

Vehicle for Hire Annual Report

2021 Update

Recommendation

That Community and Public Service Committee recommend to City Council:

That the 2021 fees within Vehicle For Hire Bylaw 17400, for dispatch and vehicle licences, be waived by 50 percent.

Executive Summary

The Vehicle for Hire industry is an essential part of the local economy, employing Edmontonians and enhancing livability in the city by providing mobility options for residents. The Vehicle for Hire Bylaw 17400 regulates vehicles for hire in alignment with the City's commitment to public safety. Further, The City Plan directs that Edmonton's mobility system should be safe, secure, accessible and responsive. The vehicle for hire program works collaboratively with industry, users and other stakeholder groups to support that direction. This report provides an overview of the program's 2020 initiatives, which includes accessibility projects, licensing services and stakeholder collaboration. The report also includes a review of bylaw enforcement outcomes, program revenue and expenses, and the program's 2021 work plan. This work plan includes stakeholder engagement and research regarding potential bylaw amendments.

Budget analysis revealed program revenue in 2020 was higher than anticipated, and therefore, the report recommends a 50 percent waiver of 2021 dispatch and vehicle licence fees to support industry economic recovery efforts.

Report

Implementation of a majority of the vehicle for hire program's initiatives continued in 2020. However, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in postponement of some initiatives and cancellation of others such as the education campaign. These initiatives are planned to be resumed in 2021.

Accessibility Projects

Following The City Plan policy direction to improve accessibility and safety, Administration and the Accessibility Advisory Committee, have been developing two major accessibility initiatives since 2019: an update to accessible driver training materials and an accessible vehicle centralized booking service.

Accessible Driver Training Materials

Administration completed the development of updated accessible driver training materials which are intended to enhance service delivery to accessible vehicle users. These materials were distributed to industry in Q1 2021 as the original delivery timeline was impacted by COVID-19. The materials cover the following areas:

- Introduction to disability, which includes prevalence of disability, models of disability, types of barriers and unconscious bias;
- Types of disabilities such as physical, visual, hearing, cognitive, and mental health;
- Disability law and legislation, including the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Human Rights Act, and the City’s Vehicle for Hire Bylaw;
- Communication and inclusive language, communication etiquette, active listening, de-escalation, and mindfulness in conversations;
- Providing accessible customer service encompassing empathy and compassion, assisting a customer based on the type of disability, and service animals;
- Experiential disability awareness training covering awareness and understanding training, and mobility, vision, and hearing experience training.

Accessible Vehicle Centralized Booking Service

An accessible vehicle centralized booking service could potentially process all service requests for accessible vehicles for hire. The benefits of this service would include oversight as to availability and effective accommodation of trips, oversight regarding wait times, and the ability for accessible vehicle users to have one point of contact for trips. Due to the impact of COVID-19 on resources, completion of research and consultation regarding the viability of this service was shifted from Q4 2020 to Q4 2021.

Licensing

In response to demand disruptions caused by COVID-19 and the resulting impact to businesses, renewal of dispatch and vehicle licences was deferred from April to September 2020. In addition, Council approved a 100 percent waiver of dispatch and vehicle licence fees for limousines and a 50 percent waiver for all other dispatchers. Administration recorded a slight decline in licences issued in 2020 compared to the two preceding years.

Number of VFH Licences

Licence Type	2018	2019	2020
Dispatch	89	77	76
Vehicle	1,580	1,554	1,427
Driver’s	1,488	1,472	1,051*

*In total, there were 2,389 valid driver's licences as some licences are issued for two-year terms. Dispatch and vehicle licences are issued annually.

Stakeholder Engagement

Communication with stakeholders in 2020 regarding issues impacting the industry included email updates and meetings, with the latter having an average attendance of seven industry representatives. Industry identified challenges related to issues such as impacts of COVID-19 on the industry, licence fees, bylaw enforcement and communication. The fee schedule was identified as the primary concern; specifically that business requirements and public health measures have a continuing impact on the demand for vehicle for hire services. Industry representatives voiced their desires to have fees waived for the entire 2021 licensing year. Engagement details can be found in Attachment 1 - Stakeholder Engagement: What We Heard.

