

**Agenda – Standing Policy Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works –  
December 4, 2020**

**REPORTS**

**Item No. 1                      Wheelchair Priority Spaces on Transit Buses**

**WINNIPEG PUBLIC SERVICE RECOMMENDATION:**

That the report be received as information.

**Agenda – Standing Policy Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works –  
December 4, 2020**

DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

COUNCIL DECISION:

On May 29, 2020, Council concurred in the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works and adopted the following:

1. That the Winnipeg Public Service be directed to engage in public consultation with respect to accessible seating on transit buses and include the following:
  - A. Policies from other jurisdictions related to strollers, priority and courtesy seating and driver assistance for persons requiring accessible seating.
  - B. The number of pass-ups recorded by Winnipeg Transit.
  - C. Barriers experienced by wheelchair users trying to navigate the current configuration.
  - D. Challenges experienced at rush hour versus non-rush hour conditions.
  - E. The impact of *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act* Transportation Standard draft legislation on Winnipeg Transit Policy.
  - F. The financial implications and rider impact of removing the flip-up bench at the front of the bus.
2. That the Winnipeg Public Service be directed to report back to the Standing Policy Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works within 180 days.
3. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the forgoing.

## ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

**Title:** Accessible Seating on Transit Buses

**Critical Path:** Standing Policy Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works

### AUTHORIZATION

Author	Department Head	CFO	CAO
T. Platt	G. Ewankiw	N/A	M. Ruta, Interim CAO

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Winnipeg Transit has a fully accessible, low floor fleet of buses. The ability of buses to kneel to the curb and deploy a ramp provides all citizens with the ability to access public transportation.

In alignment with other major Canadian transit properties, Winnipeg Transit has two wheelchair positions and seats that flip up in order to maximize the use of the priority seating area for passengers with various needs. Once the seats are flipped up, the floor space is opened to allow access for passengers using mobility aids, such as a wheelchair or scooter. The floor space is necessary for the turning radius of a mobility device and for the maneuvering required to position the device into the designated area.

All transit properties that responded to the Canadian Urban Transportation Agency (CUTA) survey related to priority seating on conventional buses have designated space for individuals with disabilities. Due to the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) transit systems in Ontario have distinct policies about the priority and courtesy seating areas, while some also have detailed stroller policies. Of the Transit systems in other cities across Canada that responded to the CUTA survey many also have policies related to the priority seating area, but are silent on stroller policies (details in Appendix A).

Systems that have specific policies distinguish between priority seating and courtesy seating. Priority seating is designated for the use of passengers with a disability. Passengers are expected to respect and obey the purpose of the designated priority seating area, which means seats must be vacated for a passenger with a disability.

Courtesy seating on buses is intended to provide additional seating for people who will benefit from having a seat near the front of the vehicle including; seniors, expectant mothers, adults travelling with infants or small children, and any other passenger who may benefit from a seat. Others sitting in these seats are expected to give up their seats to these passengers, however there is no enforcement.

To meet the proposed Manitoba legislation, Winnipeg Transit will be required to:

- better define the use of the designated priority seating area and move from a policy of first come-first serve to ensure that individuals with disabilities have priority for using the

space, if the seats are already occupied with an individual with a visible or invisible disability then it would again be first come first serve;

- implement and train all operators to provide assistance with the securements and to facilitate the use of the space for individuals with disabilities;
- develop a process to ensure that individuals with a disability that are passed up are either picked up within 25 minutes of the pass up or arrange for alternative transportation that meets their needs, and;
- create a comprehensive communication strategy that will outline the priority seating and courtesy seating area policy.

Participants in the public engagement identified the following issues as the top five barriers as “a frequent or significant barrier for me” (for a full public engagement summary refer to Appendix B);

- Lack of community understanding of invisible disabilities (23%).
- Lack of space in the priority seating area for mobility aids and strollers (22%)
- Riders not offering up their seats in the priority space to those using mobility aids (18%).
- Lack of operator support with asking passengers to offer their seat (17%).
- Lack of operator support with disability awareness (17%)

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the report be received as information.

## **REASON FOR THE REPORT**

On May 29, 2020, Council directed the Winnipeg Public Service to report back to the Standing Policy Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works to engage in public consultations with respect to accessible seating on transit buses and respond within 180 days to the following;

- A. Policies from other jurisdictions related to strollers, priority and courtesy seating and driver assistance for persons requiring accessible seating.
- B. The number of pass-ups recorded by Winnipeg Transit.
- C. Barriers experienced by wheelchair users trying to navigate the current configuration.
- D. Challenges experienced at rush hour versus non-rush hour conditions.
- E. The impact of *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act* Transportation Standard draft legislation on Winnipeg Transit Policy.
- F. The financial implications and rider impact of removing the flip-up bench at the front of the bus.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

There are no financial implications associated with the recommendation presented in this report as the report is to be received as information.

## HISTORY/DISCUSSION

Winnipeg Transit has a fully accessible, easy access low floor fleet of buses. The ability of buses to kneel to the curb and deploy a ramp provides more citizens with the ability to access public transportation.

The priority seating area in the accessible buses is designed for passengers who require additional boarding time and space for mobility aids. The priority seating area is located at the front of the bus and is designated by posted signage. The configuration of the priority seating may vary depending on the bus series; however, a typical layout would incorporate six seats that face inward and four seats that face forward. Given the limited space in the priority area, it can sometimes be a challenge to balance the needs of all riders and provide adequate wheelchair space, and also accommodate those individuals with other disabilities who require a seat in the same area.

In alignment with other major Canadian transit properties, Winnipeg Transit has two wheelchair positions and seats that flip up in order to maximize the use of the priority seating area for passengers with various needs. Once the seats are flipped up, the floor space is opened to allow access for passengers using mobility aids, such as a wheelchair or scooter. The floor space is necessary for the turning radius of a mobility device and for the maneuvering required to position the device into the designated area.

### **A. Policies from other jurisdictions related to strollers, priority and courtesy seating**

All transit properties that responded to the CUTA survey related to priority seating on conventional buses have a designated area for individuals with disabilities. Due to the direction of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (OADA)*, transit systems in Ontario have distinct policies about the priority and courtesy seating areas while some also have stroller policies. Of the Transit systems in other cities across Canada that responded to the CUTA survey, many also have policies related to the priority seating area, but are silent on stroller policies (details in Appendix A).

Systems that have specific policies distinguish between priority seating and courtesy seating. Priority seating is designated for the use of passengers with a disability. Passengers are expected to respect and obey the purpose of the designated priority seating area, which means seats must be vacated for a passenger with a disability.

A passenger with a disability occupying a priority seat is not required to move for another passenger with a disability. Under these circumstances the use of these seats is on a first come-first served basis. There is no expectation for a passenger to leave a transit vehicle in order to make room for a passenger with a disability. Bus operators are not expected to enforce the requirement for passengers to vacate a seat. Passengers who have paid a fare are not expected to leave the bus to make room for anyone.

Courtesy seating on buses is intended to provide additional seating for passengers who will benefit from having a seat near the front of the vehicle including; seniors, expectant mothers, adults travelling with infants or small children, and any other passenger who may benefit from a seat. Individuals sitting in these seats are expected to give up their seats to these passengers, however, there is no enforcement.

**B. The number of pass-ups recorded by Winnipeg Transit.**

Historically, the design of conventional buses created a systemic physical barrier where individuals with disabilities were unable to navigate the stairs making public transit inaccessible. In 1999, Winnipeg Transit acquired its first easy access low floor bus removing the physical barriers and providing individuals with an alternative and affordable transportation option. Low floor buses allowed individuals of varying abilities and their equipment spontaneity, and independence when travelling within their city. Ridership trends year over year demonstrate the increased use of conventional service by passengers with disabilities who use wheelchairs for mobility.

By 2017, Winnipeg Transit achieved a full fleet of easy access low floor buses. By 2021, Winnipeg Transit will see continued enhancements to the wheelchair securements on new buses as they update the Transit fleet.

