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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Durham Region Transit Executive Committee
From: General Manager, Durham Region Transit
Report: #2024-DRT-11
Date: June 5, 2024

Subject:

Specialized Transit: Resumption of Integrated Trips

Recommendation:

That the Transit Executive Committee receive this report for information.

Report:

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Transit Executive Committee (TEC) an update regarding the resumption of integrated trips for customers registered with Specialized transit.

2. Background

- 2.1 The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) transportation standard, part of Ontario Regulation 191/11, Integrated Accessibility Standards (IAS), is intended to remove barriers to persons with disabilities to ensure equity for all customers in accessing and using public transit. Eligibility requirements specified in the transportation standard are based on the abilities of a person, not the person's disabilities. A person may qualify for specialized transit services when the person is unable to access and use conventional transit services.
- 2.2 Equity is the foundation of the AODA for the delivery of public transit services. One person should not be advantaged over another person when using public transit. For example, two residents travelling from the same address to the same destination are expected to be provided equitable access to public transit. A person with a disability who is unable to use conventional transit service for all or

part of their intended travel may be eligible for specialized transit.

2.3 Durham Region Transit (DRT) adopted the AODA eligibility categories in 2015.

- Conditional Eligibility: A person with a disability where environmental or physical barriers limit their ability to consistently use conventional transportation service.
- Temporary Eligibility: A person with a disability that temporarily prevents them from using conventional transportation services.
- Unconditional Eligibility: A person with a disability that prevents them from using conventional transportation services.

2.4 Since August 2014, DRT has operated a full fleet of AODA-compliant, accessible, conventional transit buses. Accessible features include bus kneeling (bus lowers at its front right-hand corner), a fully extendable ramp at the bus front door, priority seating and a reserved space for up to three mobility devices at the front of the bus, and automated bus stop announcements and displays.

2.5 DRT continues to invest in bus stop infrastructure to remove accessibility barriers and ensure customers can access and board conventional services.

- Total DRT bus stops: **2,113**
- Accessible DRT bus stops (hard surfaced): **1,794** or 85%:
 - (100% of active stops by end of 2025)
- Total DRT bus stops with shelters (therefore eligible for integrated transfers): **597**

2.6 Integrated trips for customers registered with specialized transit was launched in 2015, where customers with conditional eligibility may complete their door-to-door trips using a combination of vehicles. This service delivery approach is also known as the “Family of Services”, a term adopted by several transit agencies. For example, a customer registered with DRT specialized transit who plans to travel but is unable to access a conventional bus stop, may be provided an integrated trip where On Demand will pick them up at their home and take them to the nearest appropriate bus stop. From there the customer will travel on a conventional bus to complete their journey. DRT first launched integrated service for specialized customers in 2015; however, the practice was paused during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.7 With Durham Region Transit’s (DRT) investments in accessible vehicles, infrastructure, and training, and with the adoption of the AODA requirements,

DRT is able to resume integrated mobility options for customers. Through the comingling of On- Demand and Specialized trips starting in 2023, customers using the On-Demand service are already taking integrated trips.

- 2.8 There are currently some differences in the scheduling and service delivery of On-Demand and Specialized transit trips. On-Demand customers can book trips through the DRT App whereas specialized customers need to call a booking agent. Further, at this time DRT continue to enable specialized transit customers to book up to seven-days in advance whereas On-Demand customers can only book 24-hours in advance. As we move toward increased integration and advance the scheduling platform, DRT will align On Demand service to ensure all customers receive equitable services.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 3.1 TEC approved recommendations of Report [#2020-DRT-12](#) DRT Rural Review, which included:
- a new On Demand technology platform to support the scheduling and dispatching of both Specialized transit and On-Demand trips;
 - combining the delivery of On-Demand and Specialized transit based on their complementary delivery model; and
 - DRT branded vehicles and uniformed operators/drivers for On-Demand.
- 3.2 TEC approved recommendations of Report [#2021-DRT-25](#) Demand Responsive Services, which included:
- integrating Specialized and On-Demand transit services into a single On-Demand service;
 - improving the integration of all DRT services towards a “one DRT” customer experience; and
 - implementing an automated dispatching software and related app for the seamless integration of On-Demand and Specialized transit trip bookings that can meet both customer and business/operational requirements.
- 3.3 Report [#2022-DRT-13](#) Update to Demand Response Services, provided a status update for the transition to a single demand response service, including the new system platform and contracted service delivery.

4. Resumption of integrated trips

- 4.1 When customers apply for Specialized transit, their abilities are assessed to determine the appropriate AODA eligibility category. Customers with unconditional eligibility are provided trips through On-Demand only. Customers with conditional

eligibility may travel using the integrated service (multiple vehicles) model. For those customers who can travel using the integrated service, an offer of “travel training” is included in their welcome package. This way, their first trips on DRT will be integrated and supported, and their experience will be consistent in terms of service delivery.

- 4.2 Existing customers with conditional eligibility and who are eligible for integrated trips will be reviewed by staff. Staff will connect with them individually to offer the support needed to begin the transition to travelling via integrated trips. This will be through individual travel training outreach to ensure that they are supported through the transition in their service experience.
- 4.3 Staff will begin identifying existing customers whose eligibility and trip patterns make them candidates for travel training starting in July 2024.
- 4.4 In October 2024, all new eligible customers will be required to complete travel training as part of the registration process.
- 4.5 In February 2025, it is expected that customers registered with Specialized transit will be able to leverage the full suite of services available through the Via app, once the technical barriers of the platform have been resolved.
- 4.6 Individual travel patterns and travel frequencies vary significantly. There are approximately 1500 active specialized customers, with approximately 900 customers travelling at least once a month. It is expected that approximately 60%, or 540 of these customers are candidates for a supported transition to the integrated service.
- 4.7 Generally, by integrating customer trips, the length of individual specialized trips will be shortened. This will increase available capacity to improve the current unaccommodated trip rate and wait time for booked trips.
- 4.8 Durham Region Transit (DRT) will continue to enhance accessibility and mobility of the public transit network including compliance with AODA and consistent procedures and process that promote a seamless customer transit experience throughout the GTHA.

5. Relationship to Strategic Plan

- 5.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:

- Environmental Sustainability
 - Expand sustainable and active transportation.
- Economic Prosperity
 - Position Durham Region as the location of choice for business
 - Enhance communication and transportation networks to better connect people and move goods more effectively.
- Service Excellence
 - Optimize resources and partnerships to deliver exceptional quality services and value.

5.2 This report aligns with/addresses the following DRT strategic goals and priorities:

- Advancing the Organization:
 - Modernization of Eligibility Office & Service Delivery Practices.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 DRT On Demand is a modern, public transit service that continues to innovate to meet the evolving travel expectations of the community.
- 6.2 DRT services, including On Demand, comply with the requirements of the AODA and the Integrated Transportation Standard. Integrated specialized transit trips ensures equity for all residents to access and use public transit. Continuing with the current process of providing door to door trips on a single vehicle for all customers registered with specialized transit, regardless of their abilities, will continue to exacerbate the reliability and capacity challenges customers are experiencing.
- 6.3 Integrated specialized transit trips will provide additional capacity in DRT's on-demand network, resulting in service for more customers, and a reduction in unaccommodated trips, thus providing better value for money for the Region overall.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Bill Holmes
General Manager, DRT

Recommended for Presentation to Committee

Original signed by

Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer