
Subject: Email - Request to Speak - Melanie Christopherson - Canadian National Institute for the Blind - Accessible Transit - CK 7000-1
Attachments: 22-086 (Melanie Christopherson).pdf

From: Web E-mail - Mayor's Office <Mayors.Office@Saskatoon.ca>

Sent: Friday, August 5, 2022 11:32 AM

To: Web E-mail - City Clerks <City.Clerks@Saskatoon.ca>

Subject: Email - Request to Speak - Melanie Christopherson - Canadian National Institute for the Blind - Accessible Transit - CK 7000-1

Good morning,

We are forwarding a letter our office received from Ms. Melanie Christopherson relating to item 6.3.1 on the SPC on Transportation agenda on August 8. Mayor Clark has asked that it be distributed to all of the Committee members for their information.

Thank you,

Anna | tel 306.975.3202 

Pronouns: she/her

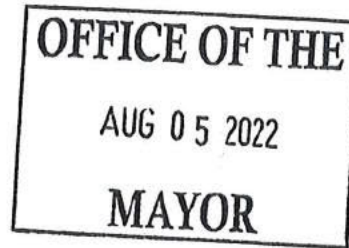
Office of the Mayor
City of Saskatoon | 222 3rd Avenue North | Saskatoon SK S7K 0J5
Treaty 6 Territory and Homeland of the Métis
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Please contact the sender and delete the message and any attachments.*

Melanie Christopherson
[REDACTED] Street West
Saskatoon SK S7L [REDACTED]

August 3, 2022

His Worship Charlie Clark
Office of the Mayor
222 - 3 Avenue North
Saskatoon SK S7K 0J5



His Worship,

Please find enclosed a copy of a letter and some related news articles. This letter was sent to City Councillors in July in preparation for our meeting on August 8 regarding accessible transit, and should have been sent to you at that same time. Unfortunately, I unintentionally overlooked sending this letter to you along with the others.

Please accept my apologies along with this letter and its information. I look forward to speaking with council on August 8 as scheduled.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Melanie Christopherson".

Melanie Christopherson

Dear Councillor 

My name is Melanie, I am a blind constituent who uses Access Transit and the Saskatoon Public Transit System as my main mode of transportation. I prefer the flexibility of Public Transit over Access Transit to meet most of my transportation needs.

I applaud City Council for the actions taken to increase accessibility on city buses, specifically the installation of audible stop announcements. These stop announcements provide me with vital information about my location and benefit other bus riders in a variety of ways. For example, people in the process of learning the English language, children who may be travelling alone, seniors with ageing vision, and people travelling after dark can all benefit from the audible stop announcements.

I would like to bring to your attention a couple of concerns with accessible transit here in Saskatoon.

Unfortunately, the audible stop announcements are inconsistent, and seem to depend on whether the system itself is working that day and whether the driver is willing to turn the service on. When the driver informs me that the audible stop announcements are not working, I ask them to please let me know when my stop is coming up. Most times, the drivers forget about my request. I am sure it's stressful for a bus driver to operate the bus safely and remember the individual stop requests of their passengers, so it is also a benefit to the drivers to ensure that this service is consistent and reliable.

The audible stop announcements can only be helpful if one can find the bus stop to board the bus. The posts that the bus stop signs are mounted on are the same as every other post for a variety of other signs, such as no parking signs and so on.

It is impossible for a blind person to find a bus stop independently. One time, I waited patiently on 22nd St. in the pouring rain at the bus stop. I heard a bus approaching and prepared for it to stop in front of me, but instead, it not only drove past me, but also splashed me with water in the process. It turned out that I was close to the bus stop, but a sighted person had to guide me to where the actual bus stop was.

Other communities are working to make their bus stops accessible. In Regina for example, they are completing a large project to ensure that every bus stop in the city has a highly visible post painted bright yellow for those with low vision, a sign with both large print and Braille-markings, and the sign blade mounted at a level that can be easily found by people with vision loss and people in wheelchair users. Similarly, in Vancouver, their bus stops have recently been made accessible by adding tactile markings to the ground around the bus stops and by adding tactile markings to the posts that the bus stops are mounted on. These small modifications can make the actual bus stops accessible to those with low or no vision.

