

Women's Advocacy Voice of Edmonton Letter of Recommendations



Dear Members of City Council,

RE: Edmonton Vehicle for Hire Safety and Accessibility Recommendations

The WAVE Committee is committed to advocating for girls, women and gender diverse people by providing advice on City policies, priorities and decisions through an intersectional gender and equity lens. Since 2018, WAVE has been advocating for better safety and accessibility of vehicle for Hire and that is why we feel compelled to write this letter to you.

We would like to begin this letter with data about the rate of sexual assaults taking place in Edmonton vehicles for hire, but unfortunately no such data exists. As women and gender diverse people, we all have our stories about our experiences feeling unsafe in vehicles for hire here in Edmonton; stories that we have shared with the City of Edmonton and City Council numerous times over the four years since we first spoke to this issue (see timeline later in the letter). In the four years since members of our committee recounted their trauma experienced in vehicles for hire for City Council in 2018, we have had talks with the city but have not seen progress on having our suggestions implemented. Prior to 2018, it could be said that the sexual violence taking place in vehicles for hire may not have been on the City of Edmonton's radar. However; now it is, and yet we still have years passing without action taken to protect Edmonton's women in these spaces. Each day that passes without proactively making efforts to address safety in Edmonton's vehicles for hire, is a day when another Edmontonian risks being sexually assaulted.

As a committee representing women and gender-diverse people in Edmonton, we recognize that this issue has intersectional levels. In a taxi study done in the Yukon, 49% of Indigenous women reported feeling targeted when taking a cab, as well as 10% of non-Indigenous women. (LINK) Additionally, women with a disability are twice as likely to be sexually assaulted than women without a disability. (LINK) This is why we have taken the unprecedented step of coordinating with other Council committees including the Accessibility Advisory Committee, the Anti-Racism Advisory Committee and the Edmonton Youth Council Policy Subcommittee and received their support for our

recommendations. We have done some of the gender-based analysis work for the City through our advocacy work. Now we ask that Council ensure that the City of Edmonton takes concrete action to address this issue.

The following timeline briefly highlights City administration's track record of consultation and the duration of time between follow-ups and progress updates. Additionally, the above timeline showcases gaps in the consultation process, from capturing legwork completed across administrative bodies, recommendations provided vs. implemented, administrative responsiveness, community sentiment toward engagement strategies, and key performance indicators for outcomes identified. The Wave Policy Sub-committee therefore shares this timeline to showcase the efforts of this sub-committee and the lack of positive changes in Vehicle for Hire policies.

TIMELINE OF THE WORK OF WAVE ON VFH

November 2018:

- WAVE was invited to work with City administration and provincial counterparts on vehicle for hire policy within the scope of the broader safer cities framework and commitment.
- WAVE members were asked to meet with Vehicle for Hire representatives, the City of Edmonton administration, Alberta Justice, and Edmonton City Police. In the meetings, WAVE members felt they were not given the space to express their perspectives and positions, and were expected to act as observers of consultations.
- Notably, only Uber had a representative attend the meetings from vehicle for hire representatives.
- There was no effort made by City representatives to follow up with WAVE to hear member perspectives and to better understand community feedback.

February 2019:

- Further WAVE consultations suggested identifying screening criteria for taxi drivers.

March 2019:

- [WAVE members raised considerations publicly with the City council](#) on March 6.

April 2019:

- The general supervisor of business & vehicle for hire licensing, inspections, and compliance for sustainable development of urban form and corporate strategic development requested feedback from WAVE on a letter related to updates proposed by the administration. Given that the vehicle for hire industry had been

significantly impacted by COVID-19, it had created additional challenges for users of public transportation.

- As a follow up to the recent [State of Local Emergency Order No. 2020-002](#), it was identified that some passengers requiring more space due to physical limitations often sit in the front of the taxi. To balance the needs of transportation passengers with the safety requirements outlined in the Order, administration recommended dispatching a larger vehicle with more space in the second row to accommodate these needs and/or asking drivers to move their front passenger seat forward as much as possible to ensure that everyone is adhering to the new restrictions.

January 28, 2021 :

- The WAVE Policy subcommittee received a request to consult on the Vehicle for Hire Policy for City administration. It was noted by WAVE that each request was made by a new City administration representative, which was presumably a result of turnover rates and the City's lack of ability to track the progress of legwork conducted.

February 4, 2021

- The sub-committee was given a presentation and an update on the City of Edmonton's Vehicle for Hire policy.
- City administration staff requested that the sub-committee send a list of recommendations by the end of the month. Unfortunately, at the end of the consultation processes, the sub-committee was made aware that none of the recommendations would be validated, researched, or implemented. In addition, the sub-committee was not presented with a City staff timeline for review or implementation of the recommendations. In addition, there was no indication on the barriers preventing progress on moving forward to evaluate the recommendations.

WAVE's Policy subcommittee recently reviewed the 2021 Pivotal Research Report on Accessible Vehicles Program Needs Assessment and was encouraged by the recommendations. WAVE's priority areas are the safety of the riders and drivers, the centralized booking system and mandatory training for the drivers on intersectionality (GBA+). WAVE requests City Council and VFH to implement the following, more detailed recommendations:

1. **Vehicle for Hire Ombudsperson**
 - a. A centralized booking line
 - b. Centralized and independently operated complaint platform

2. Security

- a. A panic button to press in case of emergencies connected to the centralized booking/complaint line
- b. Inward and/or outward dash cam requirements for all VFH
- c. A panic button added to an independent app (not VFH companies) to be used in case of emergencies connected to the centralized booking/complaint line
 - i. Could possibly be integrated into the 311 app
 - ii. A recording function in the app connected to a secure cloud with only sanctioned access

3. Driver training

- a. Specialized training certification to be a designated driver for (A) children (B) people with disabilities (C) seniors (D) women (E) other
- b. GBA+ training
- c. Training on how to respond to and report high-risk situations (example: accidents, trafficking, fraud, violence)
- d. (A) Culturally competent and (B) accessible training methods
- e. Complaint-based training curriculum development [cross sector collaborations between EPS, City of Edmonton, training providers, VFH companies]

4. Accessibility of Vehicle for Hires

- a. Update on demand transit pilot services to increase accessibility
- b. Align Vehicle for Hire policies with other transit and paratransit services
- c. Enhanced vehicle design to make vehicles for hire more accessible to more community members (Pivotal Research, 2021)

Thank you for considering recommendations shared as a result of discussions with WAVE members, with the Advisory Accessibility Committee (AAC), the City of Edmonton Youth Committee (CEYC), and Anti-Racism Advisory Committee (ARAC), and with the community. Additionally, the AAC will be writing a supplementary letter of support while the policy sub-committee members of the CEYC will be adding their signature to this letter. We look forward to sharing additional context of our findings and supporting you with your vision for the City of Edmonton.

Sincerely,

Women's Advocacy Voice of Edmonton Policy Sub-Committee