

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION REPORT NO.

MEETING DATE: June 24, 2013

SUBJECT: STAFF RESPONSE TO AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT –
REVIEW OF WHEEL-TRANS SERVICES – SUSTAINING LEVEL
AND QUALITY OF SERVICE REQUIRES CHANGES TO THE
PROGRAM

ACTION ITEM

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board:

- 1) Receive for information the attached staff response to the Auditor General's report Review of Wheel-Trans Services – Sustaining Level and Quality of Service Requires Changes to the Program; and
- 2) Forward the staff response to the City Audit Committee.

FUNDING

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

BACKGROUND

At the December 19, 2012 Board Meeting, Jeff Griffiths, Auditor General, City of Toronto, Alan Ash, Auditor General's Office, and Jane Ying, Auditor General's Office provided a presentation on the results of an audit conducted in 2012 on Wheel-Trans operations entitled "Review of Wheel Trans Services – Sustaining Level and Quality of Service Requires Changes to the Program". The Board received the presentation and report for information.

The TTC Chair moved referral of the Auditor General's Report to the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transit (ACAT) and the TTC's Audit Committee for a review to be completed by the April 2013 Board meeting, before being forwarded to the City's Audit Committee. The ACAT was established as an advisory committee of the TTC to provide a mechanism for ongoing public participation in accessible transportation in the city of Toronto.

The motion by the TTC Chair carried.

The report was forwarded to the TTC Audit Committee meeting on February 19, 2013 and to ACAT on February 28, 2013. At the Audit Committee meeting, Commissioner Peter Milczyn requested that TTC staff investigate and respond to Recommendation #4a below:

Auditor General's Recommendation #4a

The Commission requests the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transit, to review and enhance the Wheel-Trans eligibility assessment process and criteria to ensure that applicants' abilities to use the conventional fixed-route transit system are objectively and credibly appraised. Steps to be considered should include but not be limited to requiring a medical or health certification regarding mobility conditions as part of the application process.

At its meeting on April 25, 2013, the TTC Audit Committee received the staff response to Recommendation #4a for information and approved forwarding the response to a regular meeting of the Board for information and then to the City Audit Committee.

In addition, the attached "Management's Response to the Auditor General's Review of Wheel-Trans Services – Sustaining Level and Quality of Service Requires Changes to the Program" indicates the ACAT Subcommittee that each of the Auditor General's recommendations has been referred to, where applicable.

DISCUSSION

On March 7, 2013, TTC staff met with the ACAT Wheel-Trans Operations Subcommittee who reviewed the following:

1. Current Wheel-Trans Process

The TTC has established eligibility guidelines for service based upon an individual's level of physical functional mobility in the home, within the area immediately surrounding the home, and in the community at large as well as the permanency of the disability. Eligibility is not based on particular disabilities.

Although factors such as income, the unavailability of family members or an escort for transportation purposes, inconvenience, and trip purpose all impact on daily living, these do not determine the need for accessible transit.

All Wheel-Trans applicants, regardless of mobility status, are required to attend an in-person interview in order to determine eligibility. Applicants are not required to complete an application form nor obtain a letter from their doctor prior to this interview.

An appeal process is in place as well as a Questionable Rider program which ensures service is provided to those who continue to meet the eligibility requirement. This program identifies riders who demonstrate through their mobility while using the service that they may no longer require door-to-door service.

Ninety per cent (90%) of applicants are approved.

The current eligibility process used by Wheel-Trans works well and was the subject of a Human Rights Charter Challenge which was upheld by the Ontario Superior Court as a fair and equitable process.

2. Medical Model

Eligibility determination is based on information presented on an application form which includes a section requiring input by a medical practitioner (i.e., a physician, physiotherapist or occupational therapist)

The medical practitioner's input will be considered as part of the application's overall assessment.

No interview is involved in this model. One example is Hamilton Transit which is experiencing an approval rate of approximately 78% since November 2012.

