commission. The general themes of the comments are summarized below.

Table 1 Summary of Responses

Category	Number of comments	% of all comments
Wheel-Trans Service:		
• Process and procedures	33	11
• Customer service and employees	19	6
• Quality/quantity of service	17	6
• Reliability	19	6
• Buses/taxis/minivans	13	4
Subtotal	101	33
Conventional Services and Facilities:		
• Front-line staff and service	20	7
• Vehicle operation and service	26	8
• Subway Stations / Terminals / Stops	30	10
• Elevators and escalators	18	6
• Level of service	14	5
Subtotal	108	36
Corporate and Policy	28	9
Conduct of the Forums	68	22
Total	305	100

Wheel-Trans Services

The comments specific to 'to-the-door' services were divided into five (5) classifications:

1. Process and procedure: Most of the comments received related to improving the Wheel-Trans trip-booking processes and procedures (i.e. Wheel-Trans telephone waiting times, more reservationists, improve booking system, hard to change bookings, recommend internet/e-mail booking). The other, closely-related requests were for better ways of reservationists communicating with customers with speech limitations, taking note of customer's vehicle needs in the booking process, and keeping regular bookings/destinations on file to expedite trip bookings.
2. Customer services/employees: Comments received related to drivers being inadequately trained, or not sensitive to customer needs. There were some negative comments regarding reservationists. There were also a number of positive comments about drivers being courteous and helpful.
3. Quality/availability of service: comments were received pertaining to extending service (to other regions, hours of operation, frequency, and weekend availability), additional physical assistance from drivers and crowding in vehicles.

4. Reliability: comments received related to lateness, service delays and no shows, appointment gaps/windows, directness of routes used, appointment guarantees for pre-bookings, and spontaneous appointments.
5. Buses/taxis/ minivans: comments received related to the size, comfort, cleanliness, and safety of the vehicles.

Conventional Services and Facilities

The comments specific to conventional transit services were divided into five (5) classifications:

1. Front-line staff: comments were received primarily related to driver attitude (positive and negative) and need for sensitivity and/or other training.
2. Vehicle operation and more service: comments received on a wide variety of topics including the need for fully-accessible vehicles sooner -- particularly streetcars -- and the need for more space to accommodate larger mobility devices and more ambulatory disabled people.
3. Subway stations / terminals / stops: comments received primarily referred to either adding features to stations or station-specific problems. The need for improved clearing of snow and ice at station entrances was noted by a number of people.
4. Elevators and escalators: comments received focused on the need for greater reliability for the existing equipment and elevating devices in stations.
5. Level of service: comments received included the need for more accessible vehicles and more-frequent service.

Corporate & Policy Issues

The comments from the public classified as 'corporate and policy' are generally beyond the scope of ACAT. It was noted that some comments pertain to public attitude (i.e. 'public not sensitive to the needs of disabled people', 'able-bodied people are impatient'), political considerations (i.e. put pressure on governments and demand better funding, organize a rally at Queen's Park), and representation by disabled people in Provincial initiatives.

One of the most-numerous comments classified as being of a 'corporate' nature related to having reduced fares. The specific comments which pertained to the TTC's website, security, and other matters have been referred to the appropriate subcommittee and/or TTC offices.

Conduct of the Forums

Many of the comments received regarding the forum were positive in nature, including comments such as "forum very useful" and "forum allowed people to express their opinions and went very well". A number of suggestions were made on ways to improve future forums, including comments related to the need for better accommodation of people who are

deaf and hard of hearing, the need for a larger facility, and the need for better Wheel-Trans arrangements to serve the meeting site.

Action Plan to Address Concerns Expressed

TTC staff and ACAT have completed a comprehensive review of the comments and suggestions received, and are proceeding with an action plan to respond to them. A number of the suggestions received are already being addressed through the TTC's ongoing programs, and ACAT and its subcommittees are providing advice and oversight on these programs. Examples include:

- Comments were received regarding driver training and sensitivity. ACAT members are already assisting TTC Trainers and the comments received will be shared with ACAT members & staff who are conducting training and/or with operations offices.
- Comments were received regarding individual subway stations and facility designs. ACAT's Design Review Subcommittee is assisting staff by conducting individual station audits, and the comments received will be considered when examining the stations.
- Comments were received on the need for additional elevators and escalators. The TTC is proceeding to install elevators and escalators in all stations in the system as quickly as funding permits.
- Comments included the need for more accessible vehicles and more-frequent service on the conventional service. In November, 2008, the TTC increased service on every major route in the system, often with new low-floor accessible buses which will help to address this concern. The TTC will continue to introduce more accessible buses as they are delivered through to 2010.
- Comments were received on ways of improving Wheel Trans trip bookings, the quality of training and service by contracted service providers, and the need for new Wheel-Trans buses. Internet trip booking was implemented in June 2008 and additional reservationists are being hired in 2009. Improvements are also planned to simplify the touch-tone trip booking system. Improved driver training has been included in new taxi contract and Wheel-Trans is also in the process of replacing its bus fleet with 110 new buses scheduled for delivery in 2009 and 2010.

Comments regarding day-to-day operations of Wheel-Trans and conventional TTC services have been directed to the individual operating departments within the Commission for action. The actions taken will be documented and reported on at upcoming accessibility forums. Any other comments related to procedures, operations, and facility designs, which are not currently being addressed through existing programs, have been referred to ACAT's subcommittees with the request that they provide specific recommendations regarding any actions to be taken on the suggestions received. As outlined below, TTC and ACAT plan to undertake a public forum on an annual basis in future years, and staff will report the results of the 2008 forums at the upcoming forum planned for May, 2009.

Future Public Forums on Accessibility

With the success of the May 2008 forum TTC staff, in conjunction with ACAT, plan to hold a similar meeting on an annual basis. The next forum is scheduled for May, 2009. The experience and lessons learned will be used to improve future forums notably the selection of a central, subway-oriented site to allow Wheel-Trans registrants to make “integrated trips” to the location via Wheel-Trans and the subway. This will help to resolve many of the Wheel-Trans operational difficulties experienced at the CNIB facility.

SUMMARY

The TTC undertook two public forums in 2008 on accessible services at which the TTC provided an opportunity for members of the public to speak directly to TTC Commissioners, ACAT representatives, and senior TTC staff on accessibility issues. Staff, in conjunction with ACAT, have put in place a systematic process of assessing and responding to the comments and suggestions received. To create an ongoing process of public input, TTC staff have agreed to hold an annual forum on accessibility issues and to present information at the annual forum on the status of suggestions received at past meetings. The next forum on accessibility issues is planned for May, 2009.

December 5, 2008
11-31-48

Appendix A

TTC ACCESSIBILITY and
DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION

2008 Public Forum

You are invited to give us ideas on how to make the TTC services and facilities better for our customers with disabilities.

Your comments will be assessed by the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) and the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transportation (ACAT).

Tuesday, May 20, 2008
7:00 pm to 9:00 pm

Canadian National Institute for the Blind
1929 Bayview Ave.

At the corner of Bayview Avenue and Kilgour Road. Regularly scheduled accessible bus service available on the 11 Bayview from Davisville Station.

If you can not attend, but would like to contribute suggestions on TTC conventional and Wheel-Trans services, call 416-393-3030, Monday – Friday, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm

www.ttc.ca416-393-INFO