

**Pilon, Janet**

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**Subject:** HSR RESPONSE INCLUDED | FW: Political Complaint. FW: Taxi Scrip Program

**Importance:** High

**From:** Stephen Van Eerdewijk

**Sent:** June 15, 2020 8:33 PM

**To:** Whitehead, Terry

**Cc:** Prince, Kristin; Susan Malseed

**Subject:** RE: HSR RESPONSE INCLUDED | FW: Political Complaint. FW: Taxi Scrip Program

To All Council and Public Works Committee Members:

Following a conversation that I had with Mr. Terry Whitehead this morning, I have requested that he add the following issue to the agenda for the next Council and Public Works Committee meeting.

I am writing to express my extreme dissatisfaction and disgust with the handling of the Taxi Scrip Program as per the e-mail thread below in response to my complaint. I have two major issues, the second which would not be relevant if not for the first.

First, the Taxi Scrip Program should not have been suspended at all. Taxis were deemed essential, buses were deemed essential, but the assistance that the Taxi Scrip program provides to people with disabilities and seniors was not considered essential? This simply does not make sense. The fact that DARTS is available to provide essential trips at no charge for anyone with a valid ID, even if they are registered for "taxi scrip only", is perfect for people who have essential appointments to attend, however, this does not work for my use case, and the use case of many people who use taxi scrip to do their grocery shopping, or travel to and from essential services such as medical appointments, where DARTS is not able to provide an acceptable level of service.

It is more cost-effective to buy groceries in bulk and pay for less taxis during any given month, as you are spending the same amount of money at the grocery store, but in a single trip rather than multiple trips, thus saving on the transportation. DARTS will not take my wife, myself, and a trunk full of groceries home from the grocery store which is why I believe I speak for my family and many others, when I make the statement that the Taxi Scrip Program is essential. The restrictions on the amount of groceries that DARTS has advised me would be allowed, which was 2-3 bags each, would in fact cause people to have to make unnecessary additional trips to the grocery stores if using the DARTS service, where taking a taxi would minimize the number of grocery trips required to be able to purchase food and other essential items. This is counter-intuitive during a time when we are required to minimize the number of essential trips in order to do our part to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, therefore, in these cases, DARTS is not a reasonable alternative to replace the use of taxis and the need for the Program. Furthermore, with limits in stores and items being out of stock and having to travel to other stores, in addition to the fact that where we may have taken buses to get to essential services back in March and April and taken a taxi on the return trip, we took taxis both ways because we did not feel safe using public transit, we actually spent far more money on taxis, without the benefit of the discount that the Taxi Scrip Program offers. Though I strongly believe that there would be ways to facilitate the sale and servicing of taxi scrip during the Pandemic, if the decision was made to suspend the program, an alternative should have been put in place to assist people who need to take taxis rather than DARTS. A very simple solution would have been to either offer free taxi service to/from essential services for anyone with a valid ID card who is registered to DARTS/Taxi Scrip service and have the Taxi Company bill to charges to the City, or at the very least, a 40% discount (which should be more than 40% during this time as per the extra travel that people are having to do as per the reasons indicated above) and the difference would again be charged to the city.

Another even more serious use case where the DARTS Service is not an adequate alternative to the Taxi Scrip Program is for medical appointments where DARTS is unable to accommodate the need for a person to be dropped off at a specific location for such appointments. Susan Malseed, who is also copied on this e-mail, is a dear friend of mine, who is a senior and struggles with many health issues, including COPD. She is also a passenger registered for the Taxi Scrip Program,, and not having access to the program is putting her at further risk during this pandemic. Susan requires outpatient medical treatments multiple times per week at the Fontbonne Building at St. Joseph's Hospital. DARTS will not drop her off directly at the entrance to the Fontbonne Building, the reason provided to her being something to do with the emissions of their vehicles, so they will only drop her at the main entrance at 50 Charlton, causing her to have to change her gloves and mask, take an enclosed elevator, and then walk quite a distance to get to the Fontbonne Building, all which would not be necessary if she was dropped off directly at the Fontbonne Building. By the time she gets there, she is out of breath, weak and exhausted. Again, while DARTS is supposed to be available for essential trips, the fact that they will not take her directly to the Fontbonne building means that Susan either needs to put herself at further risk by taking public transit, or needs to take a taxi. The suspension of the Taxi Scrip Program and the fact that it was not deemed essential has actually caused a more negative financial impact to it's users, as this is the primary purpose of the Program, which in many cases, is used for essential trips.

Finally on this point, as services are being reopened, the Taxi Scrip Program should have been at the top of that list, but is it available yet? Not to the best of my knowledge.