Thank you for hearing my concerns. I am looking forward to talking with City Council on August 8th to discuss these concerns and possible solutions in our community. I can be reached via phone at (306) [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

Melanie Christopherson



Automated stop announcements coming to Regina buses

On Tuesday, Amber-Joy Boyd got to experience Regina Transit's new audible stop announcement system for the first time. The \$90,000 system, to be installed on all 115 buses by January, announces the cross-street of each stop.

Natascia Lypny • Regina Leader-Post

Nov 04, 2015 • June 1, 2020 • 2 minute read • Join the conversation



Amber-Joy Boyd points out new accessibility features by Regina Transit on Tuesday. (TROY FLEECE/Regina Leader-Post) PHOTO BY TROY FLEECE /Regina Leader-Post

For Amber-Joy Boyd, to hear “Broad Street and 1st Avenue North” piped through a Regina bus’s sound system means, “So much stress — just gone.”

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

The city is touting the system, which is seen in other municipalities across Canada, as vital to Regina's new residents who are unfamiliar with its geography and its visually impaired residents, like Boyd.

"It's really about independence for us," she said.

Currently, preparing for a bus ride for Boyd is "frustrating."

First, she goes online to find a map of her bus route. She counts and memorizes the stops, and left and right turns between her start and end points.

When boarding the bus, she informs the driver of the stop she's looking for, something which requires her to divulge her personal plans. She can't enjoy the ride listening to an audiobook or chatting with friends as she must concentrate on counting stops.

When she has arrived at her destination, she double checks with the driver that she is indeed in the right spot.

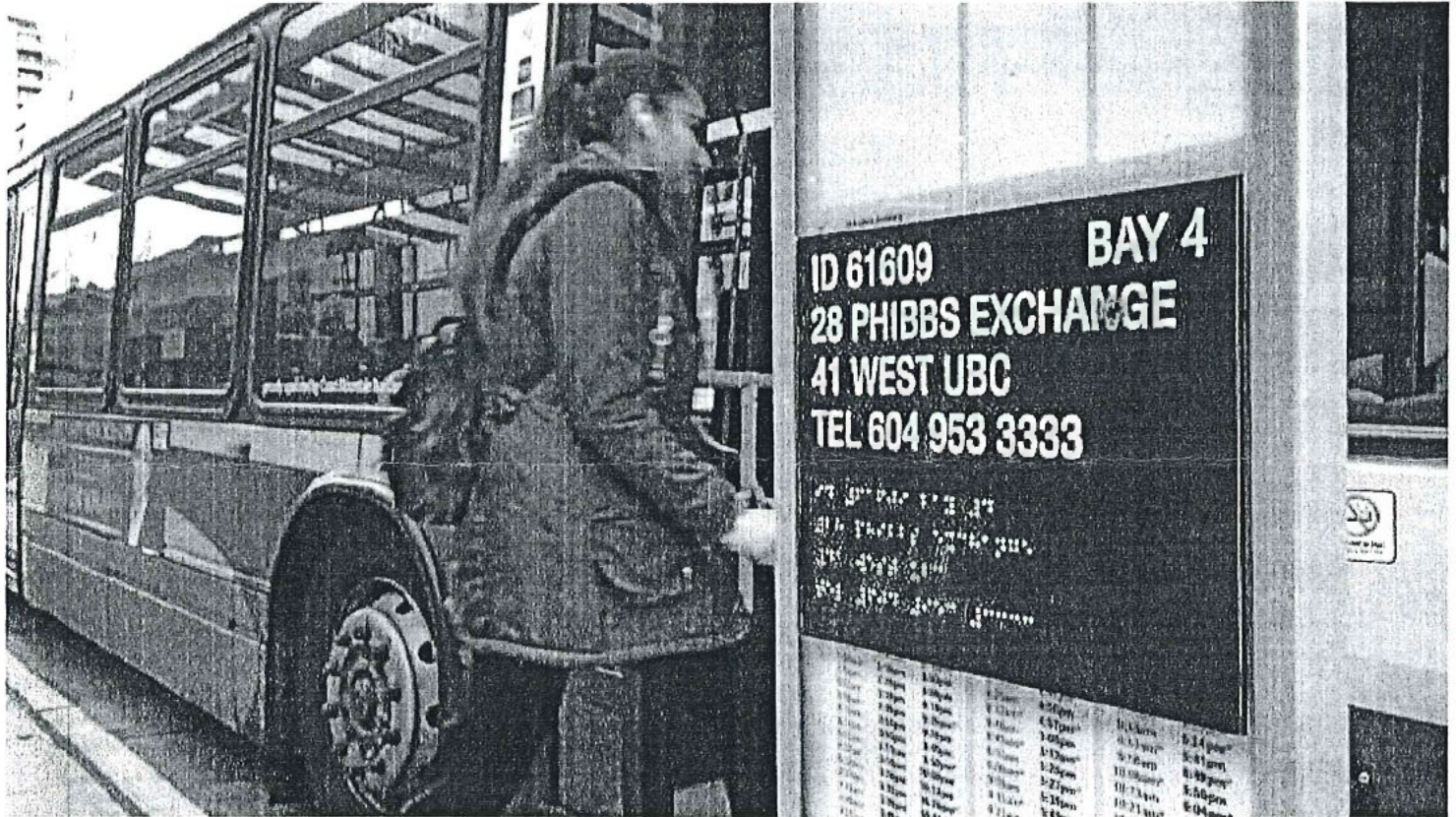
She was equally excited by the implementation of six pilot accessible bus stops on 11th Avenue that are easy to spot in bright yellow, have a route sign in large font, and a braille plaque.

