

Winnipeg Transit Plus: Winnipeg Transit Master Plan Customer Discussion

Carol Shields Auditorium - January 13 @ 1:00pm



Speakers:

Kevin Sturgeon, Program Manager
Sasha Pejic, StanTec Representative
Various Audience Members

[Start]

Speaker: Hey everybody! Before I turn the thermostat down, let's take a vote. Does everyone think it's warm? Or cool? Once you hear the guy, it'll heat you up for sure! [Laughs] if it gets stuffy in here we might turn it down just a little bit. Alright, thank you!

Kevin Sturgeon: Good afternoon everyone thanks you for coming we are going to get started. We will give a few more seconds for the people at the back. My name is Kevin I work with Winnipeg Transit and I work with the Transit Master Plan. Winnipeg Transit Master Plan started at the beginning of 2019 with technical work and we went to Phase 1 of public engagement last year. We asked people on the Transit Plus as well as the conventional system what they thought; we had several thousand comments and then we spent the summer and fall doing technical analysis and we realized we had to make big changes to transit plus and transit. In October we started conventional engagement which is Phase 2. Phase 3 will be in March so please stay tuned for more information. We want to offer some of our ideas and hear your feedback. Regarding conventional service for those of you that didn't see what we offered in November, we are proposing a new transit network where we redesign it from scratch. This is the first time Winnipeg has done that. We are classifying services with how frequently they come. More information on the conventional service will be on Winnipeg Transit website. To discuss the changes to Winnipeg Transit

Plus system I will turn the microphone over to Sasha from Stantec who is a specialist in paratransit planning. Welcome to Winnipeg Sasha!

Sasha: Thank you to everyone for showing up, what a great turnout! I'm pleased to see Stephen on the screen, beautiful photo! Thank you! Just to set the context, as Kevin mentioned, we've been working with the City of Winnipeg, as well as in commercialized and specialized transit all over North America, with small communities, large communities etc. the largest is Toronto. I've been working there for over 7 years now, lots of positive stuff we'll tell you about. Some decorum and meeting rules, everything we present today is online so you'll be able to pick it up after the meeting if you didn't get a print copy. They are also screen reader capable. Winnipeg Transit Plus staff is here today so if you have any questions they're here for you today. We have personal support assistants, two individuals at the back, if anyone needs help or assistance of any sort, they're available for you back there. We have speech to text today, in real time and in sign language as well. So, in terms of what we're going to talk about today, we're going to have a dialogue - I'll present some material, but the intent is to get personal and have a good discussion about what we are doing well and what aren't we doing well and how we can change that. We did receive feedback in the first phase of engagement, but we can get deeper here and some of the things that I've seen in my review and comparing that in other communities that I've worked. Just because we have so many people in the room, I'd like to ask once we get to the question period, if everyone can ask one question at a time out of fairness, but if there is more dialogue requested, then there are breakout rooms outside as well. When you're leaving, we do have an exit survey, and the purpose is to rate how good a job I've done and where we can improve, but also a subsequent survey online that will delve deeper into the service issues of Winnipeg Transit based on the comments we've heard today.

Sasha: So, let's get right into it here. In terms of an agenda, we'll go over the objective and why we're here, what we hope to get out of the session, we'll talk about policy analysis which really does speak to the report that we did last year. We'll talk about initial recommendations that we had, but nothing is set in stone at this point. We just want your feedback. So, if you tell me they're terrible ideas, then we won't go forward.

Sasha: So, about Winnipeg Transit, just the goal of what we're trying to achieve in the Master Plan is to modernize the transit system. The goal is to provide accessible mobility for everyone in Winnipeg and when we say "everyone" we mean everyone. We have to change things to catch the city up to enable mobility for everyone. The conventional service side we have, as Kevin mentioned, is a pretty substantial bus city redesign and how we go

about these services and the routes running the city. The city has invested quite a bit of money for accessibility features and individuals requiring wheelchairs are able to use the new system, and the city is expanding accessibility to key bus stops and stations. One aspect that we have to undertake is to evaluate the accessibility of bus stops, which we've done at over 1500 bus stops to see which ones really need help. Once we implement the new transit system, accessibility should not be an issue. Transit Plus is door-to-door transportation for those that cannot use conventional transit, but we're looking at reshaping the program to service people better. There is no shortage of media coverage, but we are looking to improve it for everyone in this room today.

