Minutes – Executive Policy Committee – October 16, 2024

Report – Standing Policy Committee on Public Works – October 2, 2024

Item No. 2 Winnipeg Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (Winnipeg WAV) Pilot Project Update

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Executive Policy Committee concurred in the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works and submitted the following to Council:

1. That the Winnipeg Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (Winnipeg WAV) "Improvements to Accessible On-Demand Transportation Service" pilot project be approved and made a permanent program beginning January 1, 2025, and be administered through the Vehicle for Hire (VFH) division.

2. That the expenditure of Accessibility Surcharge funds be authorized up to the amount required for a third-party contract related to the contract for dispatch services and to fund the associated On-Demand Accessible Transportation Incentive Program (ATIP) and its administration.

3. That authority be delegated to the Designated Employee (Manager of VFH) for the administration of the Winnipeg WAV program, as was originally approved by Council on April 29, 2021, as outlined in Appendix 1.

4. That the temporary 1.0 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) approved in 2024 for a Winnipeg WAV analyst/support position be made permanent in the VFH division beginning in 2025, funded through the Accessibility Surcharge fund.

5. That the Accessibility Surcharge fee schedule and collection guidelines be amended as per Appendix 2, effective January 1, 2025.

6. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

Report – Standing Policy Committee on Public Works – October 2, 2024

DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

Moved by Councillor Lukes,

That the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works be concurred in and forwarded to Council.

Carried

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On October 2, 2024, the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service and submitted the matter to the Executive Policy Committee and Council.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Title: Winnipeg Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (Winnipeg WAV) Pilot Project Update

Critical Path: Standing Policy Committee on Public Works – Executive Policy Committee – Council

AUTHORIZATION

Author	Department Head	CFO	CAO
R. Topolniski	J. Berezowsky	T. Graham	S. Armbruster, Interim CAO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update and analysis on the Winnipeg Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (Winnipeg WAV) pilot project (Improvements in On-Demand Accessible Transportation) which launched in May 2022 and will end on December 31, 2024.

The report highlights the Winnipeg WAV pilot project results, including the increases in passenger trips, with significant growth year over year during the pilot project, investments in the accessible drivers and accessible vehicle owners who provide this valuable service to the accessible community through the accessible transportation incentive program (ATIP) as well as the partnership with Vehicle for Hire's (VFH) centralized services dispatcher – local taxi company Duffy's Taxi.

The Winnipeg WAV pilot project has grown since its launch in May 2022, with passengers quickly learning that they would now be able to obtain an accessible on-demand vehicle consistently, throughout all hours of the day, and within a reasonable wait time, where more than 90% of the time, passengers are picked up early or within 20 minutes of their desired time. The service providers also quickly recognized that the incentives rewarded customer service, and over 94% of the time have received either a score of 4 or 5 stars. Overall, the Winnipeg WAV pilot project should be considered very successful.

It also serves to recommend to Council that, based on the overall results of the program, it should be implemented on a permanent basis beginning in 2025, with a few minor changes.

The Winnipeg WAV program expenses are all funded through the Accessibility Surcharge fund, which has a mandate to improve service and work towards equitability

for accessible passengers and to invest in the accessible on-demand transportation service providers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Council approve the Winnipeg Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (Winnipeg WAV) “Improvements to Accessible On-Demand Transportation Service” pilot project and make it a permanent program beginning January 1, 2025, and be administered through the Vehicle for Hire (VFH) division.
2. That Council authorize the expenditure of Accessibility Surcharge funds up to the amount required for a third-party contract related to the contract for dispatch services and to fund the associated On-Demand Accessible Transportation Incentive Program (ATIP) and its administration.

3. That authority be delegated to the Designated Employee (Manager of VFH) for the administration of the Winnipeg WAV program, as was originally approved by Council on April 29, 2021, as outlined in Appendix 1.

4. That Council make the temporary 1.0 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) approved in 2024 for a Winnipeg WAV analyst/support position permanent in the VFH division beginning in 2025, funded through the Accessibility Surcharge fund.

5. That Council amend the Accessibility Surcharge fee schedule and collection guidelines as per Appendix 2, effective January 1, 2025.

6. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

REASON FOR THE REPORT

The pilot project approved by Council is set to expire at the conclusion of December 31, 2024, and this report seeks approval to make the Winnipeg WAV pilot project a permanent service beginning January 1, 2025, for the City of Winnipeg, and be administered through VFH division.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Winnipeg WAV pilot project will become a permanent program, administered by the VFH division, which will include a centralized accessible on-demand dispatch system and an ATIP for driver and vehicle owners on the system. This will be funded through the Accessibility surcharge collected by the VFH division.

HISTORY/DISCUSSION

Recognizing that transportation is a right, and in response to the feedback that VFH consistently heard regarding the lack of consistent and reliable on-demand accessible transportation, the Winnipeg WAV pilot project was developed to improve on-demand wheelchair accessible transportation in Winnipeg.

Prior to the City becoming the regulator of the VFH industry, there was a significant shortage of accessible vans available to provide on-demand service. The major taxi companies had very few of them, and the remaining 65 (of a total of 70) were spread amongst a number of smaller service providers. These smaller providers often spent much of their efforts servicing the contracts that existed to provide accessible service for medical and school transport, and so there was minimal capacity for on-demand accessible service needs. There were also a number of handi-vans licenced under the Taxicab Board, however those became personal transportation providers (PTP) under the City by-law. These accessible PTPs also provided a majority of their service on contract, and were not available for on-demand requests.
In December 2018, the City issued 60 new accessible taxi licences through the second lottery process. This immediately increased the capacity to 130 licences (an 85% increase over the existing accessible fleet) and brought the overall taxi fleet to have 22% accessible vehicles.

This increased capacity allowed the City to shift focus to ways to support accessible transportation by simplifying access, supporting accessible vehicle owners and accessible drivers, and ensuring that any program could be sustainable for accessible passengers.

After receiving approval from Council to create a pilot project for the Winnipeg WAV, VFH issued a Request For Proposals (RFP) in summer 2021. In January 2022, the project contract for dispatching services was awarded to a joint bid proposal from Duffy's Taxi and Unicity Taxi. The VFH project team worked closely with Duffy's Taxi (who is the main dispatcher in the project) and iCabbi, who is the software/dispatch system provider, to meet the RFP specifications and have the dispatch system customized so that it would fit the expected parameters and be in a position to be implemented. While the software customization was occurring, the VFH project team worked to inform the accessible vehicle owners and drivers about the system, get them signed up, then train them (in collaboration with Duffy's).

Prior to launching, a number of initiatives were undertaken, including the VFH office partnering with the Independent Living Resource Centre (ILRC), on providing a targeted refresher training course to the drivers regarding proper securement of a wheelchair. This training was paid for as an incentive to drivers through the Winnipeg WAV project. One-page information sheets and information cards were created so that users would be able to easily get information on the Winnipeg WAV, as well as the City being able to distribute these through its stakeholder network and partners. Additional marketing included radio spots, newsprint ads in local community newspapers and the Winnipeg

Free Press, as well as a video explaining the service, which can be seen on the Winnipeg WAV website. Outreach through our stakeholder network also occurred, including having brochures and information available at the James Richardson International Airport, speaking opportunities through Transportation Options Network for Seniors (TONS) lunch and learn sessions, providing information to the ILRC, Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) for their transportation, hospital and personal care homes network, as well as working with other groups to spread the word.

On May 11, 2022, the Winnipeg WAV officially launched and the centralized dispatch system for on-demand accessible transportation service in Winnipeg became a reality.

While there were a number of challenges initially, these have been worked through by VFH and Duffy's Taxi in ongoing discussions and in receiving feedback from drivers, vehicle owners and passengers. There were a number of growing pains during 2022 related to the project, specifically in ensuring that enough accessible vehicles signed onto the dispatch app throughout the day in order to meet the varying levels of demand for service. As the two proponents of the system, Duffy's and Unicity have worked to instill the need in their drivers to be available to provide the service. Duffy's has consistently been supportive of the Winnipeg WAV program and has strongly reinforced this amongst their fleet. While not totally widespread through their fleet, there has been more engagement from Unicity Taxi in this area. Significant attention was paid to this area, and in working with the WAV dispatcher, a plan was devised to have accessible vans assigned to certain areas of the City and to ensure that vehicles were available both day and night.

Further, a number of the drivers and accessible vehicles from the smaller taxi companies are signed up and providing service on Winnipeg WAV. Through the program, they have access to technology that may have been unaffordable for a small operator, giving them smart meter tablets and mapping, as well as providing them with a regular ability to accept trips that they might not have had an opportunity to obtain in the past. Because of this, these drivers are now able to earn a more consistent and increased income.

