



INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Audit, Finance and Administration Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	October 7, 2021
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Consultant Report to Accessible Transportation Services funded by Provincial Audit and Accountability Fund (PW21055) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SUBMITTED BY:	Maureen Cosyn Heath Director, Transit Public Works Department
SIGNATURE:	

COUNCIL DIRECTION

At its meeting on November 18, 2019, the Public Works Committee approved the following (Item 10.6):

WHEREAS, the number of riders has increased by 78% since 2013;

WHEREAS, 17,000 clients are registered and about half use the service;

WHEREAS, in 2019, 787,226 trips were taken, so the average person uses it 87 times per year;

WHEREAS, cost has increased significantly in recent years;

WHEREAS, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA), requires we only charge the same as a bus fare; and,

WHEREAS, since the service started in 1975, we have done no reassessment of any of the 17,000 clients, which AODA permits;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: That the City Auditor General be requested to complete an eligibility audit of clients registered for the Disabled and Aged

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

**SUBJECT: Consultant Report to Accessible Transportation Services funded by
Provincial Audit and Accountability Fund (PW21055) (City Wide)
– Page 2 of 6**

Regional Transportation Service (DARTS) and report back to the Public Works Committee in Q1 2020.

Audit outcomes (AUD20009) were presented by the Office of the City Auditor to the Public Works Committee at its meeting on December 4, 2020. At this meeting, the Committee approved the following (Item 9.1):

- (a) That Appendices “A”, “C”, and “D” of Report AUD20009, respecting the Accessible Transportation Service (ATS) Eligibility Audit Report, be received;
- (b) That the Management Responses as detailed in revised Appendix “B” be approved; and,
- (c) That the General Manager of Public Works be directed to instruct the appropriate staff to have the Management Responses implemented.

Subsequently, the General Issues Committee, at its meeting of December 9, 2020, approved the following (Item 9.13):

- (a) That the General Manager, Finance and Corporate Services, be authorized and directed to submit expression of interests associated with third-party reviews of municipal services to identify potential savings and efficiencies, in accordance with the terms and conditions associated with the Audit and Accountability Fund Intake 2 by December 18, 2020;
- (b) That the third-party reviews only be undertaken should the City be successful in obtaining funds from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing;
- (c) That staff be directed to single source third-party consultants to complete reviews should the City be successful in obtaining funds from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing;
- (d) That the Mayor and City Clerk be authorized to execute a transfer payment agreement between the City of Hamilton and Her Majesty the Queen in right of Ontario as represented by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for the transfer of funds from the Audit and Accountability Fund, together with all necessary or advisable associated documents, in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor and with content acceptable to the General Manager, Finance and Corporate Services;

- (e) That where required to give effect and authorize the signing of a transfer payment agreement between the City of Hamilton and Her Majesty the Queen in right of Ontario as represented by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for the Province of Ontario for the transfer of funds from the Audit and Accountability Fund, one or more By-law(s) be prepared in the form satisfactory to the City Solicitor for consideration by Council; and,
- (f) That a certified copy of the approved by-law authorizing the signing of the transfer payment agreement be forwarded to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing upon Council approval.

INFORMATION

The information section is presented in two parts: first, the local context for consideration and second, the details related to the Audit and Accountability Fund grant received from the province.

Local Context

When accessible transit service was first introduced locally in 1975, the transit landscape was vastly different, and essentially operated as two different services, specialized and conventional. Integration between the systems was not possible because of the built environment and vehicle styles.

Since then, significant improvements have led to a more integrated approach to public transit. This is supported legislatively with the goal for a fully accessible Ontario by 2025, as set out in the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (2005) (AODA).

HSR's commitment to a fully accessible transit system includes, but is not limited to:

- As set out in the City of Hamilton's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, persons with disabilities access barrier free services and programs when using Hamilton Street Railway (HSR) and Accessible Transit System (ATS).
- 100% of the 273 buses in the fleet are fully accessible, with low floors, on-board bus stop announcements, ramps and kneeling ability, and interior configuration designed for personal mobility devices.
- Bus stop amenities, including pads and shelter standards, ensure that future infrastructure upgrades meet the AODA standards. The system features more than 1,500 accessible bus stops and new prototypes are being tested for areas where traditional benches cannot be used due to space restrictions.

- Innovations in service delivery, such as the launch of an on-demand pilot, testing “software as a service” approach to trip booking for an improved customer experience.
- Alignment with 10 Year Local Transit Strategy and the guiding principles in the (Re)envision initiative address the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion for barrier-free transportation choice in support of the Term of Council Priorities 2018-2022.
- Continued consultation and engagement with the City’s Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities, Transportation Working Group, community members and community stakeholders to improve accessible transit services.

