

Tuesday, October 15, 2024

Tim Nolan  
Accessibility Hamilton Alliance  
RE: HSR Staff Report PW 23024 (B)

To Members of the Public Works Committee

The HSR would like you to think the Fare Assist program is both accessible and financially viable to Hamiltonians with disabilities. I am here to tell you it is not.

By the HSR's own admission in this report the Fare Assist program is solely a means tested program intended to increase ridership through its affordability for all Hamiltonians. If so, then why is this report defending the program's impact upon passengers with disabilities?

The Presto system is purportedly making transit more affordable through its digital application. This is untrue. In the good old days when paper tickets were available passengers could purchase tickets in bulk which would be good at any time, and used by any person in a household. Discounts were given up front when tickets were purchased in bulk, not after trips were taken as is the case with Presto.

One challenge with Presto as opposed to the former voluntary pay program for the sight impaired is that bus operators no longer check a CNIB card and therefore may be unaware of the help needed by a sight impaired passenger (e.g. asking another passenger to vacate their seat for a blind passenger) which is then a violation of the AODA. Does this mean the City of Hamilton and HSR is knowingly breaking the law?

There seems no longer any bus fare discounts for high school aged youth (ages 13 – 17). This report states that every person in a household must have their own card. How does this make the system affordable to high school aged youth with disabilities, and by extension families supporting a disabled child? Discounts do not begin until after 11 trips. I do believe high school students still attend school 5 days per week which equals only 10 bus trips.

This report cites well over 22,000 people with disabilities living in Hamilton. Other references put Hamilton's disabled population significantly higher. To date reportedly only about 1,900 persons with disabilities have signed up for Fare Assist. If all of these 22K+ passengers used the HSR prior to Fare Assist then what are they doing now to get about town? This might well suggest that 20,000 people find Fare Assist unaffordable or inaccessible.

This report arguably states the Fare Assist and Presto internet programs are accessible. I am here to tell you they are not for people who are blind or sight impaired or persons with fine motor disabilities. People who rely upon text to speech, or speech to text, software find it difficult or impossible to navigate the websites. In both instances they

require assistance from an able bodied individual. How is this compliant with WCAG 2.0 guidelines, as is the law, and thus accessible? Two university degrees and I could only complete my Presto card profile with assistance as if I were a child. How would you feel if this were you?

This report cites the importance of family travel and the benefits or flexibility Presto gives to families. Yet, Accessible Transportation Services restricts DARTS passengers to travelling with only one guest. How is this DARTS restriction consistent with this report, particularly for passengers who are now using Presto?

This report cites the importance of conducting focus groups as a form of feedback. Why no focus groups to date? No one from the HSR attended the September 25, 2024 AHA! / DJNO community consultation despite knowing of the event well in advance, being asked to disseminate the information about the session and even being invited to attend by the AHA!

In summary, I want to thank Director Cosyn-Heath for this extensive report. It absolutely supports the need for a Fare Assist sibling program for disabled Hamiltonians. It has reinforced the obligation of this Committee to direct the HSR to bring forward a Fare Assist sibling program for persons with disabilities, and to keep alive in these Council Chambers the conversation of the importance of such a program.

Thank you.

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