Growth of the Winnipeg Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAV)

From the launch of the Winnipeg WAV in May 2022 to the end of 2022, there were 2,565 trips provided. As the community became more familiar with the program and began to feel some confidence that the level and reliability of service had improved, the numbers of trips began to climb in late 2022. Additionally, in November, Winnipeg Transit Plus (WTP), through its partnership with VFH and their own pilot project, began to use the Winnipeg WAV system for some of their overflow trips. This wasn't without its own challenges as the types of service (on-demand taxi service vs pre-booked accessible public transportation) and service levels do differ. Continued engagement between VFH, WTP and the WAV dispatcher has been ongoing and has helped in identifying the issues, and working towards solutions that can help improve them.

During 2023, the Winnipeg WAV continued to see steadily improving and increasing trip numbers. By the end of 2023, the Winnipeg WAV had completed 13,213 trips, averaging over 1,100/month. This was a total increase of 415% over the 8 months of 2022. Throughout 2023, WTP made up approximately 20% of the overall Winnipeg WAV trips. To the end of June 2024, Winnipeg WAV had completed 11,013 trips, with a projection of close to 20,000 for the full year.

Figure 1, below, shows the rise in trips from the launch of the Winnipeg WAV in May 2022 through June 2024.

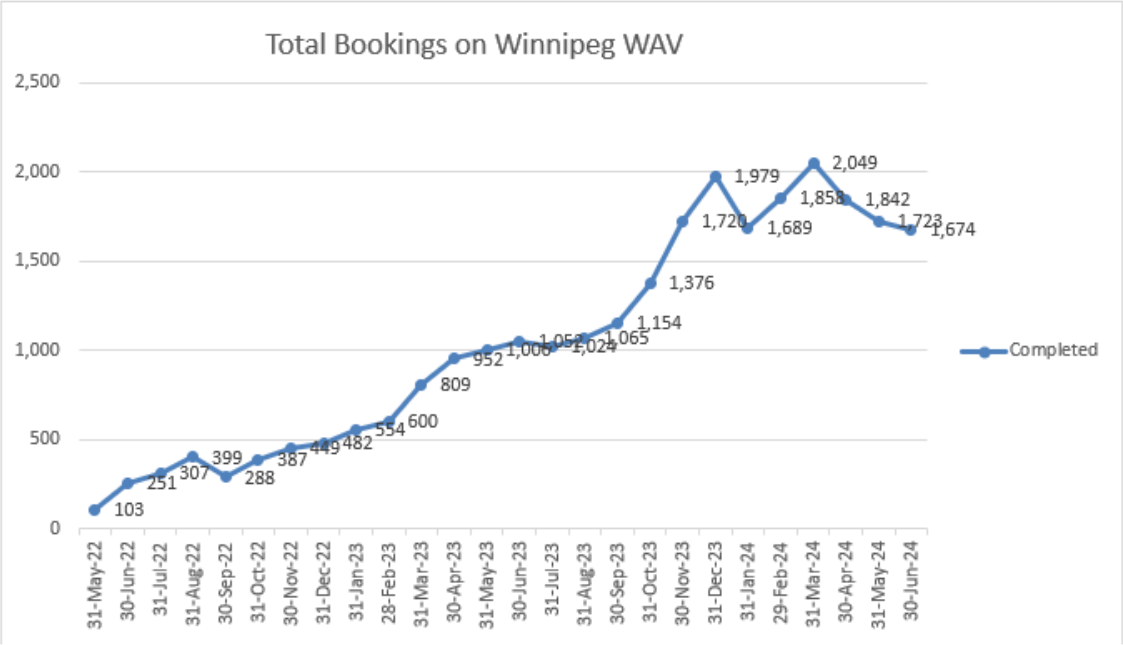

Figure 1

One of the biggest complaints that VFH heard in its consultations, both prior to becoming the regulator for the industry in 2018 and afterwards, was that the accessible community faced an inability to obtain an on-demand accessible ride on a reliable and consistent basis, and within a reasonable wait time. Prior to the launch of Winnipeg WAV, dispatchers were unable to report to VFH with any accuracy what their wait times were for accessible trips, when they could even accommodate them. However, based on the information that had been provided by the accessible stakeholders who spoke up during consultations, VFH could ascertain that wait times were regularly in the 90 minutes to 2 hours timeframe. This was unacceptable, as users of standard vehicles would consistently see wait times in the 15-20-minute timeframe.