So, with Transit Plus, whether you like it or not how it's currently provided, they did provide 400,000 trips in 2018, but it shows that there is dedication of the staff, and it's not perfect, but a lot of people receive trips, and they should at least be given a hand for that.

[Applause]

Sasha: Thank you! As you know, trip requests are made by calling the site and making a trip booking. But what we've been asked to do is really a five-part plan. Evaluate how Transit Plus is doing and compare it to best practices in North America. So how are we doing relative to everyone else? In responding to the main findings of the Ombudsman's report - so we were asked to focus on the eligibility criteria prioritization policy, the no-show policy, and contrast all that with best practices. We have a job, and that is also to align the outcome this review to the AMA. There is specific legislation of how this program needs to be run. I live in Hamilton Ontario, and we have the AODA, that's a similar legislation that mandates how our program is run. It's not finalized yet, we'll talk about that, but there was a paper that was prepared that Winnipeg Transit participated in and will make sure that it continues. It's modernizing the program and making it equitable and sustainable, to make sure that it can continue and serve the people that need it. It's also about integrating accessible conventional services into their delivery. Or I hear in communities that they would like to use the bus, but they can't get to the bus stop. So, should there be a service that takes you from your home to the bus stop? I've seen this in Toronto and so many people are just so happy because it opens up your life, you can go out, you're free, you don't have to wait on Winnipeg Transit. And it's something that we want to look at through this process.

Sasha: So, framing our discussion, where there is an aging population there are more mobility challenges and disabilities. Ridership and demand for Transit Plus has been

growing steadily, and we need to comply with new AMA legislations - it's a must. The good part of this legislation is that it seeks to remove barriers to accessibility. Which is nice, it's a win. And it also is solidifying the need to update transit buses for based on our changing society and the requirements of individuals in the city.

Sasha: So, let's talk about the AMA, it's setting the stage for what we're going to be talking about. There is a transportation component on the AMA that is currently being developed, there is a paper that was released in Oct 2019, but it's still going through review and accepting comments, and I think there is a meeting on Wed for this-

>>>Not that standard, the transportation consultation has happened, I'm from that office, and when there is a draft standard there is another opportunity to give comments.

Sasha: Thank you Colleen for that clarification. But this will include things like priority seating within the vehicles, securement devices, the colors of them, very specific requirements. Also, it's going to require these to be the same as conventional services. There are differences between the fixed route and Transit Plus, so that's a work in progress-

>>>That just happened this year? It was a big jump from what it used to be.

Sasha: And you'll see that it's one of the recommendations, like stop announcements and where the bus was headed, lighting and signage for people with low vision. Accessibility training for staff that are providing the services, and to make sure they understand the needs, Accessible information such as large type maps. It also directly impacts the eligibility criteria for this program. So, until now we've had three categories, but the new AMA act has new categories. So unconditional - meaning that you are unable to use conventional services all the time, the second one is a new one called "conditional" where there are certain times you cannot travel on conventional transit, but then there are other times that you can. For instance, there are times that people can't get to the bus stop because it's raining or there are leaves out there and I might fall. So, for those - or extreme cold or heat, you can't use the conventional transit. "Temporary" is something like an operation, like a knee replacement, when you need the service for a short amount of time - that's still going to be there. Booking, usually it's same-day, and that will be addressed also, and trip prioritization -

>>> what is that? I don't know what that is.

Sasha: We'll talk about that in a couple of slides, but that program - that program needs to be eliminated. And as I mentioned that the staff participated fully and the goal was to protect its customers and ensure that everyone receives mobility in some shape or way or form.

