Winnipeg WAV (Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles):

Improving On-Demand Accessible Service Framework

Vehicles for Hire – Accessibility Surcharge

Since the Vehicles for Hire (VFH) By-law came into effect in 2018 to regulate for hire on-demand transportation services within Winnipeg, an accessibility surcharge of $0.07 per trip has been charged to both personal transportation provider dispatchers and to taxi dispatchers to encourage a minimum ratio of accessible vehicles within the fleets of service providers.

In December 2017, when Council approved the VFH By-law, they directed that revenues collected by the City of Winnipeg from this surcharge were intended to be used to make improvements to the level of accessible service provided by vehicles for hire and that the Public Service should bring forward plans to expend these funds in order to improve service. Approval from Council is required in order for the VFH division to expend these funds.

This On-Demand Accessible Service Framework is being proposed as a pilot project to address improvements to accessible on-demand service, in line with the needs of both citizens and the industry, as well as the direction of Council at the time that the VFH by-law was passed.

What have we heard are the issues?

Over the past several years, through consultation with stakeholders (accessible service users, accessible advocacy groups, transportation service providers and others connected to and reliant on the vehicle for hire industry), the Public Service has consistently heard the following:

1) Wait times for an accessible trip are longer than a standard trip;
2) The availability of accessible vehicles is not always as consistent as it for standard vehicles;
3) Accessible rides take more time to complete than standard trips;
4) Accessible vehicles cost more than standard vehicles.

While wait times are not specifically tracked, the Public Service has consistently heard from users based on their experience, as well as receiving complaints on the fact that wait times for accessible vehicles are not consistent with that of standard vehicles. There are expectations that citizens requiring an accessible vehicle should wait no longer for service than a customer requiring a standard vehicle. Due to a variety of factors, these are often not comparable.

An area that needs improvement in regards to accessible on-demand service is that vehicles are not always available on-demand. This is to say that at certain times of the day (generally later evening/early morning) vehicles may not be available to provide transportation service, unless they are pre-booked. This is obviously an issue when a citizen or visitor to Winnipeg needs transportation service at specific times.

Drivers have told the VFH office that completing a trip involving a mobility device may take longer to board and off-board a passenger, ensuring they provide the passenger assistance in order to properly secure the passenger and then assisting them out of the vehicle and to the curb at their preferred drop-

off location. Drivers of accessible vehicles have indicated that they feel that this additional time that it takes impacts their ability to provide trips and may reduce their ability to earn additional income.

There is no specific type of vehicle that is required to be used as a standard taxi. This means that the holder of a standard taxi licence may choose any type of car. However, holders of accessible taxi licences are required to have a van in order to have it converted to accommodate mobility devices. While this vehicle is generally more expensive than a car, there is also the additional expense related to the conversion of these vehicles. In general, the conversion cost adds an additional $20,000-$30,000 to the cost of a taxi. As well, they also generally cost more to operate than a standard vehicle.

What Steps have been taken to address these concerns?

There have been steps taken already by the City of Winnipeg to address the concerns that have been identified and brought to our attention. In December 2018, 60 new accessible taxi licences were issued. These have been on the road and available for service since early 2019, increasing the capacity of the market to 22% of the total taxi fleet being accessible. This has made more vehicles available to users resulting in an increase to availability of vehicles.

As well, through recommendations made to Council, there have been new fines or expanded fines that have been put in place in order to ensure and reinforce compliance with the By-law as it relates to providing accessible service and for ensuring the safety of passengers. A few examples include: VFH Enforcement officers are able to enforce wheelchair securement compliance, on-going inspections related to accessible vehicle safety equipment and administrative enforcement of driver training requirements.

The Public Service undertook a review and analysis of what issues other jurisdictions may be facing regarding accessible on-demand service, as well as what has been done by them, and what opportunities may exist to address these concerns and continue to improve the service. As well, stakeholder consultations occurred in fall 2020, including with the VFH industry, accessible service users and accessibility advocacy groups. The summary from those public engagement sessions is attached as appendix A. The industry is aware of this proposed program to improve on-demand accessible service and has been given an opportunity to provide input and feedback. Given the interest in exploring options to improve this service, a number of goals have been determined.

