



MEETING OF THE ST. JOHN'S TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

REGULAR BUSINESS

A meeting of the St. John's Transportation Commission was held on Thursday, November 25th, 2021 at approximately 12:00 PM at the Metrobus Transit Centre, 25 Messenger Drive.

Present at the meeting were:

Paul Walsh	Chair
Ian Froude	Vice-Chair/City Councillor
Kirsten Morry	Commissioner
Lynn Zurel	Commissioner
Tolulope Akerele	Commissioner
Sheilagh O'Leary	Commissioner/Deputy Mayor
Maggie Burton	Commissioner/City Councillor
Kevin Breen	City Manager
Derek Coffey	Deputy City Manager, Financial Management
Judy Powell	Metrobus General Manager
Joan Mahon	Administrative Assistant

I. PROCEDURAL

- The Chair called the meeting to order at 12:05 pm.
- J. Mahon recorded the minutes of the meeting of this date.

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA/MINUTES

➤ AGENDA

Chair Walsh added to Business Arising – Update of Radio System and the Annual Years of Service Awards. The General Manager added to New Business – Geothermal System – Maintenance with Commissioner Burton adding Bus Stops. It was moved by Commissioner Zurel and seconded by Commissioner O'Leary that the amended agenda for this meeting date be approved.

➤ MINUTES

It was moved by Commissioner Akerele and seconded by Commissioner Morry that the minutes of the October 28th, 2021 regular business meeting of the Commission be approved with the following amendments:

Terms of Commissioners

➤ For the benefit of the new commissioners the General Manager explained that a commissioner is appointed for a two-year term and can be renewed for an additional two years. Chair Walsh and Commissioner Morry are at the end of their second term. As the Chair does not have a specified term until the Commission decides to change the Chair, Commissioner Morry's term is up at the end of December, 2021. Appointments are usually timed to stagger the replacements for continuity purposes which, in this case, most of the current Commission have been on the board for a year or less. Commissioner Morry and Chair Walsh are agreeable to stay on the Commission for an additional year.

ACTION: It was moved by Commissioner Burton and seconded by Commissioner O'Leary that Commissioner Morry's term would be extended to December 31, 2022.

It was moved by D. Coffey and seconded by Commissioner Burton that Commissioner Froude would be appointed Vice-Chair. Both actions were carried unanimously.

Amendment:

Terms of Commissioners

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II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA/MINUTES cont'd

replacements for continuity purposes which, in this case, most of the current Commission have been on the board for a year or less. Commissioner Morry and Chair Walsh are agreeable to stay on the Commission for an additional year.

ACTION: It was moved by Commissioner Burton and seconded by Commissioner O'Leary and carried unanimously that Commissioner Morry's term would be extended to December 31, 2022. **Chair Walsh and Commissioner Morry abstained from voting.**

It was moved by D. Coffey and seconded by Commissioner Burton that Commissioner Froude would be appointed Vice-Chair. Both actions were carried unanimously.

LED Lighting Tender

➤ A memo was circulated in response to the tender for LED lighting supplies. As the lowest bidder did not meet the specifications, we are recommending awarding the tender to McLoughlan Supplies Limited.

ACTION: It was moved by D. Coffey and seconded by Commissioner Zurel and carried unanimously that the LED Lighting Tender be awarded to McLoughlan Supplies Limited.

Amendment:

➤ A memo was circulated in response to the tender for LED lighting supplies. As the lowest bidder did not meet the specifications, we are recommending awarding the tender to McLoughlan Supplies Limited **which was the second lowest bidder and did meet the specifications.**

ACTION: It was moved by D. Coffey and seconded by Commissioner Zurel and carried unanimously that the LED Lighting Tender be awarded to McLoughlan Supplies Limited.

III. BUSINESS ARISING

1. COVID-19 - Update

➤ The General Manager reported that ridership for Metrobus is 75% - 80% of pre-pandemic levels. We anticipate that levels will increase once Memorial University returns to in-person classes in January, 2022.

➤ Commissioner Zurel inquired as to the percentage of employees that are vaccinated. Our Human Resources Department reported that we have approximately 85% of employees vaccinated and they are following up with the remainder of employees.

➤ Vice-Chair Froude questioned if the ATU Union is backing the requirement for vaccines. The General Manager responded that the Union does officially on a national level but there have been some questions with regards to mandatory vaccines. The Union is reviewing what their stand is on policies that state termination, which is what the City's policy stipulates will happen after 90 days.