With these additions, the City of Regina has finished checking off a list of recommendations for accessible transit devised in 2013 by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, said the director of transit services Brad Bells.


STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Other improvements included making the entire fleet low-floor accessible, adding Paratransit buses and supplementing the service with taxis, creating hot spots for winter maintenance, and piloting

CBC News · Posted: Dec 06, 2019 3:07 PM PT | Last Updated: December 6, 2019



A woman boards a bus displaying bus information in tactile and Braille language. (CBC)

comments 

TransLink says it's moving ahead with plans to implement a program to help transit users who are blind or partially sighted.

Beginning in 2020, tactile walking surface indicators (TWSI) and braille signage will be installed at every bus stop, station and exchange. It's a move TransLink claims will make it the first transit authority in North America to provide such accessibility aids.

"We know that a lot of our customers with vision loss rely on transit to get around the region and this is another example of the work we are doing for a very important community," said TransLink CEO Kevin Desmond.

The signage will provide information about each stop, terminal, bay, route and a telephone number for customer service.

Community milestone

TransLink began testing universally accessible bus stops as part of a pilot project in 2012, which included the installation of TWSI, tactile and braille at bus stops around the Joyce-Collingwood station.

The transit authority will also be looking at developing a wayfinding technology it hopes will help customers navigate the system using data sent directly to a phone or tablet.

"It is important to understand that changing an environment actually lessens the effect of the disability," said Rob Sleath, a member of the Access Transit Users' Advisory Committee.

"Today marks a special milestone for our community."

Blind man and his dog frequently left waiting at stops as Winnipeg Transit buses drive by

Drivers fail to stop several times a month for visually impaired Winnipeg man and his guide dog

Kim Kaschor · CBC News · Posted: Oct 15, 2018 9:05 AM CT | Last Updated: October 15, 2018



Vic Pereira, who is blind, says Winnipeg Transit drivers sometimes pass him by, leaving him standing at stops where he might have to wait more than half an hour for the next bus. (Lyzaville Sale/CBC)

Every relationship has its ups and downs — especially when it spans 45 years — but Vic Pereira's long-term relationship with Winnipeg Transit has hit an all-time low that frequently leaves him stranded.

"I've been looking at the records that I've been submitting since 2010, when my complaints were once or twice a year," said Pereira, who is blind. "Now, in 2018, it's almost two to four times a month that I'm registering a complaint to 311 about being left behind at the bus stop."