With the increased access to Transit services, there is a greater demand to use the space near the front of the bus (priority area) for a variety of needs identified by Transit's Passengers. The trend of increased use of Transit by individuals with disabilities are projected to continue with an aging population and individuals with disabilities who are currently active in their community and want to maintain their independence. The increased demand for the priority seating area has created situations where Winnipeg Transit passengers have experienced periodic pass-ups as noted below.

Year	Wheelchair Boarding Notifications	Wheelchair Pass-Up Notifications
2017	59,230	733
2018	57,737	713
2019	59,227	738

**C. Barriers experienced by wheelchair users trying to navigate the current configuration.**

Individuals who participated in the public engagement and identified as having a visible or invisible disability (may not necessarily use a wheelchair) acknowledged the following as the most commonly experienced or witnessed barriers;

- Lack of community understanding around invisible disabilities (67%).
- Riders not offering seats at the front of the bus to those using mobility aids (60%).
- Lack of space in the front of the bus for all mobility aids and strollers (55%).
- Difficulty flipping up benches (55%).
- Lack of operator support with disability awareness (55%).

Individuals who participated in the online discussion identified the stanchion at the front of some of the bus as an obstacle to easy maneuvering of their mobility device.

For participants that identified as having a disability (194 of 417 respondents) they were supportive or highly supportive of the following corrective actions;

- Provide training to bus operators in how to encourage riders to vacate priority space (93%).
- Bus operators may ask riders to vacate priority space (90%).
- Post signage that tells passengers to move if someone with a disability requires seating at the front of the bus (87%).
- Post signage that shows highest priority passengers for the priority area (85%).
- Introduce priority space cards for those who require priority space to support their need when asking someone (76%).

#### **D. Challenges experienced at rush hour versus non-rush hour conditions.**

The public engagement did not differentiate between barriers experienced at rush-hour and non-rush-hour. However, participants in the public engagement identified the following issues as the top five barriers as “a frequent or significant barrier for me” (for a full public engagement summary refer to Appendix B);

- Lack of community understanding of invisible disabilities (23%).
- Lack of space in the priority seating area for mobility aids and strollers (22%)
- Riders not offering up their seats in the priority space to those using mobility aids (18%).
- Lack of operator support with asking passengers to offer their seat (17%).
- Lack of operator support with disability awareness (17%)

For all respondents to the survey, they supported the following options to improve the experience for riders with a disability on the buses which was very similar to those expressed by the respondents who identified as disabled;

- Provide training to bus operators in how to encourage riders to vacate priority space (89%).
- Bus operators may ask riders to vacate priority space (87%).
- Post signage that tells passengers to move if someone with a disability requires seating at the front of the bus (85%).
- Post signage that shows highest priority passengers for the priority area (82%).
- Post signage that encourages riders to ask for a seat if they need one (77%).

For the overall rider experience, respondents identified the following as the most common barriers they experienced or witnessed;

- Lack of space in the front of the bus for all mobility aids and strollers (90%).
- Difficulty flipping up benches (89%).
- Lack of community understanding around invisible disabilities (84%).
- Riders not offering seats at the front of the bus to those using mobility aids (82%).
- Conflicts between riders because of limited space at the front of the bus (80%).

#### **E. The impact of The Accessibility for Manitobans Act Transportation Standard draft legislation on Winnipeg Transit Policy.**

The relevant clauses that specifically relate to the priority seating area on buses of the proposed legislation state that:

- every conventional transportation service provider shall have clearly marked priority seating for persons with disabilities;
- have two or more allocated mobility aid spaces;
- spaces are equipped as appropriate with securement devices;
- the priority seating area, and mobility aid spaces, be located as close as practicable to the entrance door of the vehicle;
- vehicle operators will assist if other passengers are refusing to vacate the priority seating and mobility aid spaces;
- other passengers are not required to vacate transportation vehicles to accommodate passengers with disabilities;
- passengers without disabilities shall vacate the priority seating if its use is required;
- mobility aid spaces may be used for other passenger purposes (such as strollers, baggage, etc.) if not required;
- if all priority seating and mobility aid spaces are occupied, and a passenger with a disability is not able to board the transportation vehicle, the vehicle operator shall inquire

when the next vehicle will arrive. If another transportation vehicle is not scheduled to arrive in 25 minutes or less, the conventional transportation service provider must arrange alternative transportation that best meets the needs of the passenger with a disability. If a passenger has already waited for a second transportation vehicle, the conventional transportation service provider must immediately arrange alternative transportation;

