

County of Brant Closer to Eliminating Para Transit

The Request for Proposals (RFP) for the “subsidized transportation program” is now out although the language in the document is confusing and appears to use “subsidized” and “specialized” interchangeably.

We still have no clear idea of the budget except it is \$200,000 for this year...maybe.

We have no clear idea of what the eligibility criteria is, whether it will follow Ontario Regulation 191/11, or what the process is to qualify for the transportation scheme.

We have no idea how this is to be “divided” among the service providers or if there is one service provider or several.

We have no idea what those of us with disabilities will be paying as our portion of specialized transportation services, how the specialized transportation service will be structured...nothing.

Remember that this whole mess started over the lack of a budget and yet somehow the budget and the structure of the payments/budget for Para transit has been lost in the mire of developing guidelines for the RFP...guidelines that violate the Integrated Accessibility Standards (IASR) and a few items from the Ontario Human Rights Code and perhaps one or two from the charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), which is mandated by provincial law to advise the municipality on following the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and its standards, approved the guidelines for the RFP without contacting the County Solicitor to find out what the legal liability of the committee is in approving guidelines that violate the provincial law and the very reason for their existence as a committee.

Apparently the AAC did ask for legal advice, but was told that “legal says they are fine. The mysterious “legal” supported the rebranding of specialized transportation service to a “subsidized transportation program” to avoid the IASR. The mysterious “legal” supported trip restrictions until the question was put to the County Solicitor who advised the County that they could not have trip restrictions.

While we did have a (well-publicized in the Expositor) “Accessibility Coordinator” for a few months, that person went to another municipality and the position was replaced with a “Community Relations” person. No word on what happened to the budgeted item for an Accessibility Coordinator or whether that position even exists now.

For the County, the “buck now clearly stops” at the Accessibility Advisory Committee who approved the guidelines. When human rights complaints are filed, it is obvious that fingers will point away from Council and Community Services where this all started and directly to the accessibility Advisory Committee, the current scapegoat.

Additionally, I've heard that the County is now considering opening up the "subsidized transportation program" to seniors and people with low income. This would mean that the "subsidized transportation program" would become a regular public transit service. As with everything else associated with this issue, facts and details are hard to find.

Has the budget increased to account for the increased projection in the number of people using what would now become a public transit service or conventional transportation service under the IASR and Ministry of Transport regulations?

Doesn't the addition of other segments of the population with the RFP out for bidding completely bog the process down and make it even more confusing than it is?

Of the total budget for specialized transportation service for 2013, what would remain for the last four months of the year (the life of the new contract) is approximately \$16,000 per month to provide Para transit to approximately 600 people with disabilities. The number of people eligible for "subsidized" transit could double or triple if seniors and people with low income are added to the contract.

A business bidding on this contract would have to provide a budget for all or part of the monthly \$16,000 and try to guess at whether they would be the only service provider or one of several; and whether the ridership was only people with disabilities or includes seniors and people with low income.

How can any business be expected to provide a bid for this type of contract?

There doesn't appear to be a review of the County Master Transportation Plan last updated in 2008 (as there currently is in Brantford).

There is no plan for Para transit past December 31, 2013, no budget for Para transit after December 31, 2013 and no glimmer that any such planning is going on. In effect, it appears that the County will successfully eliminate Para transit at the end of this year once the four month contract ends.

On one hand we have newspaper stories stating: that we need to be able to live "normal lives" (Paris Star cover story May 30, 2013) and ""We've all had the chance to help someone overcome a challenge because there are so many in our communities," Eddy said (quote from same article by Mayor Ron Eddy).

At the same time, the County appears to be the cause of most of those "challenges" with respect to our ability to access affordable and sustainable Para transit as there is still not even the acknowledgement that we need the specialized transportation service to continue and be affordable and sustainable to also be able to live "normal lives."

If there is a silver lining in this, it is that now that a decision has been made, human rights complaints can be filed. The statement that "if a human rights complaint is filed, the service will

stop” is now moot. There are no plans for the service past December 31, 2013. The apparent goal of elected officials to eliminate Para transit will be accomplished at that time.