
Levy to Support Accessible Taxi Services

Recommendation

1. That the City Solicitor, in drafting the stand-alone Transportation Network Company Bylaw, be requested to include provisions for an accessibility levy of \$0.07 per trip;
2. That the Transportation Network Company Bylaw establish no requirements to provide accessibility standards within Transportation Network Company dispatch apps.

Topic and Purpose

This report provides further information to address a resolution arising from the Regular Business Meeting of City Council on July 23, 2018 regarding options to apply levies or other mechanisms on the ride-sharing industry to support accessible taxi services. This report also provides further information regarding the inclusion of accessibility features in the apps used by Transportation Network Companies.

Report Highlights

1. Several Canadian municipalities charge levies to support accessible taxi service with a charge of \$0.07 per trip seen as the standard fee in a number of municipalities.
2. The Administration is recommending adoption of a levy of \$0.07 per Transportation Network Company (TNC) trip to support accessible taxi service.
3. Apps developed by TNCs to dispatch vehicles can be designed to incorporate accessibility features that assist customers in utilizing the app. A jurisdictional scan of interactive accessibility in TNC digital networks determined that municipalities in Canada are not currently regulating these features and that the pending federal *Accessible Canada Act* may require accessibility features in apps in the future.

Strategic Goals

This report supports the Strategic Goal of Continuous Improvement by leveraging technology and emerging trends, and going beyond conventional approaches to meet the changing needs of the city and expectations of its citizens. The Strategic Goal of Moving Around is also supported by optimizing the flow of people and goods in and around the city.

Background

At its July 23, 2018 meeting, City Council considered a report from the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation regarding taxi service proposals and the regulation of TNCs, and resolved, in part:

“That the Administration report back on options for the City of Saskatoon to apply levies or other mechanisms to support the provision of accessible services in the ride-sharing industry, including an analysis of best practices for other municipalities and consideration of interactive accessibility in TNC digital networks, to be brought forward to the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation by September 2018”.

At their meeting on August 27, 2018, City Council resolved that the Administration’s report be redirected from the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation meeting on September 10, 2018, to the City Council Regular Business meeting on September 24, 2018. This report is provided in response to these resolutions.

Report

Municipal Scan of Levies to Support Accessible Taxis

The costs associated with operating an accessible taxi are higher than operating a non-accessible taxi; accessible taxi owners incur additional costs in installing accessible features in vehicles, and may incur additional time in providing accessible rides (such as the time required to secure wheelchairs), which cannot be charged to the customer.

In order to establish a fund that can be used to offset some of the costs of owners and operators who provide accessible service, several Canadian municipalities which permit TNCs have implemented levies on TNCs and in some cases, on non-accessible taxis. While the approach by municipalities varies, a standard levy for this purpose is \$0.07 per TNC trip. A detailed comparison is provided in Attachment 1.

Recommended Levy to Support Accessible Taxis

Based on review of best practices in other cities and discussions with staff in those municipalities, the Administration is recommending that a levy of \$0.07 per TNC trip be incorporated in the bylaw regulating the operation of TNCs in Saskatoon. This is a similar rate to what is being applied in other municipalities. It is recommended that the levy only be applied to TNC trips, as the taxi industry currently provides accessible service. Currently there are five permanent and 21 temporary accessible taxis licensed in Saskatoon.

It is difficult to estimate the number of trips that will be conducted in the first year of licensing; however, based on data received from the City of Calgary, it is estimated that approximately 350,000 trips may be conducted by TNCs in the first year of licensing. Based on a rate of \$0.07 per trip, this would generate \$24,500 in levies.

This report does not detail a suggested process for distributing the funds raised through the levy. It is recommended that the City apply the levy for approximately one year in order to establish a base fund, and that a report be brought forward, at that time, recommending a system for distribution. Consideration for dispersal could include grants to accessible taxi owners to partially reimburse conversion costs, and/or for provision of rebates to accessible taxi drivers to compensate them for additional time spent providing accessible rides.

Jurisdictional Scan of Interactive Accessibility in TNC Digital Networks

Apps developed by TNCs to dispatch vehicles for hire can be designed to incorporate accessibility features that assist customers with disabilities to better utilize the app. Internally-recognized standards have also been developed by private industry to establish criteria for accessibility features.

The Government of Canada currently uses the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (WCAG 2.0) as a standard for the digital and web content that they publish. WCAG 2.0 were developed by the Accessibility Guidelines Working Group which is part of the World Wide Web Consortium Web Accessibility Initiative.

WCAG 2.0 states that “following these guidelines will make content accessible to a wider range of people with disabilities, including blindness and low vision, deafness and hearing loss, learning disabilities, cognitive limitations, limited movement, speech disabilities, photosensitivity and combinations of these. Following these guidelines will also often make your Web content more usable to users in general”.

Examples of WCAG 2.0 standards include:

- a) text alternatives that can convert text into other forms, such as large print, speech, symbol or simpler language;
- b) alternatives to time-based media (e.g. videos), such as audio descriptions and captions; and
- c) support distinguishability by not using colour as the only visual means of conveying information.

While the Government of Canada requires compliance with WCAG 2.0 for the digital content that they publish, private industries regulated by the Government of Canada are not required to comply.

The Government of Canada is introducing the *Accessible Canada Act* (Bill C-81). It is anticipated that Bill C-81 will include standards for information and communication technologies of all digital content for industries regulated by the Government of Canada.

The Administration conducted a municipal scan of existing and proposed TNC regulations and was unable to identify any municipalities in Canada which regulate accessibility features in TNC dispatch apps.

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For the above-noted reasons, the Administration is not recommending that accessibility standards for TNC dispatch apps be adopted.

Options to the Recommendation

City Council could choose to adopt a different levy rate. City Council could also choose to apply the levy to non-accessible trips provided by the taxi industry. This is not recommended at this time as a process for distributing the funds to accessible taxis has not been established.

Alternatively, City Council could choose to delay implementing a levy on TNC trips for approximately one year which will allow the Administration to collect data on the number of trips conducted, and to provide a more accurate estimate of the funds which could be collected. This approach is not recommended, as revenue to support accessible service will be foregone during this time period.

With respect to requirements for accessibility provisions in apps provided by TNCs, City Council could choose to direct the City Solicitor to include provisions in the proposed TNC Bylaw which requires transportation network dispatch companies to use apps that comply with WCAG 2.0. This approach is not recommended due to the significant staffing resources that will be required to analyze apps in order to verify compliance with the guidelines. In addition the proposed *Accessible Canada Act* may regulate digital content at the federal level.

Public and/or Stakeholder Involvement

On August 8, 2018, the Administration conducted additional consultation with taxi industry representatives to discuss potential for a joint proposal that would provide additional flexibility for the industry to better address high demand periods. Provision of additional accessible taxi licenses may be a component of such a proposal. Specifics regarding an accessible levy fee were not discussed, however it was noted that such a fee had merit in helping to ensure a level playing field.

Communication Plan

If the proposed TNC Bylaw is adopted by City Council, the public and industry will be informed through news releases, social media, and the City's website.

Policy Implications

Policy implications are addressed in this report and will be further considered in subsequent reports.

Financial Implications

At its meeting on July 23, 2018, City Council directed the City Solicitor to prepare the TNC Bylaw, which included a TNC license fee structure based on the number of vehicles in a fleet and the number of trips conducted. If a levy on TNC trips to support accessible taxi service is adopted, this fee can be collected at the time that TNC licensing fees are collected.

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The financial implications will vary depending on the direction provided by City Council. Financial implications will be considered further in subsequent reports.

Other Consideration/Implications

There are no environmental, privacy, or CPTED implications or considerations.

Due Date for Follow-up and/or Project Completion

A TNC Bylaw will be submitted to City Council for consideration at a future date. Following the first year of licensing TNCs, it is recommended that a report outlining options for dispersal of the funds that have been collected in support of accessibility services, and including a review of the levy amount and its applicability to the various forms of rideshare services, be brought forward for City Council's consideration.

Public Notice

Public Notice, pursuant to Section 3 of Policy No. C01-021, Public Notice Policy, is not required.

Attachment

1. Municipal Scan of Levies to Support Accessible Taxi Service

Report Approval

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