Sasha: Show of hands how many people think transit plus needs to modernize? Beautiful. I agree with you I mean what we are trying to do is create a modern equitable service for all. It recently moved from Handi-Transit to Transit Plus. That was a great first step but we need to go further. Society has changed in terms of what it means to be disabled but the program hasn't matured. It's something we need to address. It's about providing equitable services to everyone. Complying with the AMA is the starting point we want to go beyond and I mean that, that is minimum legislation but we can go further. It is important to think of those aspects that go above and beyond like the no show policy from our perspective it is outdated and like the cash fine for no-shows. Family Services is a big one, combining conventional fixed routes with Transit Plus to combine travel. It's also enabling I can tell you from personal experience it enables freedom, empowerment. A lot of the time people are scared if it's new but we support it with travel training and setting things up with success and lowering costs. Winnipeg Transit is doing a good job at keeping costs low but every trip right now is costing the city around \$25 and we collect \$2.50 how can we look at reducing costs but keep the program sustainable and keep it continuing in the future? Let's talk about the eligibility process/ I am going to open the floor and ask people if they have any comments on the process?

>>>That part is okay. The current process is something I would support because if we don't have a mechanism to give everyone rides, then people that need dialysis or to go to work, won't receive rides. But I'm all for looking for something new.

Sasha: Anyone else?

>>>It's a little bit stringent. When you have things like arthritis and people say let's talk a walk outside, it's like let's not. But you know a lot of people walk outside.

>>>Like a long walk to the vehicle?

>>>A walk like let's see if you can make it to the bus stop.

Sasha: Thank you. Anyone else?

>>>Like people using Transit Plus are disabled in one way or another and also are not able to operate our own vehicles and there is a lot of establishments that are off the transit routes and they won't go to those destinations. I think it would be great for Handi-Transit to go to any place within the perimeter. I can understand going outside of the perimeter being unrealistic but there are resources out there for us that we can't get to and is unaffordable for people in this situation

Sasha: Thank you, and we're going to talk about that in a bit! We have to carry on-

>>>I don't know if this is appropriate, I have a son who has been applying for Transit Plus, he has applied 6 times that he has been refused. He is paralyzed and cannot use his extremities. Why does he keep getting refused? Okay I don't know what to do-

Sasha: Sure, I mean, I can't talk on specifics, but after the session, maybe someone from Winnipeg Transit can. But let's carry on. The current eligibility criteria were adopted in 2006 and then modified in 2010 to include Alzheimer's and that criteria serves as eligibility determinations. One is requiring the use of a wheelchair or scooter, second, unable to walk 175 meters outside, third is has 20/200 vision or less, is considered legally blind not corrected by lenses, and the last is has Alzheimer's disease and related dementia which interferes with the ability to use conventional services independently. Right now, we have three eligibility categories. When people apply, they go through a functional assessment. Individuals that are accepted are categorized in the following: unconditional able to use Transit Plus for all trips, seasonal-able to use Transit Plus during winter months only, temporary-able to use Transit Plus for a limited amount of time for like a hip replacement. We roughly have 7500 customers; the majority fall in to the unconditional category. You can understand why we have a shortage of trips. When we look at the assessment of current eligibility practices from my perspective the policies and processes do not align with industry best practices. The way we evaluate people in to the program was when vehicles were not accessible. The city is not perfect, they have been trying to fix the infrastructure I mentioned the bus stop audits and change will continue but right now we have a blanket approach to all persons with disabilities and mobility champions. Please understand I am a champion of mobility, right now the currently practice does not consider the person's levels of abilities. The use of a wheelchair provides unlimited eligibility, that is very rare in the industry. That is a legacy category in the industry when you could not easily get on to buses. Now we have ramps, low buses. Vision impairment is also an unlimited eligibility, but

it does not look at the person and their specific needs. Continuing with eligibility there is very little to keep the program equitable and sustainable, we have an opportunity to align eligibility with effectively providing service and upcoming legislation. we are looking at bringing Transit Plus and Winnipeg Transit together as a service. Individuals with disabilities and mobility issues want to use conventional transit. As many of you know Transit Plus has a policy that if you have other transportation they do not provide services. We have to look at that, maybe Transit Plus becomes a broker in coordinating trips. The end goal is looking at how to engage a barrier free lifestyle for everyone.