VFH set a reduction in wait times as one of its major goals of the pilot project, and consistently discussed this and worked with Duffy's and Unicity Taxi on achieving this target. Immediate gains were made in this area simply through the creation of a centralized dispatch network, which allowed users a single access point (telephone, app or website) to obtain a trip from a variety of service providers, a focused approach to delivering accessible service, and ongoing monitoring of the data related to this. In late

2022, as more trips began to be provided through Winnipeg WAV, VFH began to see these efforts paying dividends and wait times reducing.

Figure 2 demonstrates the overall percentage of Winnipeg WAV trips each year where drivers were able to pick the passenger up with no more than a 20-minute wait time.

% of Trips with No more than 20 Minutes Wait	
2022	83.30%
2023	90.80%
2024	93.40%

Figure 2

During 2023, nearly 96% of passengers had a wait time no more than 30 minutes, and this increased to 97.4% during 2024.

The trips, reduction in wait times, and the high passenger feedback scores have been achieved with approximately 60% of the licenced taxi fleet being signed up for the Winnipeg WAV program, with about 66% of those who are signed up actively picking up passengers, providing service and qualifying for incentives. There is an opportunity for even more trips to be provided in the future as the demand increases.

Considering the numbers of accessible trips provided previously, especially before the launch of Winnipeg WAV, this is considered a success based on the fact that community members requiring accessible service are able generally more likely to obtain on-demand transportation service, and increasingly see this as a reliable transportation method. Winnipeg WAV has become an integral service for the accessible community, that has improved their ability to move around the City. The improvements and overall growth of the Winnipeg WAV is a testament to the efforts of our dispatcher partners, the accessible drivers providing the service and the partnership and communication that exists between VFH and the industry.

Winnipeg Transit Plus (WTP) Overflow Trip Pilot Project

In 2022, WTP began a pilot project of their own to partner with VFH and use the capacity available for accessible vehicles on the Winnipeg WAV to handle some of their unaccommodated trip requests.

WTP was provided with “business solution” access to the Winnipeg WAV dispatch system, which allowed them to update their trips directly, and have them be dispatched out to available accessible vehicles. Initially, there were a number of challenges faced in the delivery of the WTP service, most specifically the differences that customers were accustomed to between WTP service and taxi service, the biggest of which is offering specialized accessible transportation including door-to-door service vs on-demand taxi service being curb-to-curb. Further, while the overall capacity of the Winnipeg WAV program was building, at the outset, the wait times normally expected by WTP weren’t on target.

However, after further discussions between VFH and WTP, as well as participation by WTP in the on-going meetings held with VFH and our dispatch partners, as the numbers of vehicles and drivers on the Winnipeg WAV increased, wait times began to improve, and the consistency by which passengers were picked up steadily got better. These began to better align with the expectations that WTP had when they initiated their portion of the pilot project.

While testing out the business solution portal, and getting the pilot project up and running in 2022, WTP placed 17 trips on the Winnipeg WAV. This increased to 2,611 in 2023, which made up approximately 20% of the overall Winnipeg WAV trips during the year. To the end of June 2024, WWAV accommodated 2,537 trips from Transit Plus, or 23% of the overall Winnipeg WAV completed trips.

Winnipeg Transit Plus paid meter rate fares to the drivers who provided these trips, and VFH provided incentives in addition to these fares. This furthered the investment that was being made in the VFH industry accessible drivers and accessible vehicle owners. These service providers saw the benefits of the partnership with WTP providing additional earning opportunities to them, and improved on their responsiveness to providing the service to the passengers, many of whom also use the on-demand option of Winnipeg WAV as a complement to their WTP trips.

At the end of June 2024, WTP launched its new software system, developed by Spare Labs, which has allowed WTP to better route plan and use its existing capacity in a more efficient and effective manner. This new software, as well as a corresponding seasonal drop in trip requests, meant WTP didn't use Winnipeg WAV at all during July and August 2024.

Access to their business solution portal remains, and Winnipeg WAV capacity exists in which WTP can continue to partner with Winnipeg WAV to provide overflow trip coverage if needed as WTP reviews and analyzes their new system.