Throughout the initial stages of this project, and during the analysis phase, VFH worked closely with Transit Plus. Many discussions have occurred, including reviewing the Transit Plus dispatching and booking system, looking for opportunities and identifying drawbacks. Continued engagement with Transit Plus as this project progresses will be instrumental in the overall improvement of accessible transportation service in Winnipeg.

What are the goals of this program?

In using the accessible surcharge to improve on-demand accessible service, there are some specific goals that have been identified:

- Ensure a comparable level of service for those who use accessible or standard vehicles for hire;
- Improve safety of passengers;
- Provide incentives to drivers and owners of accessible vehicles;
- Improved tracking of accessible trips and wait times, in order to continue to reduce wait times.

Overall, this program is aimed at incentivizing accessible taxi owners and drivers to ensure they prioritize this service, and improve the level of service that is provided, as well as providing a single access point for users to request on-demand vehicle for hire service.

In order to address the issues that have been identified to the Public Service, and to work towards the stated goals of improving access, capacity and safety of on-demand accessible transportation service, there are a number of items that are being recommended to be implemented.

With the improved tracking and reporting, this would continue to build the datasets regarding vehicles for hire and would assist in building on the open data platform already in place by the City, and in working towards continuing to build Winnipeg as being a Smart City. This will lead to better data driven decision-making regarding accessible on-demand service in the future, and in the Public Service finding opportunities and ways to continue to improve the overall program.

What plans are being recommended for implementation?

The Public Service is recommending that three specific items be implemented in order to improve the accessible on-demand vehicle for hire service and to improve its capacity and availability, while also incentivizing drivers and vehicle owners. The main piece of the framework centers around implementation of a centralized accessible trip dispatch system. The Public Service is recommending this be known as the Winnipeg WAV (WPGWAV).

The recommended plans are:

1) A centralized accessible trip dispatch system;
2) Focused enforcement related to accessible service to improve education and ensure safety;
3) Reimbursement for accessibility training.

A centralized accessible trip dispatch system

- Provide a universal access point where users can request via telephone, website or App, a wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV) – either accessible taxi or accessible personal transportation provider
- Register user requests, as received, in a systematic database, and allocates the trip to the nearest available WAV
- Allows for storage of customer profile and information to ensure easy access to current and historical booking information to assist customer service and provide a better customer experience
- Shows the vehicles that are signed on to provide service
- Through GPS, tracks the trip, from the time of request, duration and mapping of the route taken, to drop off location and payment
- Provides reporting to the VFH division on active and available vehicles, including the number of trips completed or declined, time of trips and other reporting data as required by VFH.
- Based on defined service levels and availability, would be able to provide financial incentives to the vehicle owners and drivers.

How would this meet the goals?

Goal: Ensures those requiring accessible vehicles for hire get a comparable level of service as those who use standard vehicles for hire

- Provides an available WAV on demand;
- Should reduce wait times for accessible service due to co-ordinated dispatching;
- Use of technology will allow for continued engagement by industry users and their ability to provide on-going feedback on the service that is provided;
- Provides option for service provider type – Taxi or PTP.

Goal: Improved safety

- Trained and qualified drivers – all drivers within the system are required to complete accessibility training and this would be verified by VFH;
- Increased confidence – knowing that the most direct, or economical route was taken and tracked for reference or auditing processes.

Goal: Improved tracking of trips and wait times

- Trip dispatch system tracks the trip, from the time of request, duration of the route taken, to drop off location and payment;
- System would allocate trip request to nearest available WAV, allow user to receive an email or text when vehicle is near, and record client trip history.