>>>What does that mean?

Sasha: That means you shouldn't have to wait at home for Winnipeg Transit to pick you up. You should be able to travel when you want to. Eliminating barriers to access.

>>>We should have more bus shelters and benches throughout the city!

Sasha: Yes, in the audits we are doing are there infrastructure, do we have shelter, accessible options like benches etc.

>>>Shelters and benches in the winter snow and you can't even sit on them and the walking distance for other people that can't stand outside and then can't sit because of the snow, or if there's nothing to sit on, it's hard.

Sasha: Understand that is what we are looking at and that needs to be clear. Thank you, you with your hand up.

>>>I just have a comment, there are lots of people with temporary - who need particular kinds of medications like pain medications - there are a whole bunch of others and that doesn't allow them to drive cars, but is a barrier to getting on the regular transit or having to stand - that increases the pain levels in various disabilities and chronic pain disabilities are typically left off, and that's something that should be considered also.

Sasha: So, I should have mentioned we do have notetakers that will be recording this. I do need to push forward as this is time sensitive. Does anyone have any comments on trip prioritization?

>>>I'm glad it's gone! It was discriminatory and I really didn't like it!

Sasha: Why don't you tell us what you really thing [laughter]

>>>In what was is it gone, or changed?

>>>I also haven't used the bus in over 5 years, but if I was to use a bus to go up blocks on Portage Avenue, the space for wheelchairs now with the competition of strollers, there isn't a chance for me to get on the bus and to return to that station, to get back home!

Sasha:Fair point we are also going to implement a stroller policy as well. Where people can use the space as long as there is no one with mobility issues. [audience inaudible] They would then need to collapse the stroller if someone comes on board.

>>>I have a quick question: you're not ever going to take service away from the visually impaired?

Sasha: No that is not what we are discussing. What I have heard working at other places, visuals have said they are not disabled they want to live their life and it is about the level of ability. If there are some individuals that can use transit sometimes then we will support that. It is about finding the right balance for individuals.

>>>Do you mean equity?

Sasha: Of course, everything needs to be equitable.

>>>I'm all for getting rid of the priority system, but there are people who depend on the service for things like getting to work, getting medical appointments, education, you know, and it's like, we - we don't want to get rid of the *system* at the expense of them saying "you can't get a ride to work today because someone needs to go to the shopping mall."

Sasha: Sure, I understand but I will play the devil's advocate, there was a CBC article where an individual said 'I don't care what their priorities are, this is where I need to go'.

>>>I understand that, but there needs to be some way of balancing the two, that's all.

Sasha: How you get in to the program is a lot to do with the priorities. If you match individuals with the services they need then this becomes less of a problem. There are some individuals that need door-to-door service and that won't stop and there are some that will be able to use transit on some occasions.

>>>As the devil's advocate, my need to get to the store to buy food so that I don't starve trumps your need to get to work! There should be no trip prioritization, bottom line!

Sasha: This is a Winnipeg-only solution right now, I'll take those two comments here.

>>>Is there still subscription? And then you talked about eligibility is there a current plan for how users will be transitioned to the new criteria?

Sasha: Once the new categories are set, then usually over like a 3-year program, they get re-evaluated again. That's usually done over a transition period.

>>>I had a comment and question; Anna is that you? Its Patrick! Just a comment about eligibility and being scaled back one of the comments from the Ombudsman was to expand Handi-Transit to include chronic pain etc. is there anything in this that include expanding service? When you tell someone, they have to take a bus not door-to-door service that is rolling back eligibility.

Sasha: So, and we talk about the recommendations in a few slides, but for me, every disability has to be considered, not just mobility issues, but cognitive, psychological issue, have to be accommodated, because it's the right thing to do.

>>>Well it is and I hope there would be policy presently Transit Plus is allowed to deny people if they have access to other means of transit. As an able-bodied person, I am never denied service but for others that is a concern with eligibility.