Winnipeg Transit is required to provide barrier-free service by law, and while many changes have been made to improve the service for people with disabilities, there doesn't seem to be any way to deal with the shortcomings of individual drivers who aren't meeting the standards, Pereira said.

Pereira, who started using Winnipeg Transit in the 1970s, says the service has improved over the years, with the addition of things such as bus stop poles that are a different shape from those for street signs, and automated next-stop announcements that relieve the stress of relying on a driver to remember to tell him his stop.

These accommodations, as well as many positive interactions with transit operators, have made their way into Pereira's submissions to the city's 311 call centre, but starting in 2015, those submissions were overshadowed by his experiences of being passed by.

"Some routes have 25-35 minute service, so I have to wait. In some instances, where I've had the same bus number that goes to different destinations, I've had to wait up to 50 minutes for the next one to come. I've also had to walk 30-45 minutes in bad weather because it may have been the last bus for that time of day," Pereira said.

Clear guidelines

Winnipeg Transit is required by the Accessibility for Manitobans Act to provide barrier-free service to all passengers.

The act, which became law in 2013, includes a Customer Service Standard Regulation with various timelines for public and private organizations to meet the requirements. The public sector had until Nov. 1, 2017, to comply; small municipalities, private and non-profit organizations had until Nov. 1, 2018.

The City of Winnipeg's accessibility plan includes clear guidelines for how operators can better serve passengers with disabilities, such as providing external stop announcements.

- **Manitoba's new accessibility rules welcomed by disability-rights advocate**

"You have to open the door, tell me who you are, tell me what route you are and tell me if the bus is full or not. I understand if it's full I can't get on, but I need to know that," Pereira said about his own expectations.

A Winnipeg Transit spokesperson apologized for the problems Pereira has encountered and thanked him for bringing the incidents to their attention.

"We take reports of this nature very seriously and we thoroughly investigate every complaint we receive, taking appropriate action as needed," said the statement emailed to the CBC.



Winnipeg Transit says it will look into complaints about a visually impaired man who is frequently stranded by operators passing him and his guide dog by. (John Einarson/CBC)

Pereira has received several over the years.

After he submits a complaint, he receives a generic response from 311, followed by a personal message stating that his complaint has been forwarded to Winnipeg Transit.

Occasionally, he gets a personal call from management explaining the situation, but that has only happened once or twice in the last three years, he said.

