

Accessible Taxis - Accessibility Advisory Committee Report

Accessible Taxi Service for People with Disabilities

Recommendation

That the September 18, 2019, Accessibility Advisory Committee report CR_7224, be received for information.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to make Council aware of issues with the accessible taxi service in Edmonton and the importance of reliable modes of transportation for people with disabilities or mobility challenges. It may be worthwhile to recommend an investigation to identify any issues with accessible taxis in Edmonton, their causes, and potential solutions. Nearly a quarter (23.7 percent) of all complaints received by 311 relating to taxis being difficult to book, arriving late or not showing up, are with respect to accessible taxis. Accessible taxis represent only 7.1 percent of Edmonton's taxi licenses. These statistics demonstrate that a proportionally higher number of complaints are related to a relatively small segment of the taxi business, and point out potential shortcomings related to accessible taxi services in Edmonton. Edmontonians using accessible taxis are not satisfied with the services that they are receiving.

Report

Background

This year marks the 13th anniversary of *Laidlaw Transit Ltd. v Alberta (Human Rights and Citizenship Commission)*. In recent years, Edmonton led the way and became the first Canadian city to regulate ride-sharing technology companies. This year should also be the year in which the City of Edmonton is committed to reviewing the accessibility of its vehicle for hire industry. In 2006, the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench in *Laidlaw*, confirmed that "failure to take positive steps to ensure that disabled individuals benefit equally from services offered is discriminatory" and determined that disabled Edmonton taxi users are entitled to "24 hours a day, 7 days a week wheelchair accessible taxi service customarily available to non-disabled Edmonton taxi users."

In March 2017, the Accessibility Advisory Committee conducted a survey to determine the nature of accessible taxi issues in Edmonton via the Edmonton Insight Community

and a survey link was sent to disability-related organizations in the city. The survey (attached), asked questions about accessible taxi use, including frequency of use, reasons for use, taxi wait times and overall satisfaction with accessible taxi service in Edmonton. Two hundred and twenty people responded to the survey; some of the responses were provided by people who do not require the use of accessible taxis, but who may book accessible taxis on behalf of clients, friends or family members. The committee encourages you to review the survey in its entirety while noting a few key findings, namely that:

- participants rely on taxis for a wide range of reasons;
- 24% of participants noted that they had been unable to book an accessible taxi for one reason or another;
- 57% of participants note experiences where taxis arrived late, not at all or service is refused upon arrival;
- 74% of participants indicated that there should be more accessible taxis in the fleet, that there should be better response times and that there should be a lower cost to the rider; and
- If they were available, there is a strong indication that people would like to use accessible taxis more often.

A provincial Transportation Needs Assessment for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities was conducted by the Medically At Risk Driver Centre between December 2016 and April 2017. Provincially, the total sample size of the survey was 1,545 with responses from 145 people who identified as having a disability. In Edmonton, they received responses from 445 people, 47 of whom identified as having a disability.

Key findings that relate to people with disabilities, namely that:

- there is a range of unmet transportation needs in Edmonton, including transportation for medical appointments, essential services, and social activities. Transportation for social activities is one of the highest unmet needs, there is a gap in improved services that accessible taxis could fill;
- unmet transportation needs are greater in Edmonton than in rural areas; and
- although people can only afford to pay up to \$11.24 per ride for accessible transportation services within their limited budgets, they are actually willing to spend \$13.34 per ride (more than they can afford) indicating that for them, accessible transportation is not an optional but rather a necessary expenditure.

Please see attached documents for more information.

What Has Worked for Others?

The Accessibility Advisory Committee reached out to other large municipalities across Canada and the United States (Winnipeg, Vancouver, Portland and Toronto) to better understand what has worked for them when making taxis more accessible.

Top takeaways from the review:

1. Driver Training - In Winnipeg, taxi drivers are required to go through a 5 day training on disability awareness in order to keep a valid license. Vancouver Taxi Association has developed Ask Listen Act (a course to train drivers).
2. Uber Incentives
 - a. Driver Training - Uber is making advancements in Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAV) service around the world for paratransit operators including physical and sensitivity training, with background checks, insured.
3. Centralized booking for all (accessible) Vehicle for Hire, DATS included - Portland Taxi Cab Central dispatches a permitted cab that is closest to the callers location regardless of which cab company it belongs to.
4. Competition/Applications - The City of Winnipeg has opened up sixty new licenses with the proviso that they will all be accessible.
5. Grant Incentive - The City of Toronto, waived license, renewal and training fees. A fund was set up that all drivers paid into to help look for ways to incentivize more accessible transportation.

Next Steps

The Accessibility Advisory Committee is currently in an information-gathering stage with respect to researching accessible access to transportation in Edmonton, trying to identify the nature and extent of the problems with accessible taxi service in Edmonton and considering possible solutions. In addition, they are partnering with Vehicle for Hire and DATS to specifically address service and wait times.

The committee suggests that Administration provide updates to City Council on the following possible next steps:

1. Identify potential issues in any of several ways, including, but not limited to:
 - a. Holding consultations with, and surveying, the relevant communities in Edmonton (including accessible taxi users, taxi drivers, and other relevant groups) to determine if there are real or perceived gaps within the accessible taxi system.
 - b. Public education campaign on how citizens can report concerns using 311. Reviewing the accessible taxi services provided within other Canadian municipalities to identify promising practices and areas where Edmonton may lag. Note: The two proposed actions will have financial implications that have not yet been determined and no funding is currently allocated to these actions within existing operating budgets.
2. Continue to partner with Administration to address accessible access concerns. The support from both Vehicle for Hire and DATS will move the needle on enhanced services for non-ambulatory accessible transportation.

- a. Currently in Edmonton, there is no standardized training in place that is adequate and available for all drivers of wheelchair accessible taxis. Enhance Accessible Driver Training to positively impact service delivery for accessible passengers and explore alignment with DATS driver training. This work has been initiated and is anticipated to be implemented in 2020.
- b. Explore opportunities for a centralized booking service for accessible transportation to address wait times for passengers. With a central booking service, the pool of wheelchair accessible taxis can be more evenly distributed across the city, with more taxis in each zone. Initial discussions related to increased efficiencies to connect passengers with accessible transportation has led to a commitment to investigate the viability of a centralized booking service for all accessible taxi dispatchers. Research and development activities are anticipated to take two years.

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome(s): Edmontonians are connected to the city in which they live, work and play			
Outcome(s)	Measure(s)	Result(s)	Target(s)
Edmontonians use public transit and active modes of transportation	Overall satisfaction of Edmontonians with respect to accessible taxi service in terms of:	In 2017 the number of participants is 53 In 2019 the number of participants is 44	Improved/greater satisfaction from baseline
	the taxi arrived late	2017 - 57% 2019 - 57%	
	Did not arrive	2017 - 28% 2019 - 43%	
	were refused service	2017 - 19% 2019 - 23%	
	indicated they would like to use accessible taxi more often	2017 - 54% 2019 - 68%	
	better response rate	2017 - 58% 2019 - 61%	
	more accessible taxis	2017 - 74% 2019 - 66%	

Attachments

1. AAC 2017 Taxi Survey, 'Insight Community' survey, infographic, and results

2. Transportation Needs Assessment for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities, Medically at Risk Driver Centre
3. Emails from an accessible taxi user
4. Letter from John Stinson, Assistant Deputy Minister, Disabilities, Inclusion and Accessibility, Department of Community and Social Services, Government of Alberta