

VEHICLE FOR HIRE ANNUAL REPORT - 2021 PROGRAM UPDATE

RECOMMENDATION

That the March 7, 2022, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE00909, be received for information.

Report Purpose

Information only.

Committee is being updated on the 2021 Vehicle for Hire Program's initiatives that were undertaken to promote safe and accessible vehicle for hire services in the city, in addition to the 2022 work plan.

Executive Summary

- The Vehicle for Hire Bylaw 17400 regulates vehicles for hire in alignment with the City's commitment to public safety and The City Plan's direction that Edmonton's mobility system should be safe, secure, accessible and responsive.
- This report outlines the Vehicle for Hire program's initiatives and achievements in 2021, including research and recommendations on accessible taxis, stakeholder engagement, a bylaw review and an educational campaign.
- The report also provides an overview of 2021 bylaw enforcement outcomes, program revenue and expenses and the program's planned actions for 2022.

REPORT

Bylaw 17400 - Vehicle for Hire Bylaw defines a "vehicle for hire" as:

'...a motor vehicle used or offered for the transportation of at least one passenger in return for compensation from any place within the city to a destination either within or outside of the city...'

The Vehicle for Hire program oversees diverse and integrated features including user accessibility and safety, alignment with City transit, the Vehicle for Hire Bylaw and bylaw enforcement, licensing and public education. These aspects combine to support The City Plan's direction that Edmonton deliver a mobility system that should be safe, secure, accessible and responsive.

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Background

The program operates on a cost recovery model and fees received from services cover administrative and program costs. Where revenue exceeds expenses, it is allocated to the program's Reserve Fund to support future program needs. In 2021, expenses exceeded revenue by \$498,610 and this shortfall was offset with a transfer from the program's Reserve. A strong reserve balance in 2020 and 2021 enabled fee waivers to occur for industry while still offering a robust policy, implementation and enforcement service.

The 2021 revenue shortfall was anticipated and is attributed to the impacts of COVID-19. Fee waivers (100 per cent for all limousine vehicle and limousine dispatch licence fees along with a 50 per cent fee waiver for all other vehicle and dispatch licence fees) alongside a 70 per cent decline in licence revenue accounted for the majority of the decreased revenue. Further, several licensees who had not used the approved fee waiver in 2020 applied it in 2021. The licence fee waivers were provided in 2020 and 2021 to support industry in managing the economic challenges during COVID-19. Administration recorded a decrease in all licence categories issued in 2021 over the two preceding years. Based on information gathered from program stakeholders, this decline in licence uptake has been attributed to disruptions caused by COVID-19 and the resulting decrease in demand for vehicle for hire services.

Vehicle For Hire Licensing 2019 - 2021

	2019	2020	2021	Change (2019 - 2021)
Dispatch Licences	77	76	45	-42%
Vehicle Licences	1,554	1,427	1,340	-14%
Driver's Licences	1,472	1,051	1,049	-29%

Administration is forecasting that there are a number of expenses which will require funding from the Vehicle for Hire program's Reserve in 2022, totalling approximately \$525,000. There may be requests from industry for a similar fee waiver to that offered in 2021 (which is estimated at having a negative impact on revenue of approximately \$308,000). As at December 31, 2021 the program's Reserve balance remains in a positive position with a balance of \$1,966,551. It is anticipated that even with a fee waiver and the forecast expenditures in 2022, the program's Reserve balance would remain healthy at a projected amount of \$1,133,551 at the end of December 2022.

Further financial information can be found in Attachment 1.

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2021 Bylaw Review Project

In response to stakeholder feedback gathered in 2020 and 2021, including a meeting with limousine service providers, Administration initiated a review of the Vehicle for Hire Bylaw and several additional elements of the Vehicle for Hire program. Methods for review included stakeholder engagement with Edmonton's Vehicle for Hire Industry, and an analysis of regulatory and operational best practices in Calgary, Ottawa and Toronto.

Topics reviewed included:

- New requirements for dispatch licences
- Changes to licence fees
- Changes to limousine vehicle requirements
- Assessments of courtesy transportation services provided by businesses such as hotels
- The addition of security features in vehicles for hire
- Regulated driver training requirements
- Requirements for advertising of vehicle for hire services
- Vehicle marking restrictions
- Verification of meters and mechanical inspection certificates for vehicles for hire.

The review found that Administration's existing regulations and licensing practices are an effective balance of stakeholder interests, and are comparable to the reviewed jurisdictions' regulations and practices in the majority of cases. However, the review did identify several areas where change may be beneficial such as:

- Enhancing driver training content and application to better provide a more inclusive experience for patrons
- Removing existing size restrictions on the international symbol of access that a vehicle for hire is allowed to display, in order to support users in effective identification of those vehicles
- Requiring independent verification of taxi trip meters and mechanical inspection certificates of vehicles to enhance stakeholder safety and prevent conflict of interests.

Bylaw Enforcement

Enforcement activities in 2021 continued to prioritize adherence to public health guidelines and regulations relating to COVID-19. Enforcement officers completed 5,665 vehicle for hire face mask inspections, observing a 99.2 per cent compliance rate.

The Vehicle for Hire Bylaw prohibits street hailing for rideshare vehicles and limousines. Enforcement officers carried out street hailing attempts for these vehicles, resulting in approximately four per cent accepting the street hailing attempt, and five charges levied to those providers as a result.

A total of 92 fines and 255 warnings were issued for Vehicle for Hire bylaw violations. An additional 601 fines and 371 warnings were issued under the *Traffic Safety Act* and other bylaws. The enforcement team investigated a total of 680 complaints throughout 2021.