This process would require applicants to have a medical practitioner fill out the section of the application at the applicant's expense.

3. Medical Form and Interview

This option is a combination of the Medical Model option (#2) and an in-person interview.

This process would require applicants to have a medical practitioner fill out a medical form to support their need for service. This would be the applicant's responsibility prior to being considered.

This option would ensure medical information is available for confirmation at the time of the in person interview or prior.

ACAT Wheel-Trans Operations Subcommittee Conclusions

Following extensive discussion and review, the ACAT Wheel-Trans Operations Subcommittee members unanimously recommended that the TTC maintain the current Wheel-Trans application process requiring an in-person interview, and did not support the introduction of a medical note. The Subcommittee supported the current process for the following reasons:

- Applicants would be discriminated against because the medical note is an extra hardship with added costs to persons with disabilities many of whom are on low or fixed income.
- Subcommittee members have had personal experiences of doctors advocating and providing unnecessary devices for patients in order to qualify for Wheel-Trans Service.
- There is a Questionable Rider Program already in place that is effective in evaluating fraud.

ACAT General Meeting

At the March 28, 2013 ACAT General Meeting, the following motion was put forth:

The members of ACAT do not support the Auditor General's recommendation number 4a contained in the report entitled "Review of Wheel-Trans Services – Sustaining Level and Quality of Service Requires Changes to the Program" and recommend that Wheel-Trans continue to use the existing application process to determine eligibility for Wheel-Trans service.

This motion was passed unanimously.

CONCLUSION

Staff concurs with ACAT's recommendation and note that, in an upcoming report conducted by the Canadian Urban Transit Association entitled "Specialized Transit Eligibility Certification Programs" which compares eligibility process of various paratransit properties in Canada and the United States, Wheel-Trans was used as one of the models for having an "exemplary eligibility program".

As one of the key findings in the report it states "In-person assessments are much more effective than paper-based applications, even when the latter includes medical verification from health care practitioners."

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Attachment: Management's Response to the Auditor General's Review of Wheel-Trans Services – Sustaining Level and Quality of Service Requires Changes to the Program

**Management's Response to the Auditor General's
Review of Wheel-Trans Services – Sustaining Level and Quality of Service Requires Changes to the Program**

<u>Rec No</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>	Agree (X)	Disagree (X)	<u>Management Comments:</u> <i>(Comments are required only for recommendations where there is disagreement.)</i>	<u>Action Plan/ Time Frame</u>
1.	The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transit, to explore various short-term options, including a free-ride program on a pilot basis, to encourage Wheel-Trans customers to use the accessible conventional transit system.	X		Commission Staff will explore, in consultation with the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transit, short term incentive programs, which may include free rides, to encourage Wheel-Trans customers to use the conventional transit system.	In conjunction the review to meet the required changes in AODA eligibility requirements to be in place by January 2017. The ACAT Wheel-Trans Operations Sub-Committee will be consulted as part of the review.

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2.	<p>The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transit, to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for integrating Wheel-Trans customers into the accessible conventional transit system. Such an action plan should include but not be limited to:</p> <p>a. Identifying and addressing potential safety and service issues that can present barriers to Wheel-Trans customers in using the accessible conventional system;</p> <p>b. Education, communication and training programs for Wheel-Trans customers and transit passengers; and</p> <p>c. Customer service training to TTC staff with particular emphasis on assisting people with mobility difficulties.</p>	X		<p>These recommendations are effectively already actioned via the regular ongoing meetings with ACAT. The purpose of which is to progressively make the TTC system fully accessible.</p>	<p>In conjunction with the legislative requirement to have the system fully accessible by 2025.</p> <p>The ACAT Design Review Subcommittee will be consulted.</p>

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3.	The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer to expedite the planning and implementation of an eligibility classification system for Wheel-Trans services in accordance with requirements set forth in the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation made under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.	X		Working with the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transit we will implement the eligibility requirements set forth in the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation made under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act by January 2017, as required.	In conjunction the review to meet the required changes in AODA eligibility requirements to be in place by January 2017. The ACAT Wheel-Trans Operations Sub-Committee will be consulted as part of the review.