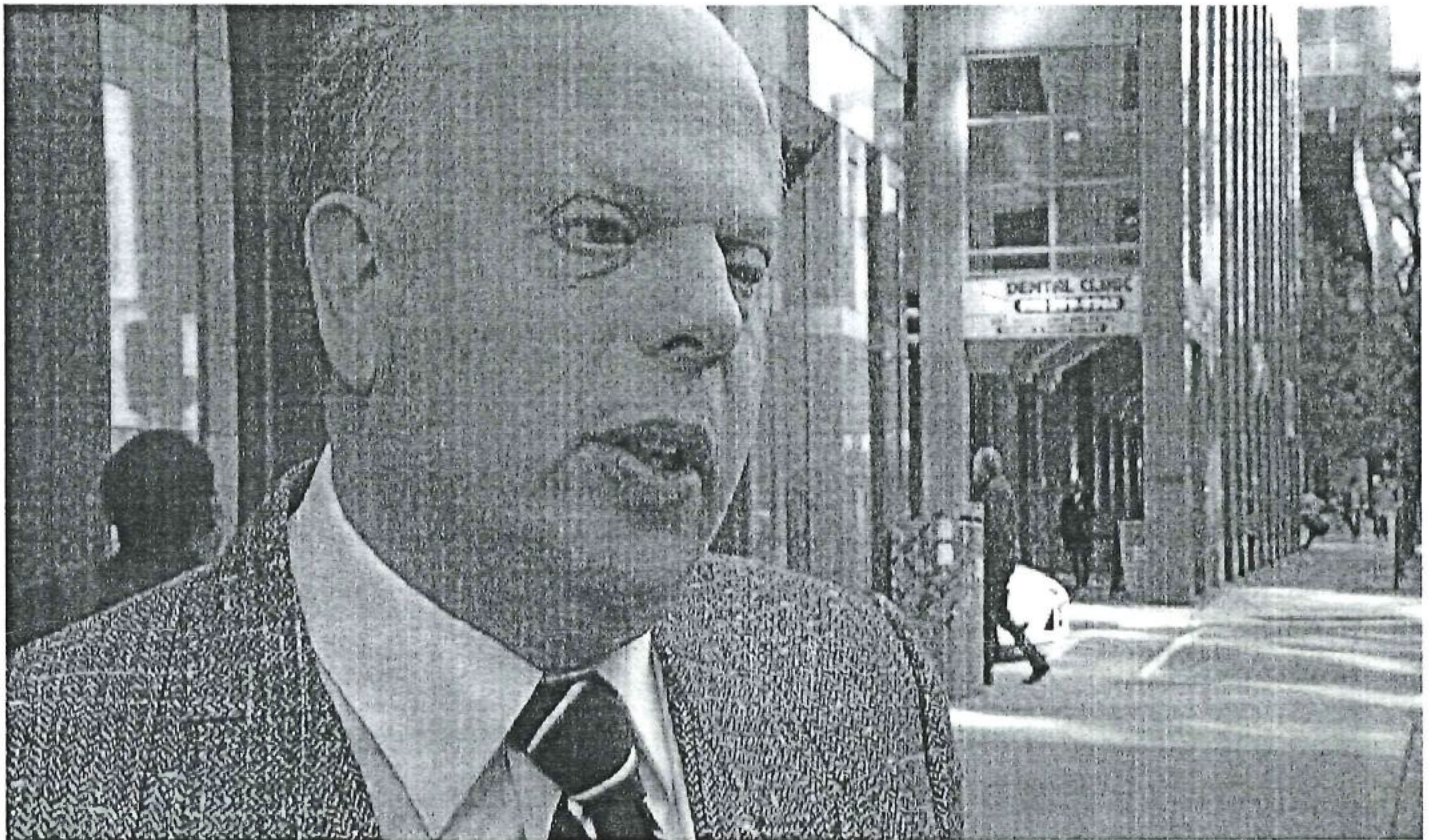
"[Management] apologize and they confirm that the policies are clear. Operators have to stop at the stop and they are here to provide a service," Pereira said.

"So the rules and policies and regulations are all in place, it's just an issue of compliance with a number of individual operators."

Enforcement needed

Disability rights advocates say government legislation is key to compliance, but it needs to be followed up with effective enforcement.

"If we had a seatbelt law but we knew that the police would never stop anyone and ticket them for not wearing their seatbelt, we know for a fact that people will be far less likely to wear seatbelts," said David Lepofsky, a lawyer and disability rights advocate known for his work with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act.



David Lepofsky is a lawyer and disability rights advocate. (CBC)

Ontario's accessibility laws came into effect in 2005, eight years before the Accessibility for Manitobans Act became law in Manitoba. Lepofsky says that while the standards under the Ontario law are clear, a lack of effective enforcement is preventing systemic change.

- **Toronto needs new plan to be barrier free as accessibility becomes law, says advocate**

Without effective enforcement, the only recourse for those encountering barriers is to head to the courts.

"These barriers are all illegal — they all violate the Human Rights Code — but people with disabilities don't want to have to fight barriers one at a time, and obligated organizations don't want to have to face human rights complaints one barrier at a time," said Lepofsky.

After dozens of complaints through 311 and in writing to his city counsellor, Pereira said he doesn't know what else to do other than turn to media.

"I've even spoken to management at Transit and they understand my frustrations and they're doing what they can. I feel like this has to come from the Amalgamated Transit Union itself to encourage its members to make that cultural shift to start providing the service," Pereira said.

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act's Customer Service Standard Regulation does not include information about what to do if an organization is non-compliant.

CBC Manitoba wants to hear from you as the first standard of the Accessibility for Manitobans Act comes into full effect. Are you living with a disability? Do you face barriers when accessing goods and services in Manitoba? Connect with us by emailing kim.kaschor@cbc.ca.