

City of Ottawa  
Taxi and Limousine Regulation  
and Service Review  
**Accessibility**



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### Disclaimer

This document has been prepared by KPMG LLP (“KPMG”) for the City of Ottawa (“Client”) pursuant to the terms of our engagement agreement with Client dated August 25, 2015 (the “Engagement Agreement”) for the purpose of informing discussion during the City of Ottawa Taxicab and Limousine Regulations and Services. KPMG neither warrants nor represents that the information contained in this document is accurate, complete, sufficient or appropriate for use by any person or entity other than Client or for any purpose other than set out in the Engagement Agreement. This document may not be relied upon by any person or entity other than Client, and KPMG hereby expressly disclaims any and all responsibility or liability to any such person or entity in connection with their use of this report is hereby disclaimed.

Our procedures consisted solely of inquiry, observation, comparison and analysis of project participant-provided information. It was augmented by limited research of publicly-available information. We relied on the completeness and accuracy of the information provided or research. Such work does not constitute an audit. Accordingly, we will express no opinion.

# Accessibility Service in Ottawa

## 1. Introduction

There are four tiers of public transportation in Ottawa for persons with disabilities:

- Accessible buses – All OC Transpo buses can now load and accommodate persons in wheelchairs.
- Para-Transpo – OC Transpo operates the Para-Transpo service dedicated to serving registered users that have limited mobility. Generally intended to be the equivalent of the public transit (bus) system for persons who cannot use the buses, the service provides door to door service at the same price as transit fares, but generally requires advance booking of the trip. Service is provided using a combination of accessible vehicles and contracted taxis (both regular sedan and accessible taxis).
- Accessible taxicabs – 187 taxi licenses have been issued on the condition that they be used for vehicles that can accommodate a passenger in a wheelchair, including a motorized wheelchair. Persons with limited mobility but not requiring a wheelchair can also be accommodated in standard taxis. This provides the same level of service available to able bodied people with the same fare levels and roughly equivalent wait times.
- Para-Transpo also provides subsidized taxi coupons for registered users, improving access to taxi services.

## 2. History of Accessible Taxi Service in Ottawa

In November 2002 Ottawa City Council gave final approval to the process for issuing accessible taxi plates for the first time.

- City to issue 25 accessible plates
- Plates to be issued by lottery / \$1 per plate
- All licensed drivers/taxicab owners are eligible subject to completion of Accessible Training Program
- More than one driver per car permitted
- Accessible vehicles can operate in all zones (other taxis were still limited by the former municipal boundaries)

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- Must initially use vehicle 2 model years or less
- Accessible plates are transferable and can be sold after 5 years in business<sup>i</sup>

In January 2007 Ottawa City Council gave approval to issue 40 additional accessible taxi licenses to deal with long wait times experienced by customers<sup>ii</sup>.

In July 2007 Ottawa City Council announced further changes to the taxi bylaw including issuing 40 new licenses per year for wheelchair accessible taxis for 3 years to bring the total number from 65 to 185<sup>iii</sup>. In time 187 licenses were issued and are now in service.

### 3. Para Transpo Services

#### i. Background and Eligibility

Para Transpo provides door-to-door transportation service to persons with permanent or short-term disabilities who are unable to use conventional transit all or some of the time. The service is available within the taxi service area (generally the urban areas) and for rural residents who are traveling between rural and urban destinations in the City of Ottawa<sup>iv</sup>.

To become eligible for Para Transpo service customers must complete a 10-page application form and have it signed by a health care practitioner such as a physician, physiotherapist, an occupational therapist or a chiropractor. Once an application is reviewed Para Transpo notifies the applicant of their eligibility by mail. Customers may be eligible on a temporary, permanent or winter-only basis. An appeal process exists for persons who are denied eligibility. Visitors to the city who require this service can apply for temporary service<sup>v</sup>.

Types of disabilities would include persons who are bound to a wheelchair, who require the use of a mobility device such as crutches, a walker or a cane, persons who require the use of a service animal, such as the visually impaired. The application states that “Persons with a disability would generally be considered eligible for Para Transpo if by attempting to use OC Transpo’s regular fixed-route transit service, their health would be severely endangered or the attempt would likely lead to bodily harm”. It goes on to say “A person with a disability, who does not qualify for Para Transpo’s door-to-door service in the summer months, may still be eligible for service during the winter”<sup>vi</sup>. An example of a person who would be eligible for Para Transpo on a winter-only basis may be a person who is visually impaired who can navigate the regular fixed-route service except when there is ice and snow on the ground.