Sasha: The intent isn't to reduce service or to throw people out, it's to accommodate all disabilities, but there is a scale that we have to balance. We have to find the right approach. The individuals that really need door-to-door service will have that, but those that can use conventional transit sometimes? It's about matching that individual to that service level. There's only so much money in the world, unfortunately, and the city is trying to do the best

it can with what it has to provide the service to those who need it. There is a balancing act we need to play also. Thank you for your comment.

>>>I think what we are talking about in terms of expanding service is crucial I just want to respond to one comment that is problematic which is people have priority and I understand, but the issue of “collapse the stroller and take your three kids...” I work with immigrant families that often have to take the bus, have small children, it is practically impossible for someone to collapse a stroller so I think it is important for the fleet be big enough to accommodate both.

Sasha: Sure! That’s a fair point. Let’s carry on. So, here’s what I think about trip prioritization. There are three levels right now: work, medical, education, and therapy is level one. Essential shopping support groups, self-development courses, is the second level. And then the third is recreational activity, grooming, dining out. In my opinion, it’s an outdated practice and it’s not fair or equitable. Further, it goes against the city’s own policy framework from 2011, so that’s a problem there that it poses. AMA won’t allow it, and as I mentioned, if we get the eligibility criteria right in the process of how they get into the program, then it eliminates this need. We have a lot of rules and a new program...and booking times, that the algorithm and the software itself cannot optimize and get trips out, there is an artificial rule that is limiting us from providing more trips. Once they put all these limits in, they can’t create more i.e. group trips. It’s creating more harm than good.

>>>You say practice needs to be eliminated. Which one?

Sasha: From my perspective, it needs to go because it’s not working. I know there are pros and cons and people that like it and others that don’t. But right now, there are situations where people are going on medical trips, but they book it at the Walmart doctor's office so they can shop after. It’s disingenuous to the program.

>>>I think perhaps in comparing who deserves better service we should be talking about giving all people the chance to live their life the way they want it.

Sasha: Absolutely give her a round of applause [applause]

>>>I was just wondering, with the booking, I think the same-day service would be a good idea to allow for flexibility, but if people could book a week in advance, that they could if they wanted to.

Sasha: Of course, you would have the ability to both, I work in Toronto and the City of Toronto delivers 14,000 trips per [inaudible]. If individuals accept family services ride to maybe Subway then we can do a same day ride.

>>>How much will you give to, in terms of eligibility, to give to doctors and the distance the patient can walk and the OT's assessment of that person?

Sasha: I'll speak to my experiences elsewhere, it is a combination of both we will accept a medical application from a physician or therapist and then the organization will do their own assessment

>>>But there must be a way somehow to see that the physician is saying no, the person is unable to walk a certain distance and have it been proven there.

Sasha: I mean the agency does its own verification and that is very common. They all do independent verification.

>>>Actually a few years ago, the doctor's used to fill out forms, and then it was decided that it wasn't up to the doctors, but the OTs, and I've taken it to my doctor/specialist to have them write something, but it would fall on deaf ears and they don't think the city will listen to them.

Sasha: Often doctors don't understand what they are filling out. They are busy people and it costs \$20 to fill out the form [audience noise] or whatever.. Are they putting in the right level of dedication to understand what is needed? Some agencies have done away with medical certificates altogether and just do onsite verification.

>>>I think they're not giving doctors enough credit, I've been with my doctor for 12 years, they have my best interests at heart and they don't even charge me, and to instead go to an OT that doesn't know me or is meeting me for the first time in years?

Sasha: Sure, your comments are recorded. Let's talk about the no show policy. What do we think about the current no show policy?

>>>I think its punitive. I can understand from the other side that it is frustrating to drive and then not have someone show up. I know for others I don't decide to be a no show

either something happens or it doesn't get caught in the automated system. At least the fine charges, I know other systems have other things behind your fines. And now the fines come right out of our bank account

>>>inaudible

>>>I think the no show policy is a problem if only you... you have to guess when your pickup should be, I just go and make sure I have had enough time for that appointment even if that means I have to wait another hour I don't think that is bad.

