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Dear Council:

I am writing to urge Council not to approve the additional funding of the specialized transportation service/form of public transit. I also urge Council not to approve any increases in fares for those of us with disabilities. The RFP was quite clear on that criteria.

It is my understanding that the service provider has come to the County less than eight months after signing a contract to provide specialized transportation service/form of public transit for a specific amount submitted as part of an RFP process.

This is exactly what happened two years ago when the former service provider was accused of coming back to the County and asking for more money.

As a Council, you refused this in 2012 and hopefully you will refuse this ransoming of those of us with disabilities again.

It appears that the RFP and selection process is flawed in some way since this is the second consecutive time that a service provider has bid on a contract, been accepted and signed a legally binding document for a quality level of service for a specific amount, and then come back for more money.

This time ONLY 8 months into the contract!

We need to examine the RFP and selection process and make significant changes so that this doesn't keep happening.

Those of us with disabilities have endured discriminatory comments, a lack of respect, and cuts to the budget for specialized transportation service/form of public transit, the loss of holiday service, and the degradation of having to carry a "luggage tag" to identify us as people using specialized transportation.

We have also been blamed for the current situation simply because we use specialized transportation service/form of public transit.

It is clear from this request from the service provider that the problems lie with the service providers or the selection process and not with those of us with disabilities.

The County has the opportunity to create a well-functioning process for specialized transportation service/form of public transit before a conventional transit service is needed by the County. The population of those of us with disabilities is smaller and staff and Council can focus on creating this form of public transit that we can all be proud of.

We need to look at improving specialized transportation service, expanding hours and eventually expanding service to conventional transit. As I stated at the beginning of this entire mess in 2012: we have the opportunity to lead other municipalities.

We can't do this if service providers for those of us with disabilities are constantly holding us for ransom and demanding more money because they can't submit an accurate calculation for the required service.

We wouldn't accept this for other services and we must hold public transit service providers to the same standards.

I will accept that the County is committed to providing specialized transportation service/form of public transit and that the goal is not to eliminate it.

If we can agree that...

Specialized transportation service/form of public transit is NOT a "gift." As long as we cling to the notion that public transit is a gift or "charitable contribution" for any segment of the population, we will not treat it as a responsibility and part of the growth process of a municipality. In turn this means that we can continually be manipulated "out of charity" by service providers and not hold them accountable.

And...

What we need now is a public transit service provider who is equally committed, has an extensive background in specialized transit/public transit and will not keep coming back for more money to provide basic service outside of the normal budget process.

And...

We need to look at improving service not overpaying for basic service.

And...

We need to develop a five year strategic plan including service and budget increases that are realistic to the proportion of people with disabilities in our community. This is actually an article in the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulations: a multiyear Accessibility Plan for Specialized Transportation.

If a service provider is not able to fulfill their contract both parties can cancel it and the County can reissue the RFP, this time making it VERY clear that what you bid on is what you are held to.

A contract for specialized transportation service/public transit is separate from the primary business of the company. We have to start treating it as such. We are not supplementing the income of a service provider, we are contracting for a form of public transit with all of the standards, regulations and laws that apply to a public transit service. It doesn't matter that the vehicles used to provide this services are large busses, small

busses, minivans or cars; it is a contract for public transit. It is not an “extension” of the existing business.

As a potential service provider, you are accountable for your calculations and the choices are to provide the quality of service you said you would for the price you stated or cancel the contract so we can find someone who can.

The sooner we start the RFP process again, the sooner we can establish a quality specialized transportation service/form of public transit and the sooner we can find the breakdown in the process that facilitates this type of behaviour by service providers.

I would rather spend money finding a quality, reliable and qualified service provider than to keep throwing money at service providers who have no qualms about abusing us by holding those of us with disabilities ransom for more money because they underbid on a contract.

Sincerely yours,

Karen McCall, M.Ed.

CC: Paul Emerson, CAO
Accessibility Advisory Committee