

**Key Points from
"Access To Public Transportation"
Public Focus Group
Rideaucrest – 5-7 pm, June 26, 2006**

The event was facilitated by Jeanette Parsons, Project Co-ordinator, Queen's University, Office of University Advisory on Equity, with assistance by Barry Kaplan, Accessibility Co-ordinator, City of Kingston. Jan Rector was the note-taker.

A Powerpoint slide presentation was made by Paula Nichols, Manager, Transportation, entitled "Wheelchair Accommodation on Kingston Transit".

Comments from participants:

Toronto has an alternate taxi service.

Accessibility committee is considering this.

For-facing/rear facing – is there more ridership with rear facing?

Hamilton and Mississauga have buses that have one or the other; some buses may have one forward and one rear.

Are there two choices on one bus? How is the choice given?

Paula doesn't have details on this.

Some cities only have rear facing, the ridership is higher.

Resident inquired if City has talked to Ottawa? A lot of their buses are equipped for rear facing. You can park yourself in there, there is a strap to use.

Paula – we would like to have as much information as possible.

If you are sitting backwards and the bus gets into an accident – aren't you more likely to get whiplash?

Paula – with CSA standard they have considered that.

There would be a lot of movement with the head hitting the neck pad.

She has used several different transit systems and had to take a step back with Kingston. The rear facing option would tip her chair back. This is a non-secure feature. She never had any problems with forward facing.

Breakup into Focus Groups:

Rear versus forward facing wheelchair passenger safety systems.

What are your experiences with either or both?

Based on your experience, what are your preferences and why?

Program roll out – will they be on one route or on different routes?

How many buses does it take to service each route?

Route 1 requires 7 buses with backup ratio, should one break down. On a route by route basis, Route 4 has 4, sometimes 3, Route 2 has many as 5 or 6 depending on whether its peak time or not. Route 1 has the most number of buses required at any one time. Route 12 has 4, 3:6 range for remaining routes.

There will be 10 minutes for this discussion.

How does the city set any priorities for one stop or the other?

Accessibility for the bus – snow clearance issue – how will the city make a decision. Where is the demand? We need transportation to get to major shopping areas, doctors offices, hospital appointments, etc.

Comments from participants at Focus Group:

Table 1:

Rear vs. forward facing passenger safety system – what are your preferences?

95% of my experience is forward facing, it is the easiest to get into, the tie downs the driver puts down, the rider sees where they are going; I've not been on a system that was rear facing, forward facing is more comfortable.

Table 2:

On that issue I've basically spoken about it before, the question of personable mobility comes into it.

As a motorist chair user myself, it would be a non-issue, but for someone that has had a stroke and does not have the use of one side, or many other reasons, perhaps that would be a choice by the person themselves.

Table 3:

Part of the issue was around scooters and the forward and rear facing; I understand that scooter riders would be required to transfer onto a seat, that was a non-issue for scooters riders, there wasn't really a preference at our table, regarding people with wheelchairs who had attendants – where would the attendant be able to sit with that individual?

Table 4:

The only experience that they've had is riding on Via and they would avoid rear facing seats. When you are facing rear you are looking at a full bus-load of people, and this is a very uncomfortable feeling; there is the possibility of motion sickness, and not knowing where the bus is going (you can't see where you are going).

Table 5 declined comment – but will make comment later.

I would like to comment on the quality again of why people with disabilities would have to sit backwards when everybody is sitting forward; it seems to me that this would add to the stigmatism that presently exists.

Wallace Finlay – I worked for Ryan buses, they ran 6 buses with the doors at the very rear. My job was to arrange the seating inside and I was involved with wheelchair arrangements. Rear facing is not very comfortable for the people facing the rear. This was tried in Montreal. The Montreal drivers refused to be responsible for tying down rear facing. There was an accident

because the wheelchair brakes were not used. I would suggest that a major question is, are the drivers going to accept the responsibility of fastening the tie downs for the seats? It is essential that a seat belt be used for someone that is handicapped to keep them in the chair. On that point, chairs will slide easily with the brakes on; on the tilting chairs I've seen tie downs have been put down on the tilting side of the chair, it doesn't have the strength if you tied it down and this causes a tipping hazard.