2. On-Demand Software Update

➤ The new software was launched on November 7, 2021 for GoBus and there have been some expected issues. Even though there was communication and education with current clients leading up to the launch, there have been a lot of questions and concerns. One of the biggest complaints was that clients had been experiencing long wait times on the telephones even though MVT had added extra staff to answer the calls. Parameters are in place to try to balance the efficiency of the software. One of the adjustments made to the software is the "negotiation window" – the timing was adjusted from one hour to 30 minutes. It was explained by the General Manager that the 30-minute negotiation window comes into play when you are booking your ride. If the time requested is not available, the software will negotiate another time that is available within 30 minutes either way of the preferred time. Prior to us changing it to 30 minutes, it was set at one hour on either side of the requested time. This will continue to be monitored. There were training issues with employees but our IT staff discovered that their drivers

2. On-Demand Software Update cont'd

were not logging in properly and/or inadvertently logging themselves out of their new tablets when they were enroute. These issues have been addressed. After speaking to the trainer and meeting with drivers, they were quite pleased with updates that were provided. If we find these tablets are not working properly, they can be switched out.

- To explain further, the General Manager clarified that there are two windows – the “negotiation window”, as explained above, and the “pick-up window”. The pick-up window is when you have a ride booked, which is confirmed, there is a 30-minute window around the requested time that the client can be picked up. If the app is used for the booking, the client will get notification stating that “Your bus is 15 minutes away”... “Your bus is 5 minutes away”... “Your bus is here”. We are promoting the app because of the communication features.
- Another issue we are encountering is trying to determine the amount of time to leave available for “will calls” to be accommodated. A “will call” is a client that has an appointment and is not certain of the return time. Some adjustments are required. Commissioner O’Leary has received many calls and emails with regards to booking appointments but not being able to book a return trip. It was explained that when a client books a ride for an appointment it is noted that they will call for their return booking but it is not put into the system until the call is actually received. From the customer’s perspective, they cannot see the booked ride until they actually call. This is an issue as time has to be left open for these return calls. It will be adjusted as we go to maximize efficiencies on the bus.
- We assigned our work term student, Omar Hamze, to be the contact person when a customer is having issues with the app i.e. how to download the app and/or also how to use it. Omar is working on producing a video to share online for clients and with organizations.
- Commissioner Burton questioned as to what has been put in place to make the transition easier for current clients. The General Manager responded that in order to facilitate the change over to the new system we provided a lot of education through the disability organization as well as leading up to the launch. Information was placed on the buses, emails were sent to current clients (if we had their contact information), and the dispatchers/schedulers at MVT were discussing the new software with clients calling in. All of the same options are available to book a ride – by phone, online portal, and the app. Customers haven’t lost the ability to book by phone but we are encouraging clients to use the app.
- Commissioner Akerele inquired if text messaging could be used with clients that are not technically savvy with Chair Walsh commenting that this makes sense.

D.Coffey and K. Breen arrived.

- Vice-Chair Froude noted that clients are having issues with their inability to make a subscription booking.
- It was opined by Commissioner Zurel that it appears that clients of GoBus are adjusting to the change in the new on-demand software. It is not unlike calling for a taxi. She is delighted to see that we are already seeing a reduction in issues. We are doing a good job in making it work – well done everyone!
- Commissioner Burton requested the opportunity to go on a ride with GoBus. She would like to follow the process from beginning to end.

ACTION: D. Power, Manager, Accessible Transit Services, will contact Commissioner Burton to set up an account.

3. Terms of Commissioners

- Since the last commission meeting on October 28th, 2021, we received a response from City Council that Chair Walsh and Commissioner Morry’s term has been extended for one year expiring December 31, 2022.
- Upon looking through the letters that were sent to Commissioners Zurel and Akerele it was stated that they were accepted as commissioners for a two-year term ending December 31, 2023. This was an error; the two-year term ends December 31st, 2022 at which time they may be appointed for an additional two years. A letter correcting this error will be sent to Commissioners Akerele and Zurel from the City of St. John’s.

