



**Meeting of the St. John's Transportation Commission**  
**Wednesday, January 26, 2021 12:30pm**  
**Via WebEx**

**REGULAR BUSINESS**

In attendance:

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Paul Walsh       | Chair                                     |
| Ian Froude       | Vice-Chair/City Councillor                |
| Kirsten Morry    | Commissioner                              |
| Tolulope Akerele | Commissioner                              |
| Ron Ellsworth    | Commissioner/City Councillor              |
| Lynn Zurel       | Commissioner                              |
| Maggie Burton    | Commissioner/City Councillor              |
| Derek Coffey     | Deputy City Manager, Financial Management |
| Kevin Breen      | City Manager                              |
| Judy Powell      | Metrobus General Manager                  |
| Joan Mahon       | Administrative Assistant                  |
| Donna Power      | Accessible Transit Services Manager       |

**I. PROCEDURAL**

The Chair called the meeting to order at 12:35 PM. Donna Power recorded the minutes of the meeting.

The Chair requested a private meeting of Commission immediately following the regular meeting.

**II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES**

**AGENDA:**

An addition was made by Commissioner Zurel to the New Business portion of the agenda - #6. Agenda/Meeting Content

An addition was made by the General Manager to the New Business portion of the agenda - #7. Bus Shelter at the Convention Centre

An addition was made by Commissioner Akerele to the Other portion of the agenda - #1. Municipal Transit Policy

An amendment was requested by Vice-Chair Froude to the Business Arising portion of the agenda to defer items 4, 5, 7 and 8 to the next meeting pending provision of background material in writing in advance of the discussions.

**MOTION:** To approve the agenda with the above noted amendments.

Moved by Commissioner Burton; seconded by Commissioner Akerele. Motion carried.

#### **MINUTES:**

Commissioner Zurel noted 2 revisions to the Minutes of the December 16, 2021 Regular meeting as follows:

1. Under Executive Summary - 2<sup>nd</sup> bullet, the 4<sup>th</sup> sentence should change from:

She would like to see them continue as she sees value in the assessment process but at an increased pace.

to:

She would like to see **the assessments** continue as she sees value in the assessment process but at an increased pace

2. Under Paratransit Tender - 14<sup>th</sup> bullet, the 2<sup>nd</sup> sentence should change from:

We would need to research electronic buses.

to:

We would need to research **electric** buses.

**MOTION:** To approve the minutes with the above noted revision.

Moved by Commissioner Zurel; seconded by Vice-Chair Froude. Motion carried.

### **III. BUSINESS ARISING**

#### **1. COVID-19 – Update**

The General Manager informed that with the move to Alert Level 3 on December 23, 2022 a capacity limit of 19 passengers was implemented. On January 3, 2022, Metrobus moved to a reduced service schedule. Ridership for January is at approximately 53% of normal ridership. On January 31, 2022, full service will resume in response to MUN's return to in-class learning. The ZIP Network will also be launched on January 31, 2022.

Several staff have been impacted by Covid. Service levels and staffing levels will continue to be monitored.

Commissioner Ellsworth noted that GoBus is also being impacted by Covid and both MVT and Newfound have measures in place to keep staff and customers safe.

## **2. On-Demand Software Update**

The General Manager noted that work is ongoing with the software provider to resolve outstanding issues. A spreadsheet of issues has been created with assigned priority levels. VIA (software provider) has been very responsive and are working through prioritized issues. Commissioner Ellsworth commends Mark (Manager of Marketing and Information Services) for his work to develop a tool to address problems with the taxi manifest. He also thanks Donna (Manager of Accessible Transit Services) and Judy (General Manager), acknowledging the added workload from weekly and bi-weekly meetings required to address issues. He expresses feeling confident that when service ramps up again GoBus will be in a much better position.

## **3. Assessments – Telus Health Care Centre**

The General Manager noted that she, as well as the Manager of Accessible Transit Services, have followed up with Telus to relay concerns about the low volume of assessments being completed. Telus has advised that staff challenges are being addressed – a new person is being hired to focus on scheduling existing customers for assessment. By the end of February, an increase in the number of completed assessments is expected.

Vice-Chair Froude inquired if anything has been put in writing to confirm the timeline for completion of assessments for existing customers. He suggested that a minimum commitment each month should be required to ensure the work is completed.

**ACTION:** The General Manager will follow up with Telus staff to convey the expectation and request a timeline for completion.

## **4. Update New Shelters**

Deferred to next meeting.

## **5. Days/Hours of Operation – Paratransit**

Deferred to next meeting.

## **6. Tender – GoBus Fleet**

The General Manager informed that the Tender for paratransit replacement vehicles closed January 20, 2022. Five bids were received from 4 manufacturers. Some clarification is required from the low bidder. When a recommendation is ready, an e-

poll will be circulated to the Commission requesting approval of the award pending a decision today on the number of buses to be ordered.

An inquiry was made regarding the maintenance and status of the current fleet and whether it would be possible to extend the life of 3 - 4 buses. In March, the full fleet will go through an inspection that will provide a better idea of their current state. Right now, the service provider (MVT) feels they could last another year, though with risk.

The recommendation is to purchase 18 buses and work toward adding electric vehicles to further supplement the fleet. This would allow time to determine what's available and what would be most suitable.

Vice-Chair Froude referenced a previous conversation where the idea of utilizing smaller, less costly vehicles for ambulatory customers was discussed. The General Manager responded that this will still be considered along with other fleet options, but with the lag time to receive vehicles, it is important to order buses now.

Commissioner Burton inquired about the number of trips that are multi-passenger trips and noted that a diverse fleet of vehicles makes sense to meet demand.