- conventional transportation providers and paratransit service providers will, upon request, provide assistance to an individual with disabilities to safely board and exit the vehicle and, securing themselves to the transportation vehicle;
- every conventional transportation service provider shall develop a communications strategy designed to inform the public about the purpose of priority seating and mobility aid spaces;
- conventional transportation service providers may have courtesy seating for seniors, expectant mothers, or passengers with small children, and;
- courtesy seating is in addition to and not the same as priority seating, which is seating specifically designated for people with disabilities.

To meet the proposed legislation, Winnipeg Transit will be required to:

- clearly define the use of the designated priority seating area and move from a policy of first come-first serve to ensure that individuals with disabilities have priority for using the space; if the seats are already occupied with an individual with a disability then it would again be first come first serve
- implement and train all operators to provide assistance with the securements and to facilitate the use of the space for individuals with disabilities;
- develop a process to ensure that individuals with a disability that are passed up are either picked up within 25 minutes of the pass up or arrange for alternative transportation that meets their needs, and;
- create a comprehensive communication strategy that will outline the priority seating and courtesy seating area policy.

#### **F. The financial implications and rider impact of removing the flip-up bench at the front of the bus.**

Removing the flip up seats would result in fewer available seats, which would make it more difficult for people with a mobility impairment and those who use assistive devices such as canes and walkers. Of those individuals who responded to the question; “*Do you use any of the following mobility assistance?*”, 49.6%, use canes and 24.1% use walkers in comparison to 30% that responded that they use a wheelchair or scooter. This would indicate that 73.7% of those that responded to the question would be negatively impacted by the removal of the flip up seats.

Respondents to the survey and those that took part in the online discussion did not identify the removal of the bench seats as a viable or preferred option to improve the accessibility of the buses. Contrary to removing the flip up benches, they expressed the fact that they felt that there are not enough seats for everyone who needs them at the front of the bus.

The financial impact of simply removing the three inward-facing bench seats is estimated to be \$500.00 per bus (\$321,000 for the bus fleet) for parts and labour. However, further consideration would have to be given for additional associated costs if there is a need to remove the two forward facing seats, upgrade or re-configure the securements and add stanchions.



It is also important to note that the removal of any seating in the priority area may have an impact on the demand for Transit Plus service as passengers with mobility impairments or those who use assistive devices would not have sufficient seats to meet their requirements.

<b>FINANCIAL IMPACT</b>
-------------------------

**Financial Impact Statement**      Date: [November 5, 2020](#)

---

**Project Name:**

**Accessible Seating on Transit Buses**

**COMMENTS:**

There is no financial impact from the recommendation in this report as it is for information only.

However there would be a financial impact associated with the removal of bus seats. As the report indicates, further analysis will be required based on the specifications needed to amend the bus configuration.

**Original signed by:**

Laurie Fisher, CPA, CA  
Manager of Finance & Administration

## **CONSULTATION**

This Report has been prepared in consultation with:

N/A

## **OURWINNIPEG POLICY ALIGNMENT**

The recommendations align with Our Winnipeg strategic goals for sustainable transportation. Section 01-1b promotes the creation of a safe efficient and equitable transportation system that encourages active, accessible and healthy lifestyle options.

## **WINNIPEG CLIMATE ACTION PLAN ALIGNMENT**

This report is in accordance with the Winnipeg Climate Action Plan (WCAP) as per Directions 3.1 *Increase Use and Efficiency of Public Transit Systems* (p.46).

Relevant actions include: Deliver continuous improvement in transit service with a focus on customer service, reliability, and route connectivity, and public education found on page 46 of the WCAP.

## **SUBMITTED BY**

Department: Transit  
Division: Client Services  
Prepared by: Teresa Platt, Acting Manager of Client Services  
Date: November 5, 2020

Attachments:  
Appendix A – Jurisdictional Scan

Appendix B – Public Engagement Summary