



## MEETING OF THE ST. JOHN'S TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

### REGULAR BUSINESS

A meeting of the St. John's Transportation was held on Thursday, November 26, 2020 at Noon at the Metrobus Transit Centre, 25 Messenger Drive, St. John's. The meeting was streamed live via Webex.

Present at the meeting were:

Paul Walsh	Chair
Colleen Galgay	Commissioner
Kirsten Morry	Commissioner
Debbie Hanlon	Commissioner/City Councillor
Maggie Burton	Commissioner/City Councillor
Jamie Korab	Commissioner/City Councillor
Kevin Breen	City Manager
Derek Coffey	Deputy City Manager, Financial Management
Joan Mahon	Information Services Coordinator, Metrobus
Judy Powell	Metrobus General Manager
Linda Ryan	Administrative Assistant, Metrobus

### I. PROCEDURAL

- The Chair called the meeting to order and welcomed Councillors Korab and Burton as the newest members of the Commission.
- He noted that this is L. Ryan's last meeting due to retirement, after having served the Commission for 37 years, and thanked her for her contribution.
- The General Manager introduced J. Mahon who will be assuming L. Ryan's role in future meetings.
- L. Ryan recorded the minutes of the meeting of this date.

### II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA/MINUTES

#### ➤ AGENDA

It was moved by D. Coffey and seconded by Commissioner Morry that the agenda for this meeting date be approved.

#### ➤ MINUTES

It was moved by Commissioner Morry and seconded by Commissioner Hanlon that the minutes of the October 29<sup>th</sup> regular business meeting of the Commission be approved as distributed.

### III. BUSINESS ARISING

#### 1. COVID-19—Update

##### ➤ RIDERSHIP/MAXIMUM PASSENGER LOADS

- Ridership is at 56% of normal (pre-pandemic) ridership levels. A slight increase has occurred in the past several weeks due to uptake of the Low Income Pass.
- October was the first full month of the LIFT pass being used. Total rides of 50,310 represented 45.8% of all rides taken using a monthly / 30-day pass.
- High compliance with masks when using transit continues. Ads were produced and began airing on NTV, NTV.ca and OZ-FM reminding customers that masks are required on board. The airtime is available to Metrobus through a contra agreement with the Newfoundland Broadcasting Company Ltd.

## **2. Tender—New Bus Stop Signs**

- A public tender was prepared and issued for this item in October; the closing date was November 24, 2020.
- One (1) bid was received from Impact Signs who currently produce Metrobus' signage and most on-board transit advertising.
- The bid by Impact Signs is based on two thicknesses of aluminum:
  - 1) .08" thick - \$36,000 based on 950 signs (one sign for each stop throughout the system) \*
  - 2) .125" thickness - \$42,113.50 for 950 aluminum signs
- This is an unbudgeted expense for 2020. The Commission had previously approved this item to proceed in the current fiscal year, at an estimated cost of \$25,000 (800-900 signs at \$26/double-sided sign), and, if possible, that it be expensed from the \$1.2 million surplus (savings regarding GoBus operations in 2020 due to the pandemic). Because of COVID-19, however, the price of aluminum has risen and this translates to an increased cost of \$10 per sign.
- Each sign will provide information on the routes serviced by a specific stop that includes: a brief route description, stop I.D. number for texting and Google search, etc. for trip planning, and wheelchair accessibility symbol. The new stops will also be reflective at night for increased visibility.
- Efforts will be made before the year's end, to produce and install a limited number of signs at major checkpoints on routes 1, 2, 3 and 10. It is expected, because the signs must be individually produced with information relevant to each specific stop, installation of all signage will continue well into the 2021 budget year before completion.
- Materials will be ordered in 2020 and the installation of the new signage will occur as the Maintenance Department's work schedule will accommodate.
- Some bracket adjustments to the signage will be made allowing for improved word spacing.
- \* The new design was finalized in October, and a sample was ordered and approved. The General Manager advised that Impact delivered in error an incorrect sample (which represented the thicker aluminum) prior to the tender. Consequently, Impact's bid is based on both thickness options.
- Following the discussion, a vote was not taken to accept the bid from Impact. D. Coffey suggested instead this item be re-tendered. All members were in agreement.

