

Safe Transportation for Ill Disabled Riders of Special Needs Transport

ISSUE

City Council received a letter dated September 10, 2019, in which a citizen expressed concern for the safety of public transportation for individuals post dialysis. To improve services to these customers, the writer proposed prioritizing services to those in medical need and to provide more direct, shorter trips to customers leaving dialysis.

BACKGROUND

The Standing Policy Committee on Transportation, at its meeting held on October 7, 2019, considered a letter from Mildred Kerr related to the transportation of dialysis patients and the special medical treatment they require, and resolved:

1. That the letter be referred to the Saskatoon Accessibility Advisory Committee for feedback; and
2. That the Administration engage with the Saskatchewan Health Authority as to how the transportation needs of ill-disabled riders following treatments can be better met and report back.”

CURRENT STATUS

Access Transit provides specialized transportation, on a first come first served basis, to registered citizens of Saskatoon. Trips are not prioritized based on the trip's purpose, which is both recommended and supported by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission in its 2014 report (Appendix 1) following an investigation into systemic complaints against Regina Transit's specialized transit service.

Access Transit is a public transit service not medical transportation and registrants with special medical issues are required to have attendants (attendants do not pay a fare). Registrants are also able to have a companion, when there is no attendant needed, should they require assistance during their trip (companions pay the appropriate fare).

Access Transit aims to have registrants on a bus for less than 75 minutes.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

On December 3, 2019, the Access Transit Manager met with the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) Dialysis Unit Social Worker to review the challenges and opportunities faced by ill-disabled riders accessing dialysis treatment. Conversation points were as follows:

1. Saskatoon Access Transit is a public transportation service and is not a dedicated medical transportation service.
2. Should customers require specialized medical assistance during a trip, they are able to travel with a companion to provide support en route (companions pay the appropriate fare, if an attendant is required they do not pay the fare. The requirement of an attendant must be in the registrant's file).

3. Saskatoon Access Transit does not prioritize trips based on purpose. This decision is supported by Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission and a discussion stemming from systemic complaints in Regina's transit system.
4. Saskatoon Access Transit defines its level of service as providing trips no longer than 75 minutes. In 2019, less than 0.2% of trips went beyond the 75 minute time limit. These trips are monitored and reported on a weekly basis.
5. Provincial Social Assistance provides funding for transportation until an individual is 65 years of age at which time they "age out" and move to Federal Pension Plan Programs which do not provide additional funds for transportation to medical appointments.
6. Kinsmen Charities provide funding for transportation that is at least one hour away from Saskatoon. They do not provide funding for those within city limits or less than one hour away from Saskatoon.
7. The cost of taxi or personal private transportation three times per week is prohibitive for many who attend dialysis. (Taxi costs would be the equivalent of \$25 one way or \$150 per week for an average trip length).
8. Saskatoon Access Transit provides transportation grouped for dialysis patients Monday through Saturday three times per day.

As a result of the December 3, 2019 conversations, internal discussions and some preliminary phone calls with the SHA around this topic resulted in:

- Saturday timings for dialysis patients were changed to include 7:00 a.m. appointments as of October 2019.
- When Saskatoon Access Transit receives applicants requiring trips to and from dialysis, the SHA Dialysis Unit Social worker is contacted to determine best placement for capacities of both parties.
- Where possible a subscription service is automatically set up for dialysis patients.
- Both parties agreed to meet on a quarterly basis to review processes and bring new challenges and opportunities to light.

In response to the original request of prioritizing transit services for those in medical need:

- Providing priority public transit service to Saskatoon Access Transit customers would go against Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission's recommendations provided in their 2014 report to Regina Transit that followed systemic complaints in that system. North American best practice does not support prioritization based on trip purpose.

In response to the request that more direct, shorter trips are provided to customers leaving dialysis:

- Saskatoon Access Transit is a shared ride service. Customers are informed that they may be on the bus for up to 75 minutes at the time of application, however this is a metric that is under constant monitoring and review.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial, legal, social, or environmental implications identified.

NEXT STEPS

Saskatoon Access Transit will continue to work closely with the SHA's Dialysis Unit Social Worker to find a best fit for dialysis patients on Access Transit buses. Saskatoon Access Transit will continue to welcome companions and attendants on trips where they are required to assist customers post treatment.

APPENDICES

1. Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission - Achieving Accessible Public Transportation: A Systemic Approach for Saskatchewan

Report Approval

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