Winnipeg Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAV) Customer Feedback

The number of drivers wanting to sign up to participate in the Winnipeg WAV has increased, as have the number of users continued to grow, and generally user satisfaction has been relatively strong overall.

There are a number of ways for the Winnipeg WAV users to provide feedback to the VFH office and Duffy's. Users are able to provide feedback directly through the app if they booked their trip that way. For those who have called the dispatch number (204-986-4WAV), a sample size of passengers is called back by Duffy's each month so that we can obtain some feedback regarding their trip. As well, there is an opportunity for VFH to receive feedback through either 311 or a dedicated email address that is monitored by VFH staff (winnipegwav@winnipeg.ca).

The feedback has been important to VFH, as it's been a barometer of the feelings of the accessible community users and their opinions related to the level and reliability of

service, the level of skill and customer service provided by drivers and the dispatch and booking service.
The consistent feedback has provided valuable information that has afforded VFH Enforcement the ability to follow up when needed and at times re-educate drivers on their responsibilities, as well as allowing VFH to adjust and tweak the Winnipeg WAV program to better respond to the needs of customers.

While higher participation numbers amongst service providers is possible, the program is considered to be running as it was envisioned, and accessible users are generally receiving service during times of the day and in areas of the City that they may not have prior to its launch. As more accessible vehicles and accessible drivers participate regularly, it only serves to continue to improve the capacity and overall level of service. VFH continues to work with Duffy's and discuss with stakeholders on how this could be achieved.

Overwhelmingly, users and passengers have been happy with the service received when they are picked up. The results from the feedback that has been received over the past two years has continually improved and has seen the majority of ratings being 4 or 5 on a scale of 5, with many positive comments received.

Over the course of the pilot project, VFH has tracked this feedback as an important metric of the feelings of the passengers, as well as the quality of the service that is being provided by the drivers and the impact of having a single access point for customers to book trips through.

Through the various methods, VFH has accumulated 4,683 customer feedback ratings since the launch of the Winnipeg WAV in May 2022, to the end of July 2024. During this time, there have been 27,825 trips provided, with 16.8% of the overall trips having been rated. Statistically, this provides validity to the ratings. Customer feedback has rated 94.1% of the trips at a 4 or 5-star rating.

Customer Feedback Ratings by Year

	1	2	3	4	5	Total Rated Trips	Total Trips	% Trips Rated
2022	9	6	22	96	135	268	2565	10.4%
2023	36	17	111	1238	1691	3093	13213	23.4%
2024	40	10	24	86	1162	1322	12047	11.0%
Totals	85	33	157	1420	2,988	4,683	27,825	16.8%
	1.8 %	0.7 %	3.4 %	30.3 %	63.8 %	100%		

Figure 3

In addition to the ratings that are received, customers also provide feedback and comments on occasion. Passengers consistently comment on the difference the Winnipeg WAV has made in their quality of life, ability to get around, and how this program has made Winnipeg a more inclusive city.

Enforcement and Enhanced Training

In order to ensure that Winnipeg WAV accessible vans are safe, roadworthy, and both the vehicle and accessible safety equipment is always maintained, VFH Enforcement developed an inspection program specifically targeted at accessible vehicles. The main purpose is to enhance passenger safety, but also to confirm the vehicle owner incentives that are tied to successful accessible vehicle inspections. In order to maintain participation in the Winnipeg WAV pilot project an accessible vehicle must be inspected by a VFH Officer quarterly. In 2022, there was an overall 74 percent pass rate for accessible vehicles and in 2023, this rate climbed to 86%. Until the end of June 2024, with two inspection periods completed, there has been a YTD 76% pass rate. However, the second set of targeted inspections saw increasing pass rates, and this is expected to continue into Q3 and Q4. This quarterly inspection process is in addition to the regular daily patrol checks VFH officers conduct.

As for complaints concerning the Winnipeg WAV pilot project, VFH Enforcement received two formal complaints in 2022, with enforcement action taken in both cases. Throughout 2023, VFH Enforcement received five complaints with regards to the Winnipeg WAV pilot project. With the increase in trips provided in 2024, this number has gone up to 10 complaints. A majority of these complaints is the failure of drivers to prioritize service and provide passenger pickups within a reasonable wait time. In these instances, penalty notices have been issued by VFH Enforcement to reinforce the requirement to prioritize accessible trips.