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4.	<p>The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transit, to review and enhance the Wheel-Trans eligibility assessment process and criteria to ensure that applicants' abilities to use the conventional transit system are objectively and credibly appraised. Steps to be considered should include but not be limited to:</p> <p>a. Requiring a medical or health certification regarding mobility conditions as part of the application process;</p> <p>b. Considering the merits and cost-effectiveness of incorporating functional evaluations into the eligibility assessment process; and</p> <p>c. Evaluating the effectiveness of the assessment criteria, scoring scheme, and threshold points for eligibility.</p>		X	<p>We do not agree with using a medical model based on an assessment completed by a doctor advocating for a patient. As experience has shown that this invariably drives up demand rather than making it more tailored to the real need.</p> <p>We agree in principle pending a more detailed review.</p>	<p>In conjunction the review to meet the required changes in AODA eligibility requirements to be in place by January 2017.</p> <p>The ACAT Wheel-Trans Operations Sub-Committee will be consulted as part of the review.</p>

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	The review should also take into consideration the process used by other providers throughout Canada and the United States.	X		We agree in principle pending a more detailed review.	In conjunction the review to meet the required changes in AODA eligibility requirements to be in place by January 2017.
5.	The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transit, to consider initiating a photo identification card program to applicants eligible for Wheel-Trans services.	X		We agree in principle pending a more detailed review.	In conjunction the review to meet the required changes in AODA eligibility requirements to be in place by January 2017. The ACAT Wheel-Trans Operations Sub-Committee will be consulted as part of the review.
6.	The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transit, give consideration to the establishment of a policy to discourage repetitive late cancellations and “no-shows” for Wheel-Trans eligibility assessment or appeal appointments.	X		We agree in principle pending a more detailed review.	The review will be completed by Fall 2013. The ACAT Wheel-Trans Operations Sub-Committee will be consulted as part of the review.

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7.	The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer to develop and implement procedures to maintain an up-to-date Wheel-Trans registrant database. Steps should also be taken to systematically identify and cancel inactive passes in a timely manner.	X			To be implemented in January 2013. Completed.

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8.	<p>The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer to review Wheel-Trans call center operations and call response capacity. Such review should include but not be limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Shortening reservation line operating hours to allocate more staff resources to the afternoon hours; b. Enhancing internet booking capacity by removing the address change and time booking restrictions; c. Dedicating more staff resources to the priority line to ensure timely call response; d. Addressing the high absenteeism rate among call center staff; and e. Consulting 311 Toronto on ways to improve Wheel-Trans call center response capacity and reduce staff absenteeism rate. 	X		We agree in principle pending a more detailed review.	The review will be completed by Fall 2013.

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9.	The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transit, to review the Wheel-Trans policy regarding late cancellations and no-shows with a view to increasing its flexibility. Consideration be given to including formalized processes for customers to request re-consideration based on unusual circumstances.	X		In consultation with the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transit, customers will be notified of the process to request re-consideration of violations of the cancellation and no show policy based on unusual circumstances.	Fall 2013. The ACAT Wheel-Trans Operations Sub-Committee will be consulted as part of the review.
10.	The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transit, to consider developing procedures to identify and contact Wheel-Trans customers who consistently miss their scheduled trips to ensure they have a clear understanding of the pick-up and wait time rules.	X		We agree in principle pending a more detailed review.	Review to be completed by mid-2013. The ACAT Wheel-Trans Operations Sub-Committee will be consulted as part of the review.

