

**Community Services Briefing to
Community Development Committee
2021 November 17**

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Update on Accessible Taxi Incentive Program

PURPOSE OF BRIEFING

On 2018 October 15, Council approved changes to the Livery Transport Bylaw 6M2007 to establish an Accessible Taxi Incentive Program for holders of an Accessible Taxi Plate Licence and accessible taxi drivers. This briefing responds to Council's direction to monitor the effectiveness of the Accessible Taxi Incentive Program and report back through the Standing Policy Committee on Community and Protective Services (now called the Community Development Committee) with an update. See Attachment 1 for Previous Council Direction.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

There are two separate Council-directed initiatives that share a common goal of improving accessible taxi service delivery in Calgary.

The Accessible Taxi Incentive Program was implemented on 2019 January 1 to improve on-demand wheelchair accessible taxi service and customer safety while mitigating the higher operating cost of accessible taxis compared to other taxi vehicles. The program provides up to \$5,000 in annual grants and incentives to holders of an Accessible Taxi Plate Licence and accessible taxi drivers who meet the qualifying criteria. It is self-funded by a 10 cent regulatory fee that is included in fares charged to customers for all taxi, accessible taxi and Transportation Network Company trips taken in vehicles licensed to operate in Calgary.

In 2019 December, following direction from Council, Administration launched a pilot of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAV) Calgary, a centralized dispatch service for on-demand accessible taxis, with the ability to transition the service to a full program if successful. WAV Calgary provides customers with one point of contact to request an accessible taxi and optimizes the accessible fleet by dispatching the closest available vehicle from a pool of drivers affiliated with different taxi companies. In addition to reducing wait times for customers and travel time for drivers, WAV Calgary provides data that is used to evaluate whether Accessible Taxi Plate Licence holders and drivers have met criteria to receive incentives under the Accessible Taxi Incentive Program.

These two complementary programs work to ensure the viability of the accessible taxi fleet and have served as a model of innovation for jurisdictions across North America since they were launched.

PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

From the introduction of the Accessible Taxi Incentive Program in 2019 January to the end of 2021 August, almost 33,000 accessible taxi trips have been delivered, representing 0.3 per cent of total taxi trips. The program has provided \$984,255 in grant and incentive payments to eligible members of industry, self-funded by the 10 cent regulatory fee. Accessible Taxi Plate Licence holders and drivers received the most funding for meeting customer safety and

satisfaction criteria, but qualified for fewer incentives for service delivery criteria around accepting and completing a specified number of accessible trips, possibly due to the reduced demand for taxis as a result of COVID-19. In 2020, there were only 9,141 accessible taxi trips completed, down 57 per cent from 2019.

Administration engaged with Accessible Taxi Plate Licence holders and drivers in 2021 June (see Attachment 2 for a summary of engagement) and heard that 90 per cent of those surveyed feel that the grants and incentives help offset the higher cost of operating an accessible taxi. The higher cost of purchasing and maintaining an accessible taxi and the longer driving distances to pick-up/drop-off customers in less fuel-efficient vehicles continue to be challenges facing the industry. Despite this, 80 per cent of respondents indicated that they intend to keep driving an accessible taxi in the future.

In addition to offsetting costs for drivers, a key objective of the Accessible Taxi Incentive Program is to improve service for customers. Before Council approved the Accessible Taxi Incentive Program and WAV Calgary, many customers expressed frustration about hours-long wait times and uncertainty about taxis arriving when booked. Since the programs launched, the average wait time for an accessible taxi is less than 22 minutes. Administration engaged with customers through the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and the Calgary Ability Network and heard that 90 per cent of those surveyed feel confident that a taxi will arrive when requested through WAV Calgary, while all those who responded are likely or very likely to continue using the service.

PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

Administration completed a full review of the Accessible Taxi Incentive Program and will be implementing improvements effective 2022 January 1 within the existing Livery Transport Bylaw framework (see Attachment 3 for a summary). Although most Accessible Taxi Plate Licence holders and drivers feel the criteria for receiving grants and incentives are easy to understand, some feel that they are overly complicated and fail to recognize that some drivers complete more accessible trips than others and have higher operating costs. To streamline the criteria, funding for the annual grant for Accessible Taxi Plate Licence holders will be reallocated to the annual incentive, providing a larger amount at one time and reducing the administrative burden of managing and dispensing two separate payments. Changes are also being made to reduce the overall number of eligibility criteria and remove those that require a specific number of trips to be completed, which may be beyond the driver's control. The total amount of available funding will remain \$5,000 annually to ensure the program continues to encourage the fleet to deliver a high level of service that meets or exceeds customer expectations.

A new per-trip driver incentive will also be introduced to provide funding that is commensurate with the number of accessible trips each driver completes. Through engagement, 82 per cent of Accessible Taxi Plate Licence holders and drivers felt that a per-trip incentive for every accessible trip completed would help offset the additional costs of running an accessible vehicle. Using funding from the 10 cent regulatory fee, Administration will be introducing a \$10 incentive for every accessible trip completed during the daytime and a \$20 incentive for every trip completed during the nighttime, which is in line with other municipalities across North America with per-trip incentives.

The mechanism for evaluating eligibility for the per-trip driver incentive will be WAV Calgary, which Administration will be transitioning from a pilot to a full program self-funded by the 10 cent regulatory fee. Administration received support from the Advisory Committee on Accessibility for maintaining WAV Calgary as a means of improving equity of accessible on-demand transportation options in Calgary and over 90 per cent of app users have rated the service as four or five stars out of five since it was launched.

NEXT STEPS

Administration is committed to reviewing the Accessible Taxi Incentive Program annually to evaluate how the program is performing and to ensure long-term sustainability. A public awareness campaign for WAV that started in November will continue throughout December using community newsletters, signage and social media to promote the service. Engagement with Accessible Taxi Plate Licence holders, drivers and customers will be on-going to ensure The City's accessible taxi initiatives are addressing service gaps and continuing to support Accessible Taxi Plate Licence holders and drivers in providing safe, efficient and reliable on-demand taxi service to all customers.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Attachment 1 – Previous Council Direction
2. Attachment 2 – Summary of Engagement
3. Attachment 3 – Summary of Planned Changes to the Accessible Taxi Incentive Program