

June 5, 2013

To: Mayor and Members of Council

Subject: various thoughts on the DARTS article in the Hamilton Spectator

It's easy to blame the new communications system ([link](#)) for the problems at **DARTS**. However, EVERYONE knows that the [ride scheduling software system](#) that was purchased by **Mark Mindorff** is not capable of handle the task for which it was acquired.

The **DARTS** drivers tell me that this [new software scheduling system](#) is "*better suited for delivering pizzas, not patients.*"

As a daily dialysis clinical out-patient, I have been on **DARTS** rides where the drivers were required to pick-up three clients, some with walkers or mobility issues, in **Stoney Creek, Hamilton Mountain and Waterdown**; all within a 30-minute window. This is not unusual: just ask any **DARTS** bus driver, or any of the **DARTS**-contracted **VETERANS** minivan drivers.

Clearly, the [software scheduling system](#) acquired and used by **DARTS** was not designed or modified to take into account variables, like the escarpment, or clients with mobility issues.

Scheduling ran smoother in "*the old days*" when it was done manually, by former drivers who were familiar with the challenges of transporting "*disabled*" and "*aged*" clients through Hamilton's unique transportation infrastructure.

Also, I agree with **Spectator** interviewee **Donna Dobroski** about **DARTS** resources (*meaning the lack of drivers and vehicles on the road*). Over a two year period, I have missed a dozen dialysis treatments because the **DARTS** dispatch manager said that she didn't have any rides available to take me to the hospital....and that I "*should take a cab.*"

If the complaints "*have largely tailed-off,*" it is NOT because the situation at **DARTS** has improved: it is because clients and their supporters have given-up on trying to resolve problems through the **DARTS Customer Service Department**. I have heard many story's where individuals, and [executives from institutions](#), have been "*blown off*" by the **DARTS Customer Service Manager** because she knows that her boss, **Mark Mindorff**, will not take any action to correct a situation.

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This is because the responsibility for scheduling rides was transferred from the **City's ATS Department**, to **DARTS**, which effectively eliminated opportunities for the **City of Hamilton** to provide oversight of **DARTS**.

The consensus among drivers, and clients, and healthcare professionals is that **DARTS** management, meaning **Mark Mindorff** and those who report directly to Mark, views **DARTS** as just another form of public transit. **DARTS** must be viewed and managed as part of the *spectrum* of public transit that takes into account an increasingly *aged* and *disabled* population.

An **Operational Review** of the **ATS** and **DARTS** situation should bring these customer service story's and situations out into the open and then, maybe, we will see the kind of *house-cleaning* that occurred after Council conducted the **Operational Review** of the **Licensing and Standards Board**, several years ago.

The spectrum of public transit, in reverse-order or urgency:

HSR & Taxi Scrip "*public transportation*" for relatively healthy folks,

***DARTS** buses and minivans "*public transportation*" for the ambulatory,

***OPT-and-the-like** "*public transportation*" for stable in-patients, and

***EMS & air ambulance** "*public transportation*" for critically injured and ill.

FYI: I've been advocating for an **Operational Review** of **DARTS** for over two years now. We were planning a petition which would have included the healthcare professionals, and even the **DARTS** drives themselves.

I put this effort on-hold at the request of **Rick Badzioch**, the **Director of Clinical Operations** at **St. Josephs Healthcare** who, along with **Marg Doma**, the **Director of Risk Management** at **St. Josephs Healthcare**, began a dialog with the **City of Hamilton's** newly-minted **ATS Director, George Brovac** to try and address the shortcomings of the **DARTS** operations that were having a negative impact on the clinical operations at **St. Joe's** and, conversely, the short-comings in the **St. Joe's** dialysis operations which were playing havoc with the **DARTS** operations.

I viewed this initiative as a positive development and would ask City Council to **STRONGLY** encourage City staff to pursue such dialog with more vigor and priority, with community stakeholders in order to send a message to **Mark Mindorff** and the **DART board of directors** that they are, if in fact, accountable to the community they are mandated to serve.

And lets be sure to include input from the grass roots service providers (*nurses, social workers, DARTS drivers and the adult daycare agency's*) who provide care and advocate for the aged and the ill so the rest of us can live normal lives.

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Having said all this, the DARTS inside and outside workers are currently in contract negotiations; not for money, but for better treatment by senior management. Perhaps some improvements will come from these negotiations.

Although it will cost more, it may be time to cut-loose the **DARTS** organization, bring the **DARTS** employees into the **HSR** family, and find a way to maintain a taxi company as a contractor.

If an **Operational Review** of ATS and its oversight and authority over DARTS operation is commissioned by City Council, the review committee should also examine the drastic reduction of services (*vehicles & drivers*) that has been imposed on clients after 6pm.

St. Josephs Healthcare Dialysis Clinic run three shifts: mornings, afternoons and evenings, ending around 11:30pm.. A few years ago, **DARTS** management cut the van service after 6pm; forcing clinical out-patients like myself, who were receiving evening dialysis, to use **BLUE LINE** taxi service, at full cost, funded by the tax payers through **Special Supports**, until we could get squeezed into an over-crowded morning and afternoon dialysis time-slot. This caused resource and scheduling problems for **DARTS** drivers, dialysis nurses and technical and cleaning staff that I see and experience to this day.

I am suggesting that **DARTS** re-allocated resources so they can offer some level of mini-van service from **6pm-12-midnight** so it conforms to the new harmonization policy. This is especially important for the *100-or-so* out-patients who are under doctors orders to ride in mini-vans because of the rough ride and mandatory seating arrangements of the heavy **DARTS** buses that trigger or aggravate physical illness and conditions and injuries in many clients.

Sincerely,

Peter Hasek