### **Note:**

- *It was confirmed following the meeting, the tender required the thickness of the aluminum to be a minimum of .08 inches.*
- *This thickness of aluminum, however, is thinner than normally used and there is concern that the lighter strength might not withstand climactic elements; therefore, it might be worth the additional investment of \$6,000 for the stronger sign.*

## **3. Ninth Annual Metrobus—Pink Days In Bloom**

- Metrobus employees raised \$3,125.75 in support of Daffodil Place through a series of fundraisers beginning in October (Breast Cancer Awareness Month).
- During this time, Transit Operators wore pink behind the wheel and pink ribbon decals were placed on transit buses to elevate awareness in the community.
- L. Ryan informed that his year's contribution to the Canadian Cancer Society-NL exceeded that of last year. In December, 2019, Metrobus employees presented funds representing 25 nights. During the 2020 "One Night Stand Against Cancer Campaign", funds raised by employees represent 31 nights, totaling sponsorship of 55 nights in under one (1) year for cancer patients in this province who must travel to St. John's for their cancer treatments.
- Members congratulated L. Ryan for her successful leadership in this initiative and all employees on their achievement.

## **IV. NEW BUSINESS**

### **1. Financial Statements—October, 2020**

- The financial statements for the month of October, 2020 were tabled and reviewed. The following item was noted:

## **1. Financial Statements—October, 2020** (Continued)

### ➤ **Service Truck Tender—2020-007 5500 Series Pickup**

- The successful bidder in response to the above-noted tender was Hickman Chrysler at a total cost of \$56,844.60 (2021 RAM 5500 Series truck, includes a 9-foot flat deck and 9.5-foot v blade commercial plow).
- The Commission previously approved funds, not in the current year's budget, to replace the truck.
- The truck has been ordered but delivery is not expected until March, 2021 at the earliest.
- The General Manager advised that, in the meantime, the monies allocated for this item will be used to make the equivalent payment on the Commission's capital debt in 2020 and borrowed back in 2021 upon delivery of the truck.

### ➤ **\$1.5 Million Surplus**

- Commissioner Burton noted in the November, 2020 financials, a surplus in the amount of \$1.5 million at the end of the year.
- It was noted that this is a reflection of savings relevant to the GoBus operations during this pandemic year and is an anomaly.

## **2. Executive Summary (Regular) —October, 2020**

- The Executive Summary for the month of October, 2020 was tabled for members' information. The following items were noted:

### ➤ **Virtual CUTA Conference—Update**

- The Canadian Urban Transit Association's Annual Conference in this pandemic year was delivered, for the first time, virtually on November 16-19.
- The General Manager attended and noted that the programming and trade show was well done and of quality in the platform used.
- Among a broad range of issues, including zero-emission buses, financing, city planning and infrastructure, focus was on the pandemic, specifically how transit systems in Canada and other countries are dealing with the virus, employee safety, bringing riders back and how a vaccine could affect change; as well as new approaches to transit, including On Demand technology systems, Canada's Permanent Transit Fund and how systems can take advantage of the COVID-19 Resilience Stream.
- She informed that the virtual trade show provided an interactive viewing experiencing, offering opportunity for 47 exhibitors to present their product and services and members to ask questions. Over 1,000 visitors attended the virtual floor show.
- Session transcripts are available online.

### **ACTION:**

The General Manager will obtain for members' information, the transcript for the inclusion session.

### ➤ **Group Insurance Renewal**

- The Group Insurance renewal is due December 1, 2020. Based on the initial renewal request, Desjardins is seeking an increase of 7.9% or \$67,300 annually.
- The Basic Life, Dependent Life and Long-Term Disability benefits have been under rate guarantee since the 2018 marketing, which expires at this renewal.
- This item is included in the 2021 budget.

### ➤ **Other**

- The Chair noted, for the benefit of the newest members to the Commission, the Financial Statements and Executive Summary, which highlights the past month's activities and events respective to each department, are included each month with the minutes for members' review.

### **3. RFP—On-Demand App (Paratransit)**

- The Commission will be going to market for a new GoBus service provider when the existing contract with MVT, as the vehicle vendor, ends on December 31, 2021.
- Planning consultations are being held with the disability community focusing on the upcoming RFP process. A meeting of the GoBus RFP Committee was held in October to review the draft RFP, and Committee members were pleased with the information presented to them.
- On-Demand systems which use app-based scheduling software are being considered that offers a more cost-effective solution to paratransit and an improved customer experience including:

- flexibility to book same-day rides and recurring same-day trips, versus 24-hour advance bookings, using either a smartphone or a landline phone to speak directly with a dispatcher
- reduced on-board time for customers
- option for Metrobus to communicate directly with the taxi provider  
*(The app-based system recognizes bus capacities; and when they are full, it will send the ride directly to the taxi broker eliminating the need to go through the vehicle vendor for bookings.)*
- reduced number of vehicles on the street
- reduced carbon emissions
- reduced kilometres travelled
- possibly reduced staff required for booking and scheduling rides  
*(Currently, eight (8) MVT staff book pre-scheduled trips and respond to customer service calls. Because the app does this for you, there would be savings in the per ride rate.)*
- reduced operating costs

