

Lauri Brunner's Presentation to SPC on Community & Protective Services;

As at: November 30, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback. My name is Lauri Brunner and I serve on the City's Advisory Committee on Accessibility and I am ACA's appointment to the Livery Transportation Advisory Committee (LTAC).

You may know there was significant discussion at a recent LTAC meeting concerning various matters. Most specifically, I wish to address the issue of Wheelchair Accessible, On-Demand Taxi service.

Calgary Transit Access does a great job of getting many Calgarians, with limited access, to many destinations in the City. While this service is great, it requires pre-booking each trip up to 4 days in advance; and the trip, must also be booked by 1:00 p.m. -- the day prior. Furthermore, to even qualify for the service, a lengthy approval process must be undertaken. The form to apply for service is 8 pages long and requires 2 of those pages to be completed and verified by a health care professional. To the best of my knowledge CTA has well-trained drivers with a rigorous program of checks and balances to ensure safety of its ridership.

While CTA has recently experienced significant scheduling and service delays, I was assured by the Manager of CTA that those kinks are close to being worked out and the service, which already, has very few unaccommodated trips, is working hard to improve its performance metrics -- even further.

What Calgary Transit Access cannot presently accommodate, is requests from disabled Calgarians for on-demand, wheelchair taxi trips. What this means is, that if I (or another disabled person) want to take a spur of the moment ride -- either for necessity or pleasure, I contact one of the local taxi companies and request a wheelchair accessible vehicle. I have personally taken wheelchair taxis and I have sometimes waited a long time for service and even experienced some safety issues. To me, this suggests there is room for my city to be more accessible for all.

The recommendation before you today, from LTAC and the City's LTS department, suggests that on demand wheelchair taxi service be wholly entrusted to taxi brokerages. I believe this to be a better option than where wheelchair taxi service presently resides. Many of the present wheelchair accessible drivers took out an Accessible Taxi Plate 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 really interested in servicing wheelchair riders. To be fair, the number of accessible trips one driver might take in a week is hardly a viable source of income.

One TNC company has attended LTAC meetings and made presentations. Each presentation suggests to me that this company seems ready and willing to provide accessible, on-demand taxi service to Calgary's aging and disabled population. In particular, this company would like for its services to be accessed by telephone -- not just a cellular phone app. The way the new By-laws exist, TNCs must be booked by an app. I would support this company's request (however it may be accommodated) to allow for telephone booking. For obvious reasons, this would give equal access to the elderly, brain-injured and other sectors of the population who do not typically own a cellular phone. I hope LTS staff is actively recording potential by-law changes that would, indeed, allow TNCs to be booked by telephone.

While I support the recommendation before the Committee today, I am 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. Please join me in ensuring these service levels are maintained; and further, that discussions continue to see if the City can enhance its accessible service to help all Calgarians experience their city to its fullest.

Thank you.