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Further enforcement activity information can be found in Attachment 2.

Accessible Vehicle Research and Recommendations

In collaboration with the Accessibility Advisory Committee, Administration commissioned research regarding accessible vehicle for hire needs in the city with the following objectives:

1. Identify current and emerging best practices, including effective management of supply and demand of accessible taxis
2. Ascertain the perspectives of supply-side stakeholders, including accessible taxi drivers and dispatchers in the city
3. Based on user experience, determine the demand for accessible vehicle for hire services.

Research involved a review of best practices of comparable jurisdictions, and qualitative analysis of accessible taxi drivers, dispatchers and user experiences.

Recommendations to Administration included:

- The use of the Vehicle for Hire program's reserve to:
 - Provide accessible taxi drivers with financial supports and incentives to offer additional accessibility services to customers
 - Provide fare subsidies to accessible riders
- The Implementation of a centralized dispatch system for accessible taxis across all local providers, with the goal of reducing wait times and improving services to users
- The standardization and improvement of accessible taxi driver training
- Improving alignment with the City's existing Dedicated Accessible Transit Service (DATS) wherever possible.

Vehicle for Hire Educational Campaign

In response to feedback from Women Advocacy Voice of Edmonton (WAVE), the Vehicle for Hire educational campaign focused on educating the public about safety while using vehicle for hire services.

Service users were encouraged to:

- Check for vehicle identification markings and licence plates when using taxis and rideshare services,
- Verify that the driver and vehicle information received from a rideshare app corresponds with the driver and vehicle engaging with the user,
- Use the emergency button on a rideshare app if necessary,
- Sharing trip details with family and friends,
- Wearing masks in the vehicle and
- Where possible, ride in the back seat of the vehicle.

Campaign advertising was shared on social media and electronic billboards in high traffic locations of the city such as Rogers Place, the University LRT station, and in hotels and bars. Social media engagement rates were above typical industry averages.

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Vehicle for Hire Program Priorities for 2022 and 2023

In alignment with The City Plan goals and objectives, and based on the outcome of 2021 research and stakeholder engagement, Vehicle for Hire program 2022 and 2023 priority actions include:

- A withdrawal from the Vehicle for Hire program's reserve of approximately \$425,000 to purchase three replacement and two new enforcement vehicles to support enhanced enforcement support for the program.
- Development and execution of an updated engagement strategy for the program.
- Development of service delivery and costing model options for the establishment of an independent complaint and investigation service for all Vehicle for Hire providers and users.
- Based on recommendations from the 2021 Accessible Vehicle for Hire research:
 - Development of a proposal outlining changes required to the Vehicle for Hire reserve model to support industry and user subsidies.
 - Development of service delivery and costing model options for centralized dispatch
 - Conduct cost/benefit analysis and options for instituting mandatory driver training for all industry drivers.
- Development and advancement of bylaw amendments to Committee addressing:
 - Removal of size restrictions of the international symbol of accessibility on vehicles.
 - Options for pursuing mandatory enhanced driver training for all drivers.
 - Verification of both trip meters and vehicle mechanical inspections by an independent party.
 - Options for mandating inward and outward-facing recording devices in all vehicles for hire.

Further information regarding the Vehicle for Hire 2021-2023 work plan, achievements and 2022 priorities can be found in Attachment 3.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

Administration continued regular engagement with Vehicle for Hire program stakeholders throughout 2021. Discussions continued to focus on regulatory matters impacting the industry and further program opportunities and included:

- Monthly meetings with vehicle for hire industry members including limousine dispatchers, taxi dispatchers and drivers' representatives.
- Meetings with the Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- Meetings with DATS regarding opportunities for accessible vehicle for hire services to align with the existing DATS services and infrastructure.
- Collaboration with WAVE and continued exploration of opportunities to enhance women's safety awareness when using vehicle for hire services.
- The facilitation of a workshop between Alberta Health Services and vehicle for hire service providers in response to industry concerns regarding safe transportation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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GBA+

The Vehicle for Hire program's initiatives are informed by a GBA+ lens on an ongoing basis by stakeholders including the Accessibility Advisory Committee, WAVE and the Vehicle for Hire industry. Further, the program formally incorporates GBA+ considerations and lenses in its project-based work. In 2021, the program:

- Collaborated with the Accessibility Advisory Committee to research accessible vehicle needs in the city, with the goal of improving accessibility for all potential vehicle for hire users.
- Engaged with WAVE, whose feedback initiated the Vehicle for Hire educational campaign, focused on promoting safety for vehicle for hire users.
- Distributed updated training materials to vehicle for hire dispatchers to address the needs of accessible users and women when utilizing services. A review of the training materials was based on feedback from both the Accessibility Advisory Committee and WAVE.
- Engaged with owners, dispatchers and drivers, which resulted in a review of the Vehicle for Hire bylaw.

Based on feedback from the Accessibility Advisory Committee, WAVE, and Vehicle for Hire industry, Administration has identified opportunities for significant improvement to the Vehicle for Hire program's stakeholder relationship approaches. The program will be prioritizing the development of a new stakeholder relationship strategy and conducting equity analysis to better understand how to address gaps that have been identified - with a focus on moving from commitment to action. Stakeholder conversations and community listening in 2022 will continue to seek insights that the program initiatives and bylaw regulations are relevant and responsive to user needs.

ATTACHMENTS

1. 2021 Revenue and Expenses
2. 2021 Vehicle for Hire Enforcement Activity
3. Vehicle for Hire Program 2021-2023 Work Plan