Sasha: Sure, thank you. Yes?

>>>There have been times that they have also gone to the wrong doors and then I'm sitting there waiting.

Sasha: I do believe that happens, yes.

>>>I go to the Seven Oaks Senior Links, where they drive you to your appointment for like \$6. I think it's a good idea to have that and relieve the load from Winnipeg transit.

>>>There is something that I have experienced where drivers do not come to the door, they sit in their cars and pretend they did. that's what has happened to me at least. Or they think the person with me should be guiding me instead of them.

Sasha: Sure, yes?

>>>To expand what the other lady what saying, things happen and we cannot foresee and to penalize us is not fair. Quite often when we are at an appointment and we know we are going to be late we try to phone in but can't get through and we still get penalized. So, you know it is a two-way street.

Sasha: Sure, thank you!

>>>You could be waiting from 45 mins to an hour, and I've been at work and on hold for roughly an hour, to see where my ride is, and it's already there by the time I've received it.

Sasha: Thank you I'll take this question.

>>>When this is about drivers they need to be made aware about what our disabilities are. I've had a driver say you need to look out for me as a blind person [laughter]

Sasha: Okay one last comment.

>>>So, I'd like to agree to the points about disability awareness and no shows, I've had the experience of waiting and waiting and then when I call I've been marked as a no-show because they either sat in the car or they didn't come in. So yeah, but another thing that's happened to me when I've been falsely marked as a no-show. They'll ask the other people who are in the vehicle to say whether or not the driver went and got out, and maybe they did, but unless they went in the building and said my name, I don't know that they did. The people in the vehicle might not know I have no vision, and they shouldn't have to know either, but I just don't think that's fair?

Sasha: Thank you. You know I forgot to mention I rode Transit Plus for two days. So, I know what you are living through. I rode for two days and presented myself as a person with a vision disability. And people would look at me and say 'hmm you're disabled?' and that's what it felt like. It felt disrespectful.

>>> I had a ride to this meeting with this lady here that also has vision problems and our car - the driver of our vehicle sat there for 10 minutes before showing up in front of the house, but he could've gotten out when he arrived and saved us time and made it a more efficient service.

Sasha: Thank you. Sorry I need to keep going on. In terms of no-show policy, I think or I've seen in other places that a policy is common. Often it is the same people that may be causing problems. It's a policy that is required so people cannot abuse the program. So, it is about being fair and equitable to your peers in the program. The policy is now if you cancel less than 30 minutes then it is considered a 'no show' if you refuse a trip when the operator or vehicle arrives is a cancellation at the door, or if you are not ready. In terms of repercussions, results in a letter explaining what happens and a fine is charged. In 2015 the most recent numbers, we have Transit Plus collected \$28,201.00 in charges. That is not that much as each trip costs around \$25. That money goes to pay off the trip. Even if the individual doesn't go on the trip Winnipeg Transit is still paying for the trip. So now the logic and purpose of this is to offset some of the costs of this.

>>>Is this service subsidized by the city or the province?

Sasha: Ultimately all taxpayers are paying for this. Ultimately the fines were the major complaint in the Ombudsman's report.

>>>With the new service being considered or operated, where you can book same-day trips, that should help eliminate the need to charge future fees.

Sasha: So, you are correct. I will keep going, another agency I work with is the York Region Transit Mobility Program, is they do a demerit point. Where you start collecting points and then for cancellations they ask for 2 hours' notice, with anything less they can't really redeploy the drive anywhere else. It is a lost trip. At York region there is a late cancellation of 1 point and no show or at the door cancellation it is 2 points.

>>>So, if Handi-transit could have a direct line to no-shows only, they could even record that you are unable to keep the appointment, then that could help the situation.

Sasha: So, the way they work, they give you 12 points and once you have 12 it is a two-day suspension so you don't get service for two days, 30 points is a 60-day suspension and phone interview to review service needs. Same as Toronto Transit, they request a 4 hour pