

## Christmas gift for People with disabilities: No Para Transit as of January 2013

On November 5 the latest transportation scheme was unveiled by the county of Brant. It cuts the budget for specialized transportation/Para transit to \$25,000 per year with the remaining \$75,000 dollars of the budget allocated for Para transit going to fund an administrative position in the County.

Ironically the administrative position is that of an Accessibility Coordinator. The purpose of a coordinator for accessibility including implementing the provincial transportation standards for people with disabilities is not clear as the County specifies that the new transportation scheme is a “subsidized” not a “specialized” transportation program.

This latest variant on the original discriminatory restrictions of travel (attempted back in June of this year) will effectively imprison people with disabilities in their homes, denying us access to education, employment, religious and social or recreational activities. It will also deny us the opportunity to vote and participate in the political process.

At the November 5 Community Services Committee meeting a further example of the systemic barriers those of us with disabilities face was heard. When asked how people with disabilities would get to work, go shopping, go to church or participate in social and recreational activities, one Counsellor said “they can call an ambulance.” Although this may have been said in jest, the statement was inappropriate. Throughout the meeting, people with disabilities were referred to as “those people” which is consistent with how people with disabilities have been referred to through this entire process.

The proposed transportation scheme which is a “subsidized” transportation program not a specialized transportation service for people with disabilities, is apparently geared to income, is for low income households only and does not involve the use of accessible vehicles.

The proposed transportation scheme will provide a modest subsidy toward travel for medical purposes only. The list of what would qualify as a medical trip has not been made available.

Emphasis of the proposed transportation scheme is on ensuring that trips are for medical purposes only. It is not clear if this means that anyone eligible will be subject to searches of their body or personal items to ensure that they haven’t “gone shopping” while on a medical trip. In June of this year similar restrictions of travel for people with disabilities were proposed due to “abuses of the program” such as going shopping, visiting friends and other independent living activities.

It is not clear what the income requirements for the subsidy are, but it is clear from the shift in branding from a specialized transportation service for people with disabilities to a subsidized transportation program, that people with low incomes will benefit.

The ad hoc specialized transportation service committee, which was dissolved in August of this year, has been resurrected (not sure why) and is meeting Monday, November 19, 2012 at 10:00 a.m. at the Paris Office – Downstairs Meeting Room. These are meetings open to anyone who wants to attend. The meeting space is accessible.

A decision on approving this proposed transportation scheme has been deferred until the next Community Services meeting.

If approved, this subsidized transportation scheme will take effect January 1, 2013.

The current contractor for the specialized transportation Service (County Service) is not involved in this decision. This attempt to imprison those of us with disabilities in our homes and deny us access to goods and services is being rapidly moved forward by the County and elected officials.

If you have comments and questions, contact the Mayor, your Ward Counsellor and the municipal office for the County of Brant.