The City of Hamilton is committed to providing integrated and accessible transportation service which supports the unique needs of its residents so they can travel when and where they want to go, while respecting flexibility, independence, and community participation. Further, the Transit Division’s Accessible Transportation Services (ATS) recognizes the need to address recommendations arising from the Accessible Transportation Services (ATS) Eligibility Audit (AUD20009) for the long-term efficiency and sustainability of a specialized transit system. Given the changing landscape in service delivery, significant investment in accessible transit infrastructure, and noting that no reassessment of eligibility criteria has been undertaken locally, Hamilton is behind some of its peer agencies (examples: York Region, Durham Region, Calgary Transit) in this regard.

ATS acknowledges that not everyone is able to access conventional transit, despite the progress in system enhancements, and that some residents require door to door transit to meet their needs. Others, with appropriate supports and travel training, may be able to migrate to conventional transit. Some residents will be well-served with a combination of services. Both conventional and specialized services remain necessary, but integration and innovation will advance opportunity to travel freely between the systems to better meet individual needs.

ATS has received a report from Dillon Consulting based on the recommendations arising from AUD20009 (Appendix “A” attached to Report PW21055- Review of ATS Eligibility Determination Process and Services). Ultimately, the audit and subsequent recommendations from Dillon Consulting provide the City of Hamilton an opportunity to develop an integrated model of service delivery using a “family of services” approach so that customers can access appropriate accessible service based on their unique needs. These actions, in turn, will help form a total transportation solution and support the City’s vision to be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

Staff will consider the proposed recommendations in the local context and will report back with recommendations to the Public Works Committee in Q4 of 2021. This time is

necessary to allow for fulsome consideration of the report recommendations, to consider peer transit agency experience, seek commentary from the service contractor (DARTS) and, most importantly, provide ATS time to engage and consult with community members before determining a robust approach for system enhancements.

Provincial Audit and Accountability Fund

In response to the internal AUD20009, the Transit Division was successful in obtaining funding from the provincial Audit and Accountability Fund to develop the business case for key recommendations. Under the terms of the related Transfer Payment Agreement executed on March 24, 2021, Transit undertook to “retain an independent third-party reviewer” to:

- Develop an operational plan to further investigate the differing third-party assessment outcomes and conduct municipal benchmarking. The operational plan will also include standard operating procedures and assessment guidelines; a quality control process; assessment of strengthening the professional qualifications and experience required for making eligibility determinations; and, performance metrics to measure process efficiencies and community impact.
- Develop a business case for the various service options (e.g. Integrated service delivery), to explore the feasibility, potential savings, efficiencies, and benefits to the community.”

The Transit Division engaged Dillon Consulting Limited on May 6, 2021 to address the following recommendations from AUD20009 (Appendix “A” attached to Report PW21055- Review of ATS Eligibility Determination Process and Services):

- “Recommendation 1: We recommend that management use the third-party evaluator’s results, municipal benchmarking and their own experiences to evaluate and potentially redesign the eligibility assessment process.”
- “Recommendation 3: We recommend that standard operating procedures and assessment guidelines be created for all assessment processes. These procedures may include instructions and evaluation strategies to assist staff in making consistent and supported eligibility decisions.”
- “Recommendation 6: We recommend that management assess the need for strengthening the professional qualifications and experience required for making eligibility determinations.”

- “Recommendation 8: We recommend that management explore the feasibility, potential savings, costs and benefits of the following service options: expanded Taxi Scrip Program, integrated service model, expanded travel training, shuttles and community buses.”
- “Recommendation 13: We recommend that management create performance metrics to measure process efficiencies and community impact and report on these regularly.”

Staff from Dillon Consulting worked closely with ATS staff, and began with an examination of current processes, assessed costs, benefits and best practices related to the above. The report was completed at the end of August 2021. (Appendix “A” attached to Report PW21055) - Review of ATS Eligibility Determination Process and Services).

The report from Dillon Consulting includes the results of benchmarking interviews conducted with transit agencies from across the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area and the country, who are now at varying stages of implementing an integrated service model, where transit trips can be accomplished using a combination of conventional and specialized transit, to meet the needs of the traveller.

Under the Terms of the Transfer Payment Agreement referenced above, the work had to be completed by a third-party, in this case, Dillon Consulting, and the final report from Dillon Consulting (Appendix “A” attached to Report PW21055) must be submitted to the Province and published on the City of Hamilton’s publicly accessible website by October 15, 2021.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix “A” to Report PW21055 - Review of ATS Eligibility Determination Process and Services