- As options are explored to find efficiencies for the GoBus service, discussions have been held with several On-Demand service providers, including Via and Spare Labs,
- Manager of Accessible Services D. Power provided to Via upon their request, ridership data from two (2) typical service days. Based on the information provided to them, Via ran several scenarios. In one example, based on a single full day of service, their results indicated nine (9) buses could be utilized versus 15 currently used out of 18 buses in the fleet, not including taxis.
- D. Coffey cautioned regarding On Demand sales calls, proprietary apps and having two (2) separate and disconnected software systems (that currently used by MVT and the On Demand provider).
- The General Manager clarified that Metrobus owns the software currently used; MVT provides only the on-road service as the vehicle vendor.
- Savings from moving to an On-Demand platform for the GoBus service are estimated at \$3 million over five (5) years; most of these savings would be realized via taxi brokerages. (Taxicab brokerages accept requests to connect individuals with taxicabs. Methods include using a smartphone or similar technology.)
- Integral rebranding/co-branding of both Metrobus and GoBus transit services is also being explored so they are non-segregating and inclusive systems in design.
- The Chair noted that apart from the financial savings in terms of sustainability of the service, On Demand appears to be a more equitable approach to the integration of conventional and para transit.
- Commissioner Korab opined that this initiative will likely result in an uptake in ridership because of the increased flexibility of same-day bookings. He inquired regarding anticipated ridership growth and existing capacities (specifically, the potential need for additional buses, more drivers, etc.). The Chair expressed that this is an unknown factor at this time.
- Commissioner Burton shared that she had attended a CUTA Young Leaders Forum in Calgary in 2019. A presenter at that conference shared examples of Via's performance in Austin, Texas as well as Pantonium Inc.'s in Belleville, Ontario in which interesting comparisons were made. She suggested that several service providers be contacted and Via, particularly, asked to share examples of reducing costs in sample service areas. She additionally requested the following information:
  - details relevant to the service area
  - rider population
  - number of rides/hour

**3. RFP—On-Demand App (Paratransit) (Continued)**

- Consultations with the Paratransit Working Group and Inclusion Advisory Committee are scheduled for November to seek input on options being explored for the upcoming RFP for paratransit service.

**ACTION:**

- It was moved by Commissioner Burton, seconded by Commissioner Morry and carried unanimously that this item proceed to an RFP.

**4. Downtown Pedestrian Malls**

- When transit service was moved from Water Street to Harbour Drive due to the popular Pedestrian Mall, Metrobus lost its accessibility in this area of the downtown over the summer.
- As it is a new event that came together quickly, opportunities for further improvement are being explored to ensure the Mall is inclusive and welcoming for all ages and abilities.
- The General Manager advised that Transit Planner K. Woodfine had some consultation with the City's Engineering Department. However, in future, there is a need for the City as a whole to consider infrastructure and the accessibility piece from a transit perspective to ensure designated space along the waterfront for this purpose.

**ACTION:**

- D. Coffey suggested Metrobus staff connect with T. Haywood, Deputy City Manager, Community Services at the City of St. John's regarding this item.

**5. BlindSquare App or Equivalent**

- Blindsquare is a widely used accessible, self-voicing GPS-app, available in many languages. It is used in buildings and other venues, developed specifically for the blind and partially sighted for use inside and outside. Paired with third-party navigation apps, it describes the surrounding environment, announces points of interest and street intersections. Filters can be applied to provide only the information the person is looking for so they're not overwhelmed by details of their surroundings.
- Metrobus is working with the CNIB to pioneer the BlindSquare app, or its equivalent, to transit so that it can communicate with the customer, via Metrobus's Automatic Vehicle Locator (AVL) system, using auditory queues in describing their location along the route, next stop identification, and other indicators so visually challenged persons can travel independently.
- A quote obtained over one (1) year ago priced development of the app for transit at \$68,000, plus an annual maintenance fee of \$15,000.
- Discussions have been held with the CNIB to determine if there is funding available to procure this type of technology, and it has been determined that there currently is none. The General Manager would like to apply for funding under the federal government's Public Transit Infrastructure Program (PTIF) as an accessibility upgrade.
- Potential cost-sharing partnerships with businesses and organizations who might want to consider improving accessibility to their facilities, such as the City of St. John's, Avalon Mall and Memorial University, for example, and would like to expand and transfer the BlindSquare, or similar, technology into their respective environments will be explored.
- D. Coffey suggested the General Manager connect with N. Godden, Manager of Family and Leisure Services at the City, with respect to this item.

**ACTION:**

- Members agreed that the General Manager meet with CNIB and other stakeholders to explore the wider application of this app in the community before proceeding with an application for funding.

## **6. Service Request—Mount Scio Road Area**

- Requests are regularly received from businesses and individuals for service in the Mount Scio Road area, particularly for Easter Seals, Memorial University Botanical Gardens, and Rainbow Riders.
- The General Manager brought it forward at this time for members' information and to keep the matter current.

## **7. Employer Influenza Vaccination—Clinic Support Program**

- H. Hopkins, Manager of Human Resources was successful in an application for funding under the provincial government's Employer Influenza Vaccination--Clinic Support Program to contract an external private company to administer influenza vaccines to Metrobus employees. Under the grant program, the contracted licensed party is eligible to receive access to the public supply of influenza vaccine, appropriate PPE, and a clinic kit at no cost to the employer or private service provider.
- The Influenza Vaccination Clinic Grant is valued at \$120 per hour (prorated) of vaccination clinic time. It is expected that 10 to 12 vaccines would be administered per hour.
- During the on-site Flu Clinic, 58 of 150 Metrobus employees received the vaccine. Individual vaccines cost \$40. Funding in the amount of \$12 per employee has been received for a total of \$696 toward the cost of the program.
- The goal of the Department of Health and Community Services (HCS) for the 2020-21 influenza season is to immunize 85 per cent of the provincial population during the period of October, 2020 to May, 2021.
- The purpose of the Employer Influenza Vaccination Clinic Support Program is to provide support to Employers with 100 or more employees in Newfoundland and Labrador to undertake influenza vaccination clinics for their employees.

## **V. OTHER (Information/Community)**

### **1. Volunteerism Award**

- The General Manager shared that in celebration of National Philanthropy Day (observed on November 15th). L. Ryan was presented by the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP)--NL Chapter at the Manuel's River Interpretation Centre on November 16<sup>th</sup> with "The Spirit of Philanthropy Outstanding Fundraising Volunteer Award."
- The award honours individuals who go above and beyond to make an impact through generosity and contribution of their time and talents in exhibiting exceptional leadership skills for fundraising projects for one or more not-for-profit organizations.
- The General Manager noted that L. Ryan received the award for her extensive volunteerism and establishment of the Pink Days In Bloom initiative, through which over \$180,000 has been raised in support of the Canadian Cancer Society and Daffodil Place. Between May, 2018 and November, 2020 alone, the initiative has provided sponsorship of 232 nights accommodations at Daffodil Place for cancer patients and their companions in Newfoundland and Labrador who must travel across the province to St. John's for cancer treatments.
- Members congratulated L. Ryan on receiving this prestigious honour. In accepting the philanthropy award, L. Ryan expressed that she did so on behalf of everyone who has been part of the Pink Days In Bloom initiative in any way and thanked the General Manager and members of the Commission for their continued support of the initiative since its beginning in 2011.
- The Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) is an international association that strives to stimulate a world of generosity and positive social good through fundraising best practices.

### **2. The Caring Spirit Award**

- In light of the testimonials shared by customers and members of the general public about Metrobus employees who demonstrate exemplary thoughtfulness on the job, the Commission, in partnership with long-term employee L. Ryan, established "The Caring Spirit Award" in 2018.
- The goal of the award is to foster kindness, consideration and generosity of spirit and inspire others. For employees who receive this recognition, a monetary donation is made in their honour to the Canadian Cancer Society--Newfoundland and Labrador Division (CCS-NL).

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### **2. The Caring Spirit Award (Continued)**

- The General Manager noted that for the past three (3) consecutive years, since the award was first established, L. Ryan and her husband have pledged \$200 each year for the award fund and the Commission has matched this amount, growing the contribution to \$400 annually.
- L. Ryan noted that this year, the monies were presented during Daffodil Place's VOCCM Radiothon on November 19, 2020 for its "One Night Stand Against Cancer Campaign", and the provincial government matched donations up to \$50,000.
- Members congratulated L. Ryan also on this initiative in support of CCS-NL.

### **V. ADJOURNMENT**

- There being no further regular business to discuss at this time, the meeting adjourned at approximately 12:35 PM.
- Live streaming of the public meeting ended immediately followed by an in-camera business meeting of the Commission.
- The next regular business meeting of the Commission will be held at the Metrobus Transit Centre, 25 Messenger Drive on Thursday, December 17, 2020 commencing at Noon.

Respectfully submitted,

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Paul Walsh  
Acting Chair

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Linda Ryan  
Administrative Assistant