

C-3

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Re: Emergency evacuation plans for passengers with disabilities

The storm and flooding of July 8, 2013 revealed a serious deficiency in TTC's emergency planning, one that should have been visible all along and rectified a decade ago. There is no procedure to rescue, evacuate, or simply transport passengers with disabilities when even part of the subway is shut down.

On that evening, I saw a man in a power chair sitting on the platform of St. Clair West station – like most stations, an inaccessible one. We talked and he told me the collector at St. George (an accessible station) told him to go to St. Clair West. But the subway was terminating at St. Clair West due to flooding. So then: A man in a wheelchair was told to leave an accessible station only to be stranded in an inaccessible one.

Eventually we got on a train that reversed itself and returned to St. George. We then had the same collector phone Wheel-Trans and arrange a ride. But it took about two hours for Wheel-Trans to show up, during which time my friend had to wait on the cold bus platform. He later told me, in effect, he was pushing the limits of his sitting tolerance in his wheelchair.

Seemingly credible people reported after the fact that Wheel-Trans did this rescue manoeuvre for about 15 people that night. But they weren't done ferrying everyone home till 3:00 in the morning. How many nondisabled people had to wait that long?

My friend possibly would not have been rescued had he not run into me, a knowledgeable person who knew that Wheel-Trans could be dispatched; if I hadn't insisted that supervisors at St. Clair West deal with my friend urgently; and if Gary Webster were still general manager. (I say that because I mailed Andy Byford, who passed on the issue to Transit Control right away. That would have been inconceivable under Webster.)

Stated another way, my friend got lucky.

TTC has an inaccessible subway system. (A partially-accessible system is an inaccessible system.) It nonetheless encourages or induces disabled people to use the subway. But when the subway is shut down, TTC has no plan whatsoever to get people who cannot climb stairs out of a subway station. It also has no plan to get them home or to their destination.

**PRESENTED TO
THE COMMISSION**

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It would be absurd to suggest that everyone, disabled or not, is in the same boat. “Everyone” else can walk up staircases and stand up on a packed “shuttle” bus.

If this sort of thing happens again in the winter with sub-zero temperatures, I foresee a passenger in a wheelchair being hospitalized for hypothermia. Or just freezing to death.

TTC needs now and always needed a plan to rescue disabled people when the subway is out of service. Short of legitimate health and safety emergencies like personal injuries, disabled people need to be the priority in any subway shutdown.