#### ii. Bookings, Usage and Cost

Most trips are “regular bookings” - that is where the passenger has to be at the same destination at the same time on the same day of the week for at least one month<sup>vii</sup>. This accommodates employment, school, and regular medical, shopping and personal trips.

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Passengers requiring casual transportation must book their ride one day in advance, and availability at specific times may be limited by available capacity. Passengers with a mobility device are able to book their ride starting at 7am the prior day, where as other eligible passengers who do not use a mobility device can make their booking after 9am on the prior day. Para Transpo reports that 5.5% of all trip requests are refused. Refusal rates are higher for casual (next day) trips by persons who do not use a mobility device. Trip refusals include cases when the trip request can be accommodated, but not at the time requested.

Pick-up times are scheduled on the hour and half hour and pick-ups usually occur within 30 minutes of the requested pick-up time, with the result that pick-up is actually scheduled to occur within a one hour period. The maximum number of casual trips that may be booked by a customer is 4 per day.

OC Transpo is currently reviewing its policies for Para Transpo service customer eligibility and booking processes<sup>viii</sup>.

Para Transpo fares per ride are comparable to the PRESTO card fares for regular OC Transpo transportation, which are currently \$2.85 for adults, \$2.15 for seniors and \$1.55 for children<sup>ix</sup>. There is a flat rate of \$8.80 for rides to or from a rural area.

Coventry Connections and West-Way Taxi are under contract to Para Transpo to provide both sedan (West-Way) and accessible (Coventry) taxis to provide rides for Para Transpo customers, as an alternative to service provided by the OC Transpo vans. The agreement states that at least 80 cabs must be available to service Para Transpo riders when needed. Although not required, they tend to provide the service by dedicating specific taxis to the contract work for the day – or at least a significant part of the day. Although the work is more demanding and stressful, it is generally a preferred assignment as incomes are higher than in regular dispatch service.

Para Transpo manages the scheduling of its own fleet of 89 vans and the contracted taxis by scheduling based on vehicle capacity. When scheduling service, group trips are scheduled to the higher capacity Para Transpo vans first and then the remaining trips are scheduled to the lower capacity taxi vehicles.

The following table outlines the revenue and expense detail relating to the Para Transpo service.

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<b>Para Transpo Service<sup>x</sup></b>	
<b>Revenue and Expense Figures Year Ending December 31, 2014</b>	
<b>Funding:</b>	
Passenger revenue	\$ 2,260,000
Municipal contributions	<u>\$ 30,868,000</u>
Total funding	\$ 33,128,000
<b>Expenditures:</b>	
Operations	\$ 29,058,000
Administration and service management	\$ 2,370,000
Provision for reserves	<u>\$ 1,700,000</u>
Total expenditures	\$ 33,128,000

Para Transpo reports there are approximately 12,000 registered Para Transpo Users who were served on nearly 884,000 trips in 2014. The average cost per trip in 2014 was \$37.48.

<b>Para Transpo Service<sup>xi</sup></b>	
<b>Performance Measures, 2014</b>	
<b>Trips:</b>	
Total Passenger Trips	884,000
Cost per trip	\$ 37.48
Revenue service hours	205,000
Cost per hour	\$ 161.60
Revenue vehicle km	6,688,000
Cost per km	\$ 4.95

For contracted services, the taxi companies are paid the metered taxi fare plus a 15% overhead surcharge by Para Transpo, which in total represents an annual cost of approximately \$9 million. Para Transpo reports an average savings of \$10 per trip when contracted taxis are used rather than the OC Transpo vans.

## **4. Taxi Coupon Program**

### **i. Background and Eligibility**

The Taxi Coupon Program allows Para Transpo customers to take discounted taxi service as an alternative to Para Transpo. Passengers are able to book a trip directly with participating Ottawa taxi companies. Registered Para Transpo customers buy coupons in advance and use these coupons to pay for their taxi ride. A coupon book worth \$40 in taxi fares costs customers \$24; and each coupon book has a selection of \$1, \$2 and \$5 coupons. Eligible customers are permitted to buy up to 4 books each month. Coupons are accepted at face value and taxi drivers are not able to provide change to passengers. Family and friends may travel with the eligible customer at no extra charge, up to the capacity of the vehicle<sup>xii</sup>. Taxi drivers are paid the face value of the coupons. The subsidized portion of the coupon is paid for by Para Transpo.

