From: Zach Fleisher
Sent: Tuesday, July 4, 2023 5:25 PM
To: Poitras, Andrew >
Subject: EPC Handi-Transit Deputation

Good morning to the members of EPC,

I wish I had the opportunity to speak with you in person or virtually on this important issue. Unfortunately, I am quite limited in the activities I can take on as I recover from a traumatic moving vehicle accident in early May.

First, the issue of biases: I was previously quite involved in this file on a number of fronts. Firstly, I worked with many activists in the disability community on this crucial file. At the forefront of the issue was the question of equity; why were people living with disabilities afforded transit that was not of the same quality and reliability as the "regular" transit system? It confounded me to be honest.

Then, as a union organizer with the ATU, I orchestrated the first union drive for Handi-Transit drivers. The stories I heard quite frankly were shocking and I would be ashamed as a Winnipger to hear them. Consider this:

Workers were not paid overtime rates.

They often were not provided breaks. Have any of you actually seen a handi-transit schedule? It's mystifying.

They often were engaged in questionable owner-operator schemes where they were actively paying for the right to drive the vehicle, with no supporting paperwork.

Workers were scheduled at the whim of the owner, and workers who questioned their conditions could lose their livelihood with the flick of a pen.

Consider that workers had to follow all of the policies of Winnipeg Transit, but somehow were not employees.

When it came time for the union election, these workers were subjected to horrendous fear-mongering from the employers, who claimed they would lose their job as workers would no longer earn overtime hours because they couldn't afford to pay them the regular overtime rates. Anyone who looks at our overtime hours for Winnipeg Transit should see the irony there.

Despite this, the workers voted to unionize. I left any and all professional affiliations with the ATU after this and have not worked on this file since this time, nor any paid work for any transit-related campaigns since that time. I can't tell you what has happened since then.

What I do see is owners promising that they will do better. They see the pressure. And I see the regular rhetoric that this will cost more. But the question of cost is an interesting one.

Imagine you relied on Transit Plus. Would you want a quality service that your provider could answer for, or would you be happier with the lowest-cost service? And keep in mind that this lower-cost service comes as the overall costs of the service come in.

What is being proposed is not radical; rather, it gives us the opportunity to contrast the public and private delivery of the system. We could propose a system to look at customer and driver satisfaction of the public versus private. Why would we be afraid of it? Are we worried about having to properly provide services to all residents of Winnipeg?

I also ask: Have you actually ever spoken to any workers at Transit Plus? Or are we taking the word of the owners as without bias in these conversations?

I thank you for your time in consideration of this.

Further reading: https://policyfix.ca/2019/04/17/it-is-time-to-stop-contracting-transit-plus-out/

Zach Fleisher