My second point is that as per the below thread, it has been stated that since taxi scrip is monthly and is not cumulative, we will not be allowed to purchase taxi scrips retroactive to April. This is understandable when a person makes a choice not to purchase their allotment of taxi scrip during a given month, however, we should not be penalized for the fact that we were unable to purchase taxi scrip because the decision was out of our hands as there was no opportunity to purchase taxi scrip due to the suspension of the Program. I inquired about this option as it would assist those who have had to take taxis at a monthly cost that is higher than what they normally would during the Pandemic, or people who generally take taxis that add up to more than the monthly allotment of the 3 books of taxi scrip that is currently allowed per user, to recover some of their losses. Another option would be for the City to provide regular taxi scrip users with a payment for the 40% difference that we would have saved, which for a person who uses 3 books of taxi scrip per month is \$48.00, in order to compensate for the suspension of the program. I was not asking for free taxi scrip, just the opportunity to purchase the same amount of scrip that I would have normally purchased, and should have been able to purchase, especially during these difficult times, or at least the ability to recover the loss of my discount as a result of not having access to the Program.

If a satisfactory resolution to this issue cannot be provided, I will be taking next steps to escalate this further, as I feel that it is unacceptable that all of the factors outlined above do not appear to have been taken into consideration when the decision was made to suspend the Taxi Scrip Program, and the request to allow us to purchase the taxi scrip that registered users would have been entitled to if the Program was not suspended was denied. Next steps include but may not be limited to:

1. I will be sending a copy of this entire e-mail thread, without modification, to all City Councillors individually, the Mayor of the City of Hamilton, the AODA, several media outlets, and any other person or entity that I determine could potentially assist with making the case for justice to be served in this matter.
2. I will be filing an complaint with the AODA for the suspension of the Taxi Scrip Program, a service that disabled persons rely and depend on, in a time where it is most essential and has had a more negative impact on the disabled community.
3. I will be starting support groups on social media to reach out to anyone who would like assistance with a resolution to this issue, and who wish to stand with me in supporting this cause.

I would be happy to personally discuss this issue further with any of the Council or Public Works Committee Members that feel that they can assist with reaching a satisfactory resolution in this matter. Please feel free to contact me by phone or e-mail using the contact information in my signature below. Since I work from home, I can be reached by phone before 9:30 A.M. or after 6:30 P.M. Monday through Friday, however, if you leave a message on my voicemail, I can return calls during my lunch or breaks throughout the day. I look forward to

hearing from someone, and sincerely hope that we can reach an acceptable resolution to this matter in a timely manner.

Sincerely, and Without Prejudice,  
Stephen Van Eerdewijk

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**From:** Prince, Kristin <[Kristin.Prince@hamilton.ca](mailto:Kristin.Prince@hamilton.ca)>

**Sent:** May 28, 2020 11:31 AM

**To:**

**Subject:** Fw: HSR RESPONSE INCLUDED | FW: Political Complaint. FW: Taxi Scrip Program

Good morning Stephen,

Thank you for your patience while I was waiting to hear back from our staff on your questions. Please see the email below for the response from our Emergency Operations Team. I trust this will answer your concerns mind you, it will not be satisfactory. I can speak to Councillor Whitehead about this however and see if there is anything he can do to help with retroactive purchasing of the books and let you know what he thinks can be done. In the mean time, if you have any further questions or concerns please let me know and I'll do what I can to get you information and help.

Best Regards,

Kristin Prince

Executive Assistant

Councillor Whitehead

Ward 14 Hamilton

905-546-2779

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**From:** EOC Council Liaison

**To:** Prince, Kristin

**Cc:** Whitehead, Terry

**Subject:** FW: HSR RESPONSE INCLUDED | FW: Political Complaint. FW: Taxi Scrip Program

Hi there, your email was sent to me for a response,

Due to the closure of HSR Customer Service Centres until further notice, the Taxi Scrip program also remains temporarily suspended until further notice, including the purchasing of taxi scrip books. However, while the taxi scrip program remains suspended, current Taxi Scrip clients may call DARTS at 905-529-1717 to book an essential trip, using their Client ID number, even if their current eligibility is for taxi scrip only. At this time, no fare is being charged for travel on DARTS.

Taxi scrip allotments are monthly and not cumulative, so backdating the purchase of taxi scrip books for the months while the program is suspended will not be allowed.

Customers can find up-to-date information online at <https://www.hamilton.ca/coronavirus/faq-transit-customers>.

Customers can also call the Accessible Transportation Customer Service number with any questions about changes to service: 905 529 1212.

Take care  
Kelly

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**From:** Prince, Kristin <[Kristin.Prince@hamilton.ca](mailto:Kristin.Prince@hamilton.ca)>  
**To:** ATS <[ats@hamilton.ca](mailto:ats@hamilton.ca)>  
**Cc:** Whitehead, Terry <[Terry.Whitehead@hamilton.ca](mailto:Terry.Whitehead@hamilton.ca)>  
**Subject:** Taxi Scrip Program

Good afternoon,

I hope this email finds you well.

I have received a call today regarding the taxi scrip program and am hoping someone can provide me with some answers for this resident.

The Taxi Scrip program was suspended for the Months of April and May. When will the program be reinstated and people be able to purchase again? Additionally, will people using the program be able to retroactively buy the books for the 2 months they were not able to buy?

As you know the people who rely on this program do not have the discretionary income to get around. Is there any plans on the part of ATS to compensate people for the loss of the two months worth of taxi scrips if they do not allow retroactive purchases?

Best Regards,  
Kristin Prince  
Executive Assistant

Councillor Whitehead

Ward 14 Hamilton