In addition to these initiatives, VFH Enforcement also conducts random accessible vehicle trip audits through the dispatch system to confirm compliance with fare rates, routing and to ensure drivers are prioritizing accessible passengers and picking customers up in a timely manner.

One of the incentives offered to drivers who participate in the Winnipeg WAV is an enhanced accessible wheelchair securement seminar. This is paid for through the program, and is about an hour in length, with drivers required to take this course every two years to maintain their Winnipeg WAV registration. This training is in addition to the mandatory accessibility training that all drivers take on a three-year cycle. This enhanced training was developed in partnership with the ILRC who also delivers the training to drivers. Providing this additional training to drivers who are focussed on wheelchair service not only enhances their skillset, but also is another method that Winnipeg WAV attempts to improve passenger safety.

Accessible Transportation Incentive Program (ATIP) - Vehicle Owner & Driver Incentives

In addition to the centralized dispatch system, the Winnipeg WAV pilot project has provided financial incentives to accessible drivers and accessible vehicle owners who provide accessible service through the Winnipeg WAV. The incentives are meant to encourage improved customer service and the expanded availability of vehicles and drivers, as well as helping to address the additional costs associated with purchasing and operating an accessible vehicle.

These incentives have directly led to the improved availability of the accessible vehicles and drivers, as can be credited with the overall increase in the level of service that the accessible community has seen. Accessible drivers have consistently been prioritizing accessible trips, when this was not the case in the past.

From the inception of the Winnipeg WAV to end of December 2022, drivers earned a total of $61,150 in incentives (which includes trip incentives as well as enhanced accessible training), and vehicle owners received $92,400 in incentives. During 2023, drivers who qualified earned $84,200 in incentives related to customer service and trip metrics, as well as an additional $97,835 in per trip incentives, for a total payout directly to drivers of $182,035. These incentives are paid in addition to the fares paid by the passengers (or in the case of WTP trips, by WTP to the driver). During 2023, accessible vehicle owners received $52,037 in incentive payments. In the first two quarters of 2024, accessible drivers earned $48,900 in incentives, as well as $112,120 in per trip incentives. Vehicle incentives are paid out on a yearly basis.

Throughout the course of the Winnipeg WAV pilot project, from its launch in May 2022 to June 2024, drivers have earned an additional $404,205 in incentive earnings. This is in addition to the fares they earned by delivering the service. Additionally, many of these drivers also own the vehicles they are driving, and vehicle owners have been paid $144,437 to the end of 2023.

After analyzing the data from 2022 and into Q1 2023, and through discussions with the Winnipeg WAV contractor (who also provided the perspective from service providers themselves) the ATIP program was adjusted and the driver and vehicle incentive categories were simplified, while still maintaining a focus on rewarding service delivery. In addition to the existing incentives, a per-trip incentive was added, where drivers could earn a top-up on the regular fare of $10/trip between 5am and 10pm and $25/trip for trips originating between 10pm to 5am. These incentives made an instant impact to the program, and saw the availability of drivers and vehicles increase, and correlated to a reduction in cancelled trips as well as improvements in wait times. They made providing accessible service more attractive to drivers.

Of note, the entire Winnipeg WAV centralized dispatch system and the ATIP program for the pilot project are funded through the Accessibility Surcharge, with no cost to taxpayers or the VFH operating budget. This has been sustainable throughout the pilot

project, but adjustments to the Accessibility surcharge are needed to ensure that this program remains sustainable and can support the ongoing growth of accessible service demands, and continue to pay the incentives to accessible drivers and accessible vehicle owners.

Most importantly, the incentives are paid directly to the accessible vehicle owners and the accessible drivers, which increases their incomes and reduces their operating costs, and should be seen as a social enterprise and an investment in small-business owners within Winnipeg.

Other Jurisdictions

While Winnipeg wasn't the first jurisdiction to introduce a centralized dispatch program and an ATIP, it is one of only a few Cities to have implemented this type of system. Winnipeg joined only Calgary as the other Canadian city, as well as New York and Chicago as other major cities in North America to have some form of an accessible centralized dispatch system. Winnipeg is on the cutting edge in delivering on-demand accessible service, and providing opportunities for integration with Winnipeg Transit to best service its accessible community.

Further, with the success of Winnipeg WAV, VFH has been contacted and consulted a number of times by other Cities and jurisdictions across North America regarding what we have done, how it has worked, and the opportunities and challenges Winnipeg has seen. This includes presenting on the Winnipeg WAV at the International Association of Transportation Regulators (IATR) annual conference in Scottsdale, Arizona in September 2023. Some of the locations who have consulted with and looked to Winnipeg's system include: Regina, Saskatoon, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Seattle/King County, the District of Columbia, as well as ongoing discussions and collaboration with Calgary.

A number of these cities have implemented an accessible surcharge on their trips, which Winnipeg was one of the first cities to do, and started this practice in 2018. In order to ensure the sustainability of the program, and to fund the incentives, many Cities are using a combination of both tax dollars and accessible surcharge funds.

Cross-jurisdictionally, Chicago and Seattle both levy $0.10/trip accessible surcharges on their trips, and while Calgary charges $0.10/trip as well, their administration has delegated authority to adjust the accessible surcharge up to $0.30/trip in order to collect more funds for the program.

Winnipeg continues to be on the forefront and a leader in providing on-demand accessible transportation.

Recommendations and the Future of the Winnipeg WAV

Originally, the plan was to have the Winnipeg WAV operate as a pilot project for approximately two years. However, due to some delays in being launched, the original approval from Council would have expired at the end of 2023. In December 2023, Council approved an extension of the Winnipeg WAV pilot project though with a report back in 2024 on next steps. This extension allowed for a second full year of operation, and to allow for a fulsome review and analysis of the

data, adjustments and tweaks that have been made, as well as to see the efforts of our dispatch partner, the taxi companies in Winnipeg and especially the accessible vehicle owners and drivers.

Given the impact to the industry and the accessibility and the overall success that has been seen over the Winnipeg WAV pilot project since it's launch in May 2022 until now, it is recommended that Council approve the Winnipeg WAV pilot project as a permanent program, administered by the VFH division, with authority over the program delegated to the Designated Employee (the Manager of VFH).

The current 1 FTE approved on a temporary basis for 2024 would be made permanent, with the positions main focus being on the day-to-day administration of the Winnipeg WAV, VFH's relationship with our dispatch contractor, data review and analysis and working with stakeholders. The position would be funded through the accessibility surcharge.

The cost of partnering with third-party dispatcher, providing the ongoing investment through the ATIP, funding a position to administer the day-to-day operations, strengthening the relationships with stakeholders, continuing the ongoing data mining, reviewing and analyzing the program is estimated to be $800,000 per year. It is predicted that the expenses related to this program would be relatively consistent on a year-to-year basis. The entire program will continue to be funded through the Accessibility Surcharge fund.

In order to provide clarity to the way VFH charges and collects the Accessibility surcharge, the public service is recommending the following changes to the VFH fees and charges schedule:

In all cases, any reference to ensuring a minimum of 10% of a fleet are accessible vehicles providing accessible service on a regular basis would be removed, and the accessibility surcharge would apply to all trips provided in each category (both standard and accessible). A new fee schedule is in Appendix 2, and are summarized here, to be effective January 1, 2025.

- Personal Transportation Providers (non-PTP Limo category, standard and accessible trips):
    - $0.10/trip – an increase of $0.03/trip

- Personal Transportation Providers (PTP Limo category):
    - $0.07/trip – no change

- Taxi (both standard and accessible trips):
    - $0.03/trip – a decrease of $0.04/trip, but now applied across the board.

By moving to this proposed model, it will streamline the calculation and collection of the accessibility surcharge. It will also spread the estimated cost of the program out to have all

users of the VFH network contribute, while still recognizing the efforts of those who have accessible vehicles and drivers (and of which investments are being made).

As mentioned, this does remove a qualifier (or exemption) to pay the accessibility charge when a company could demonstrate that at least 10% of their overall fleet were accessible vehicles, that were regularly providing accessible service each month. To count towards this exemption, the dispatcher had to demonstrate that an accessible vehicle provided multiple trips on at least one day per week in the month, was occupied on those days by a driver qualified to provide accessible transportation services, and was available on those days for dispatch to individuals who required accessible transportation services. This created significant administration work for the dispatchers and for VFH. In removing this exemption, and simply applying a smaller amount across all trips within the category, this reduces administration on both sides, provides additional clarity on the calculation on a regular basis. Further, these costs were originally included in adjustments to fares back in 2018, and are meant to be passed along to passengers as a flow-through.

These proposed changes provide for an increased opportunity for this program to remain sustainable for the long-term, maintaining the centralized dispatch and the current ATIP program. The VFH division analysis shows that, based on conservative estimates, the expenses could possibly begin to be more than accessibility charges takes in approximately five years from now (2030) and would require review of the charges by then, if not before. When looking across jurisdictions, Winnipeg would remain with some of the lowest charges.

Further initiatives, such as including a conversion payout for taxi licence holders looking to update or convert their vehicles to accessible vehicles, would require additional investments and may require additional funding through adjustments to the accessibility surcharge in the future. These types of industry investments are being reviewed and considered as the Winnipeg WAV program expands.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Financial Impact Statement **Date:** August 27, 2024

Project Name: **First Year of Program** **2025**

Winnipeg Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (Winnipeg WAV) Pilot Project

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Capital					
Capital Expenditures Required	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Less: Existing Budgeted Costs	-	-	-	-	-
Additional Capital Budget Required	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Funding Sources:					
Debt - Internal	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Debt - External	-	-	-	-	-
Grants (Enter Description Here)	-	-	-	-	-
Reserves, Equity, Surplus	-	-	-	-	-
Other - Enter Description Here	-	-	-	-	-
Total Funding	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Additional Capital Budget Required	$ -				
Total Additional Debt Required	$ -				
Current Expenditures/Revenues					
Direct Costs	$ 800,000	$ 800,000	$ 800,000	$ 800,000	$ 800,000
Less: Surcharge Revenue/Deferred Revenue	800,000	800,000	800,000	800,000	800,000
Net Cost/(Benefit)	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Less: Existing Budget Amounts	-	-	-	-	-
Net Budget Adjustment Required	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -

Additional Comments: Direct costs above represent maximum authorized to be spent to run and administer Winnipeg WAV program each year, which includes cost of the dispatch system, incentives and one permanent FTE to oversee the program. These costs are covered by accessibility surcharge that starting January 1, 2025 will added to each trip (vs. only some trips currently) as outlined in Appendix 2. As of July 31, 2024 there was a balance of $989,762.39 in accessibility surcharge. If costs to run this program become more than accessibility surcharge takes in, the fee structure will be reviewed and adjusted appropriately before this happens to allow for the continuation of the program.

Lioubov Gavrilova-Crozier, Aug 27, 2024

Lioubov Gavrilova-Crozier, CPA, CA
Manager of Finance, Winnipeg Parking Authority

CONSULTATION

This Report has been prepared in consultation with:

- Winnipeg Transit Plus

OURWINNIPEG POLICY ALIGNMENT

Goal: Leadership and Good Governance
Objective #1 – Establish and implement priority actions through evidence-informed decision-making processes.
Objective #2 - Promote trust and government responsiveness through meaningful, inclusive and informed community engagement
Policy 1.5 – Evidence-Informed Decisions
Policy 1.7 – Equitable Service Access

Goal: Economic Prosperity
Objective #3 – Address poverty as an unacceptable and costly outcome of systemic barriers, through collaboration with the community and government bodies.
Policy 3.12 – Poverty Reduction

Goal: Social Equity
Objective #2 - Build bridges spanning ideas, cultures, identities and generations on a foundation of truth, understanding, and rights-based reconciliation.
Policy 5.4 – Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples
Policy 5.5 – Indigenous Lens
Policy 5.6 - Equitable Service Access

WINNIPEG CLIMATE ACTION PLAN ALIGNMENT

Consideration was given as to whether this report connects to the Winnipeg Climate Action Plan (CAP), and it was determined that the CAP is not applicable to this specific report.

WINNIPEG POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

Goal 5 -Transportation System Equity is Enhanced
Goal 6 – All City Services are Equitable, Inclusive and Accessible

SUBMITTED BY

Department: Public Works
Division: Winnipeg Parking Authority
Prepared by: Grant Heather
Date: September 4, 2024
File No: WPA-013-2024

Attachments:
Appendix 1: Winnipeg WAV: On-demand Accessible Transportation Improvements Framework

Appendix 2: Updated VFH Fees Schedule (effective January 1, 2025)