Administration will continue to engage stakeholders on a broader basis in 2021 with a focus on potential bylaw amendments to address concerns raised by the stakeholders.

Enforcement

Enforcement activities in 2020 were focused on promoting adherence to public health guidelines and regulations relating to COVID-19. Administration conducted over 4,000 inspections under the City's state of local emergency order, the Temporary Mandatory Face Coverings Bylaw 19408 and the provincial public health orders, issuing 49 warnings.

Most vehicle for hire investigations were officer-initiated as opposed to investigations initiated due to citizen complaints. Administration issued approximately 672 fines and 330 warnings, of which 115 fines and 127 warnings were issued under the vehicle for hire bylaw. The remaining fines and warnings were issued for various infractions of provincial statutes such as the Traffic Safety Act and its regulations along with other City bylaws. Details can be found in Attachment 2 - 2020 Vehicle for Hire Bylaw Enforcement.

Financials

The vehicle for hire program operates on a cost recovery model; therefore, fees received from services must cover administration costs. In 2020, revenue exceeded expenses and \$113,866 was transferred to the vehicle for hire reserve. This was due in part to industry performance being higher than the anticipated revenue (adjusted downwards on a one-time basis for estimated impacts of COVID-19 through the 2020 COVID-19 Financial Impacts and Funding Strategy Report on April 27, 2020) and a decrease in expenditure on enforcement operations.

Revenue

Transportation Network Companies (dispatch licence fees, per trip fees and accessibility surcharge)	\$826,466
All Others - Taxi and General Dispatchers (dispatch, vehicle and driver's licence fees and accessibility surcharge)	\$766,017
Total Revenue	\$1,592,483

Expenses

Administrative (including personnel)	\$607,881
Shared Costs (Branch and front counter/licence processing)	\$213,112
Community Standards (Peace Officer Enforcement)	\$657,624
Total Expenses	\$1,478,617

Recognizing the impacts of COVID-19 continue to affect the industry, and given that the reserve is healthy, Administration recommends a 50 percent dispatch and vehicle licence fee reduction. This will ensure that administrative costs of running the program continue to be covered while also supporting the industry. It is anticipated that this fee reduction will impact 2021 revenues by approximately \$42,000, which can be accommodated by the reserve. Additional funds in the reserve will continue to be used to fund items on the work program such as accessibility initiatives which will enhance the vehicle for hire service.

2021 Work Plan

The vehicle for hire program's 2021 work plan will focus on accessibility projects, stakeholder engagement and research regarding potential bylaw amendments. In addition, Administration will use the feedback received (as outlined in Attachment 1 - Stakeholder Engagement - What We Heard) to help inform work operations and communication with industry. Details can be found in Attachment 3 - Vehicle for Hire Program 2021 Work Plan.

Next Steps

Administration will continue engaging with stakeholders to advance alignment of programs and industry needs. Administration will present the program's annual update to Community and Public Services Committee in the first quarter of 2022.

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome: Edmonton is a safe city			
Outcome(s)	Measure(s)	Result(s)	Target(s)
Support the development of a livable, safe and sustainable community.	Number of enforcement actions for vehicle for hire trips.	124 fines and 109 warnings for approximately 3,063,767 vehicle for hire trips (2019)	N/A.
Corporate Outcome: The city of Edmonton has a resilient financial position			
Deliver effective and efficient services: revenue supports ongoing city operations.	Fees received from the Program are sufficient to cover costs of the Program.	107 percent (2020)	100 percent cost recovery.

Attachments

1. Stakeholder Engagement: What We Heard
2. 2020 Vehicle for Hire Bylaw Enforcement
3. Vehicle for Hire Program 2021 Work Plan
4. Key Observations from 2019 Trip Records Data

Others Reviewing this Report

- M. Persson, Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer, Financial and Corporate Services
- C. Owen, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement
- G. Cebryk, Deputy City Manager, City Operations
- R. Smyth, Deputy City Manager, Citizen Services
- K. Fallis-Howell, Acting City Solicitor