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11.	Commission request the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transit, to consider adopting a more restrictive Wheel-Trans late cancellation and no-show policy after successfully implementing the four-hour cancellation allowance, and incorporating the provisions for re-consideration.	X		We agree in principle pending a more detailed review.	The review will be completed following changes to the trip booking and scheduling system currently targeted for Fall 2013. The ACAT Wheel-Trans Operations Sub-Committee will be consulted as part of the review.
12.	The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer to monitor the extent of overtime incurred by Wheel-Trans bus operators and where possible steps be taken to reduce the level of overtime.	X		We agree in principle pending a more detailed review.	Review will be incorporated as part of the 2014 budget cycle.
13.	The Commission request the Chief Executive Director to continue to monitor and where possible steps be taken to reduce Wheel-Trans bus preventable collision rate.	X		Wheel-Trans currently have KPI to monitor Wheel-Trans bus collisions and programs to reduce preventable accidents.	Ongoing.

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14.	The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer to monitor and refine the Wheel-Trans route scheduling system to improve efficiency. Ongoing monitoring should include processes to encourage customers and bus operators to report inefficient route scheduling for further investigation.	X		A process already exists for bus operators to report scheduling inefficiencies and customers provide input using the customer service comments process	Ongoing.
15.	The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer to re-assess the needs for the existing Wheel-Trans community bus routes, and cancel or develop alternate routes to ensure the services are cost efficient and effective.	X		This study is currently in progress	To be included as part of the 2014 budget cycle. The ACAT Service Planning Subcommittee will be consulted as part of the review.
16.	The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer to ensure that all future Requests For Proposal for Wheel-Trans contracted taxi services are designed to seek competitive bidding on price components as well as non-financial factors.	X		We agree in principle pending a more detailed review.	In conjunction with issuing new Requests for Proposals.

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17.	The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer, in developing future Request For Proposal for Wheel-Trans contracted accessible taxi services, to ensure that the monthly management fee is adequately structured to obtain the best overall value for the Commission.	X		We agree in principle pending a more detailed review.	In conjunction with issuing new Requests for Proposals.

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18.	<p>The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer to take the necessary steps to enhance the procurement process in future acquisitions of Wheel-Trans contracted taxi services. Such steps should include but not be limited to:</p> <p>a. Ensuring all terms and conditions in the Requests For Proposal and contract documents are reviewed for clarity and consistency;</p> <p>b. Ensuring all concerns identified in the previous procurement process and contracts are addressed; and</p> <p>c. Retaining a Fairness Commissioner to oversee the entire procurement process, from finalization of the Requests For Proposal to the final award of the contracts.</p>	X		We agree in principle pending a more detailed review.	In conjunction with issuing new Requests for Proposals.

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19.	The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer, in developing future Requests For Proposal for Wheel-Trans contracted taxi services, to replace the bonus entitlement with a financial penalty clause to deter inadequate contractor performance or non-compliance with contract terms and conditions.	X		We agree in principle pending a more detailed review.	In conjunction with issuing new Requests for Proposals.
20.	The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer, in developing future Requests For Proposal for Wheel-Trans contracted taxi services, to incorporate requirements for contractors to inform drivers of their rights and responsibilities as prescribed in the contracts, and how drivers may report inappropriate contractor practices to Wheel-Trans.	X		We agree in principle pending a more detailed review.	In conjunction with issuing new Requests for Proposals.

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21.	The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer to develop and update Wheel-Trans standard operating procedures in a timely manner, including those relating to taxi contract administration and monitoring.	X		Standard operating procedures are currently being updated to reflect the changes resulting from the upgrade to the scheduling system and those relating to the taxi contract administration and monitoring.	Mid 2013.
22.	The Commission requests the Chief Executive Officer to reduce the annual printing and mailing costs of Wheel-Trans quarterly newsletters and bulletins to customers. Consideration should also be given to allowing advertisements in the publications to generate revenue.	X		We agree in principle pending a more detailed review.	To be included as part of the 2014 budget cycle. The ACAT Communications Subcommittee will be consulted.