

## Para Transit Catastrophe in the County: The Tsunami Continues

The County is poised to approve (again) yet another variant to the original transportation scheme that is unaffordable, limits the travel of people with disabilities, violates our basic and protected human rights, and is just as confusing and convoluted as all the other variants to the scheme over the past – yikes, almost a year now.

In addition, the eligibility criteria have changed to a WSIB form instead of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Part IV – Transportation (eligibility standards)...which is **STILL** provincial law.

It is not clear whether this means only workers with disabilities under WSIB will be eligible for the service. It is not clear whether using the WSIB form means that those of us with disabilities must look for work or whether those of us with disabilities who do work will even be eligible for para transit...a public transportation service.

It is not clear why the Integrated Accessibility Standards for eligibility are not being implemented. They are, after all, a provincial standard...and did I mention, **STILL** provincial law.

It is not clear whether the increase in funding to \$200,000 for 2013 was to fund a \$75,000 administration position for Para transit or if the entire amount will be used for the service itself.

It is not clear whether the County has a plan for Para transit (specialized transportation service) beyond 2013, what the yearly increase in budget will be or any other details related to the recently approved scheme are.

The domino Tsunami decision for this latest variant came from the Accessibility Advisory Committee for the County. At a special meeting on February 25, it appears from the minutes of the meeting that the AAC was told that they could not approve Option 2 of a staff recommendation (issue an RFP for contract) and **HAD** to approve the latest variant to the staff recommended scheme.

From the minutes of the February 25, 2013 AAC meeting: "...explained that the County cannot enter into a contractual agreement with a single provider..."

Why not? If this was never a serious option by the County why was the dissolved then resurrected ad hoc specialized transportation service committee tasked with identifying RFP/request for proposal/contract criteria last year by the Community Services Committee and County Council to replace the existing contract?

If a contract was never an option, why was it included in the staff recommendation to the AAC on February 25?

**AND**, the current specialized transportation service **IS** a contract.

There is still no clarity on what the limit to travel is (a human rights violation), what the criteria for extending that “limit” is (did I mention this is a violation of our human rights), whether the limit is also on the amount of a trip we can use coupons for and...well basically there are no details to this scheme at all, other than it has been rushed through the approval process...again.

The concerns of those of us with disabilities and the parents/caregivers of people with disabilities have not been addressed and have been summarily dismissed as irrelevant.

From the minutes of the February 25, 2013 AAC meeting: “In response to questions...explained that the zones idea that was discussed at the public meetings was not implemented as it would deviate from the metered rate used by taxi cabs. “

As a specialized transportation service (which the scheme is despite the use of the word “subsidized” by the County), a zoned service can be implemented as the Para transit service under contract. The statement that zoned fares cannot be implemented is not a valid argument.

The approved again scheme continues to include a variety of coupon denominations despite statements and documentation by people with disabilities and the parents/caregivers of people with disabilities that managing several denominations of coupons would be difficult for people with cognitive, developmental and visual disabilities.

It was pointed out by people with disabilities and the parents of children with disabilities to the County that a ticket and zone based service would save the County money and resources...a theme which seems to be at the centre of the county’s actions and press releases (the budget and oversight).

From the start of this entire catastrophe in May of 2012, the County has made discriminatory statements about people with disabilities, approved over and over again variants of a transportation scheme that violates the integrated Accessibility Standards for transportation, our basic and protected human rights, told us that if we file a human rights complaint that the service will stop immediately, told us that if we didn’t approve the scheme that the service would stop immediately, and has intentionally called the scheme a “subsidized” transportation program to avoid the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and the Integrated Accessibility Standards for specialized transportation services...which are **STILL** provincial laws.

Even the resignation of three members of the accessibility Advisory Committee including the Chair has not deterred them from pushing through any number of variations of the original staff recommendation of July 2012.

The only thing that **DOES** appear to be clear is that the County is determined to push through several variants of the staff recommendation of July 2012 that is punitive toward people with disabilities, limits our ability to travel and participate in our community and is designed to avoid the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, the Integrated Accessibility Standards and violates several layers of our basic human rights.