4. Committee Membership

- Considering that we now have new members on the Commission, the General Manager will share the current list of members on each committee to verify if they wish to stay on and also to fill any current voids. It was noted that the Marketing Committee has two new members, Vice-Chair Froude and Commissioner Morry.
- Vice-Chair Froude stated that Councillor Ron Ellsworth is interested in joining the Paratransit Working Group which is a sub-body of the Commission. It was noted that there has never been a Councillor on the Paratransit Working Group and it will be verified if there are by-laws regarding membership.
- Commissioner Burton stated that in a previous commission meeting she brought forth the idea of implementing a Youth Focus Committee with the idea of increasing youth ridership. Transit is a topic that was prevalent within all Youth Engagement Action Team meetings held with members from the ages of (13) thirteen to (35) thirty-five. She would like this topic brought forth for the next Commission meeting.
- Commissioner O'Leary is in agreement with this idea as it is important to grow membership. We are talking about the future and there is no better way to do that than to look at the younger users.
- Commissioner Akerele questioned creating working groups to develop initiatives to welcome immigrants to the City to integrate them into the Metrobus systems.

ACTION: The General Manger will check with D. Power, Manager, Accessible Transit Services with regards to the details on membership of the Paratransit Working Group.

5. Update – Radio System

- Our consultant, Norm Cook, is currently looking for the possibility of a replacement tower. The initial replacement tower that was identified is no longer an option. It is going to be expensive to move to a new tower which is not budgeted in 2022. The “push to talk” option is still the one feature that Bell cannot provide. This enables the drivers to push an emergency button to open the airways so Dispatch can hear, if there is an issue. To make the system more viable, we have to be prepared to move to a new tower for backup.

6. Years of Service Awards

- The Years of Service Awards luncheon was a success. The employees are very appreciative of the recognition they receive.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

1. Executive Summary – October, 2021

- The October Executive Summary was tabled for members' information.
- Commissioner Zurel questioned the “Out of Area” trips for GoBus. The General Manager explained that this category is for customers from other areas of the province that are in the City of St. John's or Mount Pearl temporarily and require accessible transportation.
- She also questioned the number of cancellations and with the new on-demand software the number should reduce, which is the expectation. Currently, if someone cancels a trip, the spot will be filled.
- It was noted that there are 16 (sixteen) intersections in the city that have transit priority traffic lights with one queue jump at Stamps Lane and Freshwater Road.

2. Financial Statements – October, 2021

- It was noted that ridership numbers are tracking upward – down about 23% from 2019. The General Manager noted that compared to many cities in Canada, we are high in terms of rebounding. This month we are trending about 80%. This information is obtained from weekly CUTA (Canadian Urban Transit Association) web calls.
- Vice-Chair Froude questioned the Transit Advertising Revenue and how that has been for past couple of years. The General Manager commented that it has been challenging with the Covid-19 pandemic and marketing almost shut down but it appears to be picking up again this fall. Last month's sales were over budget with this month being under budget. There has been a lot of challenges with new advertising options.

3. Geothermal System - Maintenance

- Metrobus is looking at an unexpected, significant expenditure that is estimated to be between \$130,000 - \$150,000. When Metrobus was constructed, the Geothermal System was in place and commissioned. There was information that was not provided for maintenance of the system and some information was given incorrectly. An investigation was started earlier this year because we were experiencing leaks. Testing was done on the glycol and it was discovered that the wrong glycol and ratio of mix has been used since the beginning and it has caused damage. The system requires flushing and needs to be cleaned. The glycol will cost approximately \$95,000 to be replaced and the remainder of the cost will be for flushing and re-commissioning. This needs to happen sooner rather than later as there is a risk of freezing with winter approaching.
- The tender process will be bypassed. There are three local suppliers of glycol with two of them purchasing it from the third company – Chem-Aqua. Air-Tite Sheet Metal has our current maintenance contract and they will be doing the work.

ACTION:

- The commissioners agreed to go ahead with the project.
- K. Breen suggested that this item should be referred to the Legal Department at the City of St. John's.

4. Bus Stops

- Commissioner Burton inquired as to how a bus stop location is determined. She has received a request to have the bus stop by the A.C. Hunter Public Library on Allandale Road to be moved closer to the cross walk and wondered what the policy is. The General Manager explained the Parameters surrounding locating a bus stop in the city.

ACTION: The General Manager requested the information from Commissioner Burton and will have the Transit Planner look at the bus stop in question.

IV. OTHER

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VI. ADJOURNMENT

- There being no further regular business to discuss at this time, the meeting adjourned at approximately 1:03 pm.
- The next regular business meeting of the Commission will be held at Metrobus, 25 Messenger Drive at **Noon on December 16th, 2021.**

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Walsh
Chair

Joan Mahon
Recording Secretary