If one of the concerns is driver involvement, there are communities that have got around that by having the attendant do it up (tie the chair); that is eliminating our freedom, I don't agree with it, but I do want to use the bus. They have to be positioned in the right spot. I can do it, how many can't?

He's feeling that a decision has already been made (by the city) – and that our comments are not useful.

Paula – we contacted other municipalities and had leaned toward rear facing; we would like to get the feedback as to whether or not this will work, and how we could implement it or not. We could implement one rear facing and one forward facing.

Next question -

Program Rollout – one route or other routes?

In my past experience the only way to go is one route; use that route as an experiment. Work out the challenges; rollout on one route is the most sensible and practical way to go.

Our table feels the exact same way, if you don't have consistency you are not going to use the service; a lot of people will be turned away from this; it would not be nice not knowing when you will get home.

Our table - some of the same conversations came out, the most popular routes make sense to go first. There are a lot of people that want to transfer to other routes; this may be impractical to get where you want to go; what if you can't transfer? How many people use transfers to other routes; we need more access buses; the City buses don't always go close enough to the destination (St. Mary's rehab) but that would be an example that the bus stop is far from the destination.

Access bus – you could probably improve the overall situation in this city in the interim by being able to put a fixed route in (access bus). Other communities call it a community bus; it goes to areas where people have disabilities, and people can count on that (service) being there. Rollout for KT, we agree that it needs to be consistent, based on a need to find out the

geographic area where the demand is needed, take that into consideration when planning routes. Route 1 is accessible, keep that route, add a route servicing Queen's. I don't know if the demand is there.

We decided that we should have one route that is accessible all the way through, we thought about Route 1 as it hits downtown. We would learn from using the walkers/wheelchairs. People with walkers could get hurt; people using strollers on the bus are not folding their strollers up, a child should not be in the stroller when on a city bus.

Bus stop improvement and snow clearing:

Priorities to certain bus stops – how to decide what factors are to be considered for the fairest decision. I feel bus stop areas should be cleared for accessibility in general, not just for the buses. We use sidewalks for more than getting to a bus stop; KAB the areas where people have a lot of unmets where they can't go to, one of the things, especially a medical run, it seems to be one of the main things with the hospitals. Fairest decision, Rome wasn't built in a day; we are trying to get accessible transit in Kingston. The one important thing we need to remember is that we want to reach this goal; we can't expect it to be overnight, if we do it one at a time and go ahead, work out the bumps, in the meantime use KA, get it up and running.

Related to that, why wasn't something done when Amherst Taxi no longer provided taxi service in Amherstview? This should have been looked at due to the shortage of taxis. Our group looked at bus stops at major areas, doctor's offices. Bus stops where there is an existing curb should be looked at first, the grade may be twice as steep. A flat street is more difficult, especially in the winter time and becomes a hazard and too steep.

Regarding the snow removal process – look at bus stops with the curbs first, remove the snow from those bus stops. Someone could get hurt if snow is not cleared properly.

I have a comment on ramps. I have an expanded steel ramp, when it is wet it is slippery, I don't know what the ramps are like on the bus (the ramps have a sandy grip). Accessible bus stops – general consensus at the table – snow removal is a problem everywhere in the city. It should be considered more of an emergency. Snow removal by-laws would be of great assistance.

Some of the ideas about bus stops as far as which ones the city should focus on, flash cards for the blind, if wheelchair operators could use the flashcard as well; be able to phone ahead to ask about getting a ride in a certain area, how accessible is it? People should be able to call in.

Snow removal at the bus stops – people are responsible for clearing their own sidewalks, not everybody is able to do it.

Have we moved far enough ahead in regard to the constant technology we have? High risk rides (amusement) can be compared to riding on a transit bus.

Lou, KAB - Securement systems – there are a variety of types. We use only forward facing; there are a variety of other types of securement; self-locking mechanism types; compartmental types; I am not sure what else is available. The problem is the different sizes and shapes of wheelchairs; and in the States the manufacturers put brackets on the chairs, we don't have that in Canada yet, some chairs cannot be secured, out of the different brackets that exist.

Focus group concluded.

Participants were invited to view the Kingston Transit access bus parked outside the Rideaucrest building.

The evening events were completed by 8 pm.