Commissioner Ellsworth noted:

- demand will continue to increase;
- providing smaller vehicles may not work for the service provider – this would have implications for the upcoming RFP;
- with the current 18 buses there are still 200 trips a day being sent to taxis;
- the idea of moving dispatching in-house may offer some cost-savings; and
- a broader discussion may be needed on what paratransit looks like in St. John's.

**MOTION:** To move ahead with the purchase of 18 buses and direct staff to bring forward a plan to purchase 2 electric vehicles within the next 2.5 years to be added to the GoBus fleet.

Moved by Commissioner Ellsworth; Seconded by Commissioner Burton.

Discussion on the motion:

- No need to wait 2 plus years for electric cars
- Need time to evaluate software impacts, usability and demand
- Electrification plan expected to be finalized this year which will give a better sense of what's needed
- Need more effort to encourage GoBus customers to use conventional transit which is more cost effective and offers more freedom to riders
- Purchasing fewer buses would translate to extra reliance on taxis

- Need to have eligibility assessments completed to verify everyone using GoBus needs to be using GoBus

**AMENDED MOTION:** To move ahead with the purchase of 18 and direct staff to bring forward a plan and complete the purchase of 2 electric vehicles within 24 -36 months to be added to the GoBus fleet.

Vote on Motion:

In favour - 5; Opposed - 2. Motion carried. Dissenting votes by Vice-Chair Froude and Commissioner Burton.

On Monday, February 7, 2022 the recommendation was received to award the Tender for 18 Paratransit Vehicles to Western Canada Bus. The total project cost is \$2,587,479.30 with the City's cost being \$457,252.23.

Votes were cast by email. Votes in favour: 6

Recommendation approved.

#### **7. Sign – Shelter Opposite Gathering Place**

Deferred to next meeting.

#### **8. Bus Stop – Allandale Road**

Deferred to next meeting.

#### **9. Geothermal System – Legal Update**

The update from the Legal department will move to the In Camera agenda.

The General Manager informed that work is progressing to complete repairs. The contractor identified that the amount of glycol ordered was insufficient. The cost to purchase the additional amount of glycol is \$80,000, which was unbudgeted but essential to the repairs.

(Commissioner Zurel left the meeting at 1:40pm)

### **IV. NEW BUSINESS**

#### **1. Executive Summary (Regular) – December, 2021**

Vice-Chair Froude noted that he is pleased to see decreased trip length and increased passengers per hour for paratransit.

## 2. Financial Statements – December, 2021

Commissioner Akerele asked for clarification on the difference between actual and budgeted amounts for the low-income pass revenue rather than it being a fixed amount. The General Manager notes that it is a fixed amount but it is apportioned to its use (GoBus/Mount Pearl routes/Paradise routes).

The General Manager identified new costs for 2022 that were not budgeted:

- \$80,000 for repairs to the geothermal system
- the move to a new radio tower will incur some cost (awaiting final estimate)
- diesel was budgeted at \$1.19 per litre for 2022 while the actual cost is currently \$1.42/l and expected to rise. If it stays at the current rate this will result in an overrun of \$415,000.

Vice-Chair Froude inquired about the amount of surplus from 2021 that was prepaid on debt. The General Manager noted that amount was approximately \$275,000.

## 3. Community Bus Replacement – Application for Funding

The General Manager commented that Council is supportive of continuing the Community Bus service and of purchasing a new vehicle. The funding application (through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program) requires a Minute of Commission approving the project. The intention is to investigate and purchase an electric vehicle.

**MOTION:** To purchase a replacement bus for the Community Bus service.

Moved by Commissioner Ellsworth; seconded by Vice-Chair Froude. Motion carried.

## 4. Radio System

The General Manager informed that the CBC radio tower will be decommissioned on July 11, 2022. Staff are working with the owner of an alternate tower in Shea Heights to identify what work needs to be done and to get a cost estimate. This information will be brought forward when it is available.

## 5. Parts Tender

The General Manager noted that the Tender closed last week but was subsequently cancelled and reissued. The results will be brought to the Commission for approval (via e-poll or at next meeting) when a recommendation is finalized.

## 6. Agenda/Meeting Content

Deferred to next meeting.

## 7. Bus Shelter at the Convention Centre

The General Manager identified ongoing safety concerns with the current bus shelter in the Convention Centre. Maintenance of the shelter is presently the responsibility of the Convention Centre since the shelter is built in and not free-standing. The General Manager received notice from the interim CEO that they will cease doing maintenance on the shelter this summer. It is preferable to close the existing shelter and establish a free-standing shelter. There would be costs associated with this project that are currently not in the budget.

Commissioners inquired about the proposed use for the space if the shelter is removed, if work on this shelter would impact existing plans to install shelters in other prioritized areas, and whether there is a contractual obligation for the Convention Centre to continue maintenance. Additionally, there was concern with spending money that has not been budgeted.

**ACTION:** The General Manager and City Manager will follow up with the CEO of the Convention Centre and bring forward more information to the next Commission meeting.

## V. OTHER

### 1. Municipal Transit Policy

Commissioner Akerele inquired if there is a municipal transit policy for St. John's that outlines goals and objectives, and that provides guidance for the Commission and staff.

Commissioner Burton identified that the City has a Transportation Plan and that transit is a feature within guiding documents such as the Envision St. John's Municipal Plan. Vice-Chair Froude also noted an upcoming Community Climate Action Plan which highlights active transportation as a component of climate change.

## VI. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further regular business to discuss at this time, the meeting adjourned at approximately 2:10 pm.

The next regular business meeting of the Commission will be held via Webex at 12:00pm on February 24, 2022.