

“Circle in a Spiral, Wheel within a Wheel:” Para Transit Saga Continues

OK, pun might be intended but the continuous circle of approving a staff recommendation that has been continuously rejected for almost a year now must be wearing everyone’s treads thin.

At the March 19 County Council meeting the unaffordable, unsustainable and scheme that violates the Integrated Accessibility Standards which are **STILL** provincial law was deferred for two cycles (2 months) at which point Council hopes a decision is made.

The current scapegoat in this saga is the Accessibility Advisory Committee which is now given the responsibility for approving yet again, the staff recommendation with yet more variations.

At the February 25 Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting members were given two choices (one being the rejected over and over again staff recommendation) and told that they couldn’t choose the other option (according to the minutes that were on the county website last week.)

I say “were on the County website” because they may be gone or changed now. After responding to a request for where the letters of resignation in protest over this issue were on the meetings and agendas website, colour me surprised to find that they appear to have been “cleansed” from the site.

Anyone going to the minutes for the December 10 meeting of the accessibility Advisory Committee would only find a simple statement that two members resigned. It sounds like we had something better to do and just left the committee instead of resigning in protest over the treatment of people with disabilities by the County regarding specialized transportation service/para transit.

I thank the editors of the Paris Star for printing my letter of resignation in its entirety so that it is in the public record.

This appears to be the latest in a series of “historical revisionist” changes to meeting agendas and minutes regarding the issue of specialized transportation services in the County.

It is anticipated that with only two months (or two meetings) for the Accessibility Advisory Committee to “fall on the County’s sword” for the actions of the County, that yet another variant of the original staff recommendation that has been rejected over and over again for the past year will be the only choice or option available to the AAC members.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee or any committee charged with revising specialized transportation service in the county should have the option to direct staff to come back with a different model like a zone-based Para transit model. Even large cities like Toronto, Calgary, Hamilton and several American cities are now looking at zone-based transit as a way to more equitably spread out transit costs by people who use public transit. Many rural municipalities in Canada and the United States use zone-based specialized transportation service models as the most effective way of providing that transit service.

A zone-based specialized transportation service model was presented to the County and to Council that identified a zone-based payment structure and the benefits over the staff recommendation, but this has been ignored to date. As pointed out in a previous letter to the editor, the argument that taxis are metered so the County cannot provide zone-based Para transit is not a valid one.

A specialized transportation service can use whatever accessible vehicles it wants or needs and is not confined to only using buses. The accessible vans currently used for specialized transportation services in the County are often used by specialized transportation services or Para transit as the most cost effective vehicles, especially in rural areas like the county of Brant.

The only thing missing from the model presented to Council was the identification of the zones. This was only omitted because the County would hopefully know what the best way to divide the geographical area into zones is.

Those of us from the community and the current service provider are willing to work collaboratively with the County to determine the zones.

There are also companies and software that help municipalities identify zones for transit. There are tools available to the County that would cost less or equal to the amount of staff time spent over the past year trying to push forward a transportation scheme that would leave the County vulnerable to human rights complaints on many levels.

The question remains: Why is the County determined to push through this staff recommendation that has been rejected several times for a year now without research or analysis, and without seriously considering a zone-based service that would save money...or any other option?

Perhaps if Council and its committees aren't "allowed" to direct staff to come up with a different model, a zone-based model, then it is up to those of us who live in the municipality with or without disabilities to do so by contacting our elected officials and asking for it ourselves!