### **ii. Usage and Cost**

Para Transpo reports that a total of 16,452 \$40-coupon booklets were sold in 2014. On average 413 registered Para Transpo customers purchased the taxi coupon books each month. Para Transpo paid \$345,339 for the subsidized portion of the Taxi Coupon program.

## **5. Accessible Taxis**

### **i. Background Information**

Ottawa currently has 187 accessible taxi licenses, which represents 15.7% of the total amount of 1,188 licensed taxis.

The definition of accessible taxicab according to the City of Ottawa Bylaw means a taxicab that is used for the provision of taxicab service to persons with disabilities; that is subject to federal and provincial legislation applicable to the transportation of persons with disabilities; and that has been issued an accessible taxi plate<sup>xiii</sup>.

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The City of Ottawa bylaw stipulates that an accessible taxicab driver must do the following when a person with a disability has requested accessible taxicab service:

- bring the accessible taxicab as close as lawfully possible to the building's accessible entrance or such other entrance as directed by the person;
- take appropriate measures to notify the person of the arrival of the taxicab including ringing a residence and waiting at least three (3) minutes for a response;
- accompany the person to and from the immediate interior of the building;
- provide support and carry items for the person;
- carefully fasten the passenger seat belt;
- secure the person's mobility aids in accordance with the vehicle and equipment specifications;
- politely inquire and address the person's needs and concerns before assisting the person into the accessible taxicab and commencing the accessible taxicab service; and,
- request and wait for paramedic services if the person develops a need for medical attention during the trip if a friend or family member is not present<sup>xiv</sup>

Licensed accessible taxi drivers must also pre-arrange or pre-book return trips for accessible taxicab service when requested to do so and to ensure the return trip is provided by informing the taxicab broker and dispatcher of the details of the return trip. Accessible taxicab service must be provided on a priority basis to any person with a disability who requests the service.

An accessible taxicab which is used to provide accessible taxicab service must be configured at all times to transport a minimum of one standard motorized wheelchair or scooter without having to reconfigure vehicle equipment or remove passenger seats to accommodate such wheelchair or scooter.

Most of the time accessible taxis are serving able bodied clients. Coventry Connections reports that on average each accessible taxicab (in their fleet) provides service to a mobility impaired person once every two days when it is not under contract to Para Transpo. The company reports that a mobility impaired person calling their dispatch service is virtually guaranteed immediate dispatch. That was the intention of the City in issuing 187



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licenses. When not serving mobility impaired individuals wheelchair accessible vehicles are included in the queue to provide regular service.

### ii. Usage and Cost

The total # of dispatched accessible fares has increased from 9,764 in 2011 to 15,610 in 2013, which is still less than 1% of dispatched fares. When accessible service provided through the contract with Para Transpo is included, trips requiring accessible service are about 3% of total taxi trips<sup>xv</sup>.

Fares for both sedan taxicabs and accessible taxi cabs are the same, however operation of accessible taxicabs is more expensive, based on data provided by Coventry Connections. Transporting a person in a wheelchair also takes more time for the taxi driver, with the need to assist the person to get to the vehicle, to board the vehicle and to tie down the wheelchair.

<b>Operating Costs per Day: Sedan vs. Accessible Taxicab<sup>xvi</sup></b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Sedan Taxicab</b>	<b>Accessible Taxicab</b>
Taxicab*	\$ 12.01	\$ 42.73
Insurance**	\$ 25.64	\$ 27.24
Vehicle Maintenance***	\$ 15.38	\$ 26.92
Gas****	\$ 70.00	\$ 100.00
Total	\$ 123.03	\$ 196.89

Note: All cost estimates provided by Coventry Connections and have not been analyzed or corroborated.

\* Sedan taxicab: 3 years old at time of purchase, used for 4 years. Initial cost \$15,000. Accessible taxicab: 3 years old at time of purchase and used over a period of 3 years. Initial cost \$40,000.

\*\* Insurance cost estimated at \$8,000 per year for two drivers in a sedan vehicle and \$8,500 per year for two drivers in an accessible vehicle

\*\*\*Vehicle maintenance including parts, labour and consumables at \$400 per month in a sedan taxicab and \$700 per month in an accessible taxicab

\*\*\*\*Fuel cost estimated for a gasoline engine. 2 shifts per day. \$35 per shift in a sedan taxicab and \$50 per shift in an accessible taxicab

## 6. Accessible Service in Other Cities

The table below shows that Ottawa has a relatively high proportion of accessible plates as it was one of the first to establish a separate category of accessible plates for use in general taxi service. Many other cities are moving to expand the number of accessible plates they have.

<b>Taxi Permits Issues by City</b>						
<b>City</b>	<b>Popu- lation</b>	<b>Stand- ard Plates</b>	<b>Access- ible * Plates</b>	<b>Other Plates</b>	<b>Total Plates</b>	<b>% Access- ible</b>
<b>Ottawa</b>	<b>883,391</b>	<b>1,001</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,188</b>	<b>16%</b>
Montreal	1,886,481	4,316	206	0	4,522	5%
Edmonton	877,926	1,185	95****	0	1185	8%
Los Angeles	3,928,864	2,353	220****	0	2,353	10%
Vancouver	640,469	476	113	99	687	16%
New York City	8,491,079	13,437	233	12,000	25,670	1%
Chicago	2,722,389	6,741	162	0	6,903	2%
Boston	655,884	1,725	100	0	1,825	6%
Washington D.C.	658,893	6,300	0	0	6,300	0%
San Francisco***	852,469	2,210	100	0	2,310	4%
Indianapolis***	903,393	800	0	0	800	0%
Minneapolis***	382,578	687	0	0	687	0%
Seattle	608,660	688	45*****	0	688	7%

\* Accessible means a passenger vehicle or a bus, other than a school bus, that is designed or modified to be used for the purpose of transporting persons with disabilities

\*\* Figures in local currency - most are estimates and may not be accurate

\*\*\* Data from previous Hara Associates study

\*\*\*\* Approximate figure, accessible taxis permits are included in the total Standard and Other plate categories

\*\*\*\*\* Note that 45 accessible taxis are licensed by King County, but can serve Seattle

Source: Data from websites of licensing agencies.

Note that in some cities some or even all accessible taxicabs are under contract to public transit agencies and may not be available for other calls.

## 7. Application Based Service Models and Accessibility

App Based Service Model (ABSM) or ridesharing services, such as Uber, primarily involve the use of a private vehicle to give rides for compensation. This model inherently does not lend itself to accessible-friendly service as the majority of private vehicles are not equipped with the required equipment for the transportation of mobility impaired persons.

For those with physical disability, Uber reports that all transportation providers that partner with them are able to accommodate folding wheelchairs, although with the increased popularity of scooters, there are far fewer folding wheelchairs in regular use today.

Uber launched Uber WAV (Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle) in August 2014. Passengers can request wheelchair accessible vehicles by using the regular app and selecting the WAV option. This service is currently only available in the boroughs of NYC<sup>xvii</sup>.

In some cities, including Toronto, Uber has partnered with transportation providers with wheelchair accessible vehicles. Where the service is available users can request a wheelchair accessible vehicle through the Uber app and the request is transferred to the partner provider. The company reports that it is currently working to partner with wheelchair accessible transportation providers across the country. Pricing and wait time information was not available at the time of writing. This option is not currently available in Ottawa.

For the vision impaired the Uber app is VoiceOver iOS compatible. This service is available on iPhones. The VoiceOver functionality can be used in connection with a wireless braille display or it can be used to help the user navigate the app by reading a description of the button aloud when the user touches it. The pickup and destination locations can be entered into the app by dictating it through iPhone's microphone. The estimated fare is then read aloud through the iPhone. Once the trip is confirmed the user can hear the driver name, rating and vehicle information. A notification is read aloud upon arrival of the driver as well.

Several accessibility options exist for the hard of hearing who are using the Uber app with an iPhone. Visible and vibrating alerts can be enabled so that the user receives the alert whenever a new Uber notification has been sent, for example when a driver has been assigned, the driver has arrived or when a ride is canceled. The visible alert causes the iPhone's LED light to flash.

## **8. Application Based Service Models and Accessibility in Other Cities**

Some cities that have adopted – or are considering – licensing changes to accommodate ABSMs have addressed the accessibility issue in different ways.

The Toronto, Edmonton and Waterloo draft proposals either do not have provisions with respect to accessible service, or the requirement is simply to refer the service request to another service provider that has the capability<sup>xviii</sup>. In California regulators do not require Transportation Network Companies to be wheelchair accessible.

A number of jurisdictions, such as Washington, DC did not require accessible service from ABSMs, but they did stipulate that drivers cannot impose additional or special charges for providing the service to an individual with a disability. It also states that digital dispatchers shall train drivers how to properly and safely handle mobility equipment and how to treat persons with disabilities.

However in New York City, regulators have added a \$.30 surcharge on each trip to fund accessible services.<sup>xix</sup>

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