

Presentation to SPC on Community & Protective Services

Lauri Brunner, Chairman – Advisory Committee on Accessibility (ACA)

As at: March 1, 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to talk about one of ACA's strategic goals of accessible transportation for persons with disabilities. My name is Lauri Brunner and I have served on ACA since 2009; and I am ACA's appointment to the Livery Transport Advisory Committee (LTAC).

I am here to give you a perspective on Calgary's on-demand, wheelchair accessible taxi service. I have a mobility disorder and I use a scooter for stamina and long distances. This means I ride in both wheelchair accessible taxis and Calgary Transit Access vans. You may know that LTAC and its subcommittees have spent considerable time on this topic. With each passing meeting, the people from the taxi industry are expressing more and more frustration and we are no closer to a possible solution for the wheelchair taxi riders who need a 24/7 on-demand accessible taxi service.

LTAC has expended significant effort researching and understanding the various challenges of ensuring the availability of a 24/7 taxi service -- which meets the needs of the city's people who use mobility devices. We have explored alternate delivery systems; cross subsidization within the livery industry; and suggestions for mill rate support of a 24/7 service. At the end of the day, we keep returning to a well-supported idea known as the "Broker Accountability Model". This option allows taxi companies to have greater control over Accessible Taxi Plate Licenses (ATPLs) allowing them to be responsible and accountable for accessible taxi service.

Calgary Transit Access (CTA) does a good job of getting many disabled Calgarians to destinations within the City. While this service is great, it requires pre-booking and a lengthy pre-approval process. Even though CTA has very few unaccommodated trips, it does not provide service between the hours of midnight to 6:00 a.m. People with disabilities want to be able to have wheelchair transportation between these hours like everyone else.

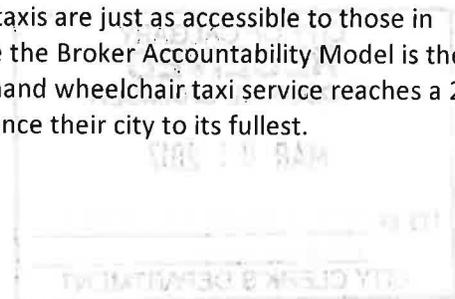
In December, 2016, City Council asked administration to prepare a scoping report between Calgary Transit Access and Livery Transport Services, which explored opportunities to collaborate on service delivery for the accessible taxi community. We haven't heard much about the possible opportunities to work together with Calgary Transit Access.

That leaves us where we are today, with under-used accessible taxis -- because the wheelchair trips are so few, and the drivers cannot make a living; -- and wheelchair riders who have given up on wheelchair taxis because the wait for a ride is so long and they feel rushed and beholden to drivers for the "imposition" of their extra loading time.

A restated recommendation will come before City Council on March 20th. It will ask that the on-demand wheelchair taxi service be entrusted to taxi brokerages. I have wondered if taxi companies will do a better job than individual taxi drivers. Many of the present wheelchair accessible drivers took out an ATPL because, at the time, that was the only plate available to enter the City's taxi market. Now, however, we have a fleet of aging wheelchair accessible vans with some drivers not interested in servicing wheelchair riders. The number of accessible trips one ATPL driver might take in a week is hardly a viable source of income. Brokerages are better suited to manage the financial burden of accessible business. LTAC receives constant reassurances, from the city's two largest taxi companies, affirming they can provide the service. From time to time, brokers have provided their drivers with incentives to ensure wheelchair service is augmented for specific holidays. Brokers appear to understand their duty to accommodate under present and future legislation.

Even though I support LTAC's recommendations I, and the rest of ACA, remain concerned that service standards and dispatch response times must be closely monitored to ensure on-demand taxis are just as accessible to those in wheelchairs and scooters as the rest of Calgary's travelling public. I believe the Broker Accountability Model is the best alternative to address this urgent need. Please join me in ensuring on-demand wheelchair taxi service reaches a 24/7 availability and accessible service is enhanced to help all Calgarians experience their city to its fullest.

Once again, thank you.



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