

**TO THE CHAIRMAN AND  
COUNCIL MEMBERS I HAVE  
SPOKEN TO A LOT OF DARTS  
CLIENTS AND DRIVERS AND IT  
HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO MY  
ATTENTION THAT THE  
VEHICLES AND THE  
SUBCONTRACTORS THAT YOU  
APPROVED DO NOT THINK  
THAT THE RULES REGARDING  
TALKING ON THEIR  
CELLPHONES WHILE DRIVING  
APPLY TO THE BUT IF ANY  
OTHER MOTORIST TALK ON  
CELLPHONES WHILE DRIVING  
THEY GET A TICKET I AM**

**GETTING FRUSTRATED IT  
SEEMS LIKE COUNCIL IS NOT  
LISTENING AND BY GETTING  
RID OF THE BUSSES YOU END  
UP SENDING MORE VEHICLES  
TO ONE LOCATION FOR GROUP  
BOOKINGS**

# City looks to take more control over DARTS

News Jan 29, 2016 by [Matthew Van Dongen \(/hamilton-author/matthew-van-dongen/70C601F0-79A5-4189-B1DA-147F61545D27/\)](#) [✉ \(mailto:mvandongen@thespec.com\)](mailto:mvandongen@thespec.com) The Hamilton Spectator.



*Staff recommend the city take more control of the DARTS service, which is the subject of a growing number of complaints. - Hamilton Spectator file photo*

The city wants to shrink vehicles and take back scheduling and reservation duties for complaint-plagued disabled transit agency DARTS.

The independently run shared-ride service has seen complaints and its annual deficit grow in recent years, leading councillors to call for a review.

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The independently run shared-ride service has seen complaints and its annual deficit grow in recent years, leading councillors to call for a review.

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But a budget presentation posted online Friday shows transit officials already have some ideas about how to improve the service.

"Basically, we're looking at moving towards less expensive vehicles and bringing more control back (to the city)," said HSR director David Dixon in an interview Friday.

Specific recommendations include:

- cutting the service's fleet of 70 small buses in favour of more accessible vans;
- seeking new private bids for service before the end of the DARTS contract in 2017;
- repatriate scheduling, reservations and dispatching duties from the contractor.

Complaints about DARTS reached a crescendo not long after the service took control of those duties in 2012.

DARTS officials have argued the initial spike in complaints was due to technical failures that were gradually ironed out.

DARTS executive director Mark Mindorff said he would attend Monday's budget meeting but wanted to learn more about the recommendations before commenting.

But he did say it would be difficult for a contractor to control complaints if it didn't control scheduling. "If you're going to be held responsible for a service, you need to have control of that service."

Other complaints have stemmed from reported hour-or-more rides for some disabled passengers.

The service has also been inundated with new customers by changing provincial legislation that required DARTS to serve a broader array of passengers over a longer time frame each day.

Dixon said he is not suggesting an end to the often criticized shared-ride model of service, which involves the same vehicle picking up and delivering passengers on the same ride.

"We think it will help to better match customers to a more appropriate type of vehicle delivery," he said.

The presentation suggests DARTS is wasting money using buses to transport relatively few passengers over long distances. It recommends buying more but smaller accessible vans, as well as sedans for riders who don't have wheelchairs.

Dixon said he's not recommending folding the disabled transit service completely into the HSR.

Coun. Sam Merulla has repeatedly called for that move. But he said Friday the important thing is to start "rebuilding" an "antiquated" paratransit system.

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