Goal: Provide incentives to drivers and accessible vehicle owners

- Potential financial incentives for both taxi and PTP drivers and vehicle owners;
- Use of technology will allow for continued engagement by industry users and their ability to provide on-going feedback on the service that is provided and have service providers compensated for this;
- Reduced down time by allocating fares and allowing drivers to accepting fares nearest to them;
- System technology support:
    - Mapping/Route tools to know the quickest route for the trip destination;
    - Innovative dispatch software, including soft meter technology;
    - Record of trip history and shift summary.

<u>Focused enforcement related to accessible service</u>

- Increased capacity for accessible vehicle and trip enforcement

How would this meet the goals?

Goal: Improve safety

- Provide expanded capacity to increase driver and vehicle inspections;
- Improved education that can be provide by the VFH enforcement officers to drivers;
- Expanded and new fines for non-compliance and safety infractions.

<u>Reimbursement for accessibility training</u>

- Consideration to provide accessibility training and refresher training at no cost to accessible vehicle drivers

How would this meet the goals?
Goal: Provide incentives to accessible vehicle drivers

- Reduce out of pocket driver expenses, thereby saving them money;
- Ensure that all drivers providing service are trained in compliance with the By-law.

The Public Service is committed to providing a safe, sustainable and customer focused on-demand for hire transportation industry. Accessible on-demand service enhances the mobility and reduces social isolation for those with disabilities in Winnipeg. Further, the taxi, limousine and PTP industry serves to facilitate and drive the City's economic development, while furthering the use of environmentally friendly modes of transportation by enabling personal travel through an integrated network that does not require purchasing a vehicle. Supporting a pilot that uses innovative technology to deliver an on-demand accessible taxi centralized dispatch service also aligns with the City's goals to stimulate the technology sector in Winnipeg and to take an innovative, stakeholder driven solution to improving service levels and customer experience.

How are these recommended plans going to be implemented?

In order to implement the options described above to improve on-demand vehicle for hire service in Winnipeg, the Public Service recommends that be done as a 3-year pilot project, beginning in 2021. The length of time required for this is based on the fact that 2021 will require significant administrative work to issue a request for proposal (RFP) to review plans and proponents for a third-party dispatcher and to launch the program. Using a third-party vendor to act as a dispatcher would enable the City to test the system's effectiveness in improving on-demand wheelchair accessible taxi service at a lower cost than what would be required to incorporate the dispatching into the Winnipeg Transit Plus existing dispatch system, while still leveraging the Public Service's experience and oversight in design/specification of an RFP and ensuring oversight from the City. At the conclusion of the pilot, the City would evaluate whether a third-party vendor would continue to offer the most feasible and cost-effective approach to continuing such a service over the long term.

After the initial startup year, the project would then be in place to run for at least 2 full years in order to ensure that the proper promotion of the program can be communicated to the industry and to accessible service users, to allow for the full implementation of the system and industry changes to be rolled out and trickle through the community and to provide sufficient time to ensure proper uptake occurs.

As well, this timeline would allow for data collection for an extended period of time to occur, in order to ensure comparability and analysis, as well as building datasets that can assist in future data-driven decision making and building on innovative ideas in order to further improve the program and service.

Continued monitoring of the data and the program over the timeframe would provide an ongoing opportunity for stakeholder engagement as well as evaluation and analysis by the VFH office.

Holders of an Accessible Taxi Vehicle licence, or those PTPs that meet the VFH accessible vehicle specifications, and accessible drivers affiliated with a current accessible taxi vehicle or an accessible PTP, and are licenced to operate in the city of Winnipeg, become eligible to qualify for the annual program. All accessible vehicles in the program must be affiliated with a licenced dispatch company. The amount of the annual incentive that is received is based on the holder of an accessible taxi vehicle licence and accessible driver successfully meeting qualifying criteria. Holders of a Standard Taxi Vehicle licence,

standard PTPs, or drivers who do not provide accessible service in an accessible vehicle are not eligible to qualify for receiving an annual incentive through the program.

Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities required under the Program are set out below.

The *Manager of Vehicles for Hire* is responsible for the following:

- setting the requirements for eligibility in the program, both initially and throughout the program, including any prorating of incentives or qualifying criteria;
- oversight, and general administration and direction of the program;
- the criteria for a participant receiving any incentive or grant;
- the amount and frequency of the disbursement of any incentive or grant;
- any sanctions, including disincentives or reductions in the amount of any incentive or grant, for non-compliance with the conditions of the program;
- any reporting or auditing requirements with respect to the program;
- the process for making changes to the program and the methods used to publish and inform the industry and public of any changes;
- confirming that all participants in the program have met the licencing requirements of the City and all drivers possess the required and appropriate training;
- on-going enforcement of the VFH industry, including those specific to this program;
- reviewing and evaluating the data required to determine whether vehicle owners and accessible drivers met the criteria to qualify for annual incentives; and
- any additional requirements that are needed to administer the program.

Licenced Taxi and PTP dispatchers are responsible for:

- ensuring compliance with any reporting requirements, as determined by the VFH office with respect to the program;
- reporting of trips completed by vehicles under their dispatch; and
- remitting any per-trip fees to the City.

Accessible Vehicle owners are responsible for:

- ensure they maintain all licencing requirements for their vehicle;
- ensuring that they maintain their vehicle in accordance with the all vehicle safety requirements, including *The Highway Traffic Act, The Driver's and Vehicle Act*, the Vehicle for Hire By-law, Federal D409 requirements, and any other relevant legislation;
- reviewing the On-Demand Accessible Service program framework; and
- ensure their vehicle is available for accessible service in accordance the program.

Accessible Drivers are responsible for:

- ensure they maintain all licencing requirements in order to drive in the VFH industry;
- provide confirmation to the VFH that they hold the appropriate training, as required under the By-law to provide accessible service;
- ensuring that they work with the vehicle owner to maintain the vehicle they provide service in, in accordance with the all vehicle safety requirements, including *The Highway Traffic Act, The Driver's and Vehicle*, the Vehicle for Hire By-law, Federal D409 requirements, and any other relevant legislation;

- ensure they prioritize accessible trips; and
- reviewing the On-Demand Accessible Service program framework.

The successful *RFP dispatch contractor* is responsible for the following:
- Accepting requests for on-demand accessible transportation service;
- Meeting requirements of RFP;
- Ensuring equity and diversity in their staffing;
- Having representation and input from the accessible community;
- Providing required reporting to the City regularly and on an as-needed basis;
- Meeting all current and on-going technology needs; and
- Providing training to the vehicle owners and drivers.

Project Schedule

The contract for the pilot project was originally issued for a 2-year period, with up to 2 additional extensions. The first extension was used to continue the pilot project in 2024, with the second extension expected to be applied for 2025, should Council approve the Winnipeg WAV to become a permanent service delivered through the VFH division.

On-Demand Accessible Service Program Incentives

Qualifying Criteria and Incentives for Drivers

Effective June 1, 2023	**Evaluation Process**	**Frequency**	**Value**
Incentive for Active WAV Program Drivers (Note 1)			
1. Accessible training refresher course (Note 2)	ILRC	Every 2 Years	$50
2. Yearly Sign-up Bonus (Note 3)	WAV Data	Yearly	$300
3. Annual Number of Trips (Note 4):	WAV Data	Yearly	Up to $1400
• Between 20-50 trips ($200 max)			
• Between 51-100 trips ($400 max)			
• Between 101-150 trips ($600 max)			
• Between 151-200 trips ($800 max)			
• Between 201-250 trips ($1000 max)			
• Between 251-300 trips ($1200 max)			
• Over 300 trips ($1400 max)			
4. Overnight (Note 5)	WAV Data	Yearly	$500
Total Yearly Driver Incentives Available			**Up to $2,250**
Qualifying Criteria Per Trip Incentive (Note 6)			
a) Accept and complete a wheelchair accessible trip through the WAV platform during the daytime (between the hours of 5am – 9:59pm)	WAV Data	Monthly	$10 per trip

b) Accept and complete a wheelchair accessible trip through the WAV platform during the nighttime (between the hours of 10pm – 4:59am)	WAV Data	Monthly	$25 per trip
TOTAL Driver per trip Incentives			**Variable***

Note 1: Drivers must have a minimum of 20 trips per year to qualify for Active Driver status and be eligible for any of the incentive listed in the driver category. Incentives are based on annual number of trips, unless otherwise noted. Drivers may qualify for a single incentive, or any combination thereof once they are considered active.
Note 2: Drivers are required to maintain up-to-date accessible training. This is required to remain licenced and is due every 2 years.
Note 3: Drivers who sign-up for the program and provide the qualifying number of trips would receive up to $300 per year incentive.
Note 4: The annual trip incentive is not cumulative and once a driver qualifies at the level, that is the maximum amount they will be paid.
Note 5: Drivers must be scheduled by the WAV dispatcher for a minimum of 30 overnight shifts or provide a minimum of 20 overnight trips per year in order to qualify for the overnight shift premium. Overnight shift hours are considered to be from **10PM to 4:59AM** for the purposes of this project. In order to have been considered to work this shift, a driver would have to be signed on for a majority of the hours in the timeframe.
Note 6: In addition to the yearly driver incentives WAV drivers may receive per trip incentives, subject to successfully meeting the qualifying criteria. The trip premium will be paid monthly upon driver qualification. Once a driver meets the qualification criteria, trips completed prior to qualification date will be paid retroactively.
*There is no limit on the number of wheelchair accessible trips an accessible driver may complete on the WAV platform. Additionally, an accessible vehicle taxi licence holder may have more than one driver operating the licensed accessible vehicle.

Qualifying Criteria for Accessible Vehicle Owners

Effective June 1, 2023	**Evaluation Process**	**Frequency**	**Value**
Incentives for All Accessible Vehicle Owners			
1. Initial Sign-Up Bonus	WAV Data	One Time	$300
Incentive for Active Vehicles (Note 1)			
2. Yearly Sign-up Bonus	WAV Data	Yearly	$200
3. Trips taken on a minimum 120 days per year available (average 10 per month)	WAV Data	Yearly	$1000
4. Overnight shift premium (Note 2)	WAV Data	Yearly	$500
5. Inspection rate of 100% on critical items (D409, securement, ramps) (Note 3)	VFH Enforcement	Yearly	$500
Total Vehicle Incentives Available			**Up to $2,500**

Note 1: Vehicle owners must have the vehicle on the road and active taking trips on a minimum 120 days (drivers must be WAV logged in) per year to qualify as an Active Vehicle. This will be prorated for

the first year of the program based on the launch date, at the direction of the Manager of VFH. Vehicle owners may qualify for a single incentive, or any combination thereof once they are considered active.
Note 2: Vehicles must have taken 20 overnight trips in a year in order to qualify for the overnight shift incentive. Overnight hours are from **10PM to 4:59AM.**
Note 3: WAV are inspected at regular intervals and are expected to be maintained, especially as it relates to accessible safety equipment, in accordance with the VFH By-law & D409 standards. A vehicle should pass inspection of 100% of the time in relation to these items.

Changes to the Program

The Manager of Vehicles for Hire may set the process for changes to the program and the method by which any changes will be published.

If any changes are required to the program, wherever possible, the Manager of VFH will provide a minimum of 30-days' notice to the VFH industry and citizens prior to implementing the changes. However, some circumstances may require a shorter notice period or may take effect immediately.

Notices will be communicated through an industry notification directly to the affected parties (generally emailed), as well as to VFH dispatchers, published on winnipeg.ca/vehiclesforhire and through social media.

On-going Review

The Public Service will continue to monitor, review and analyze the results of the program, the dispatcher and the associated accessible transportation incentive program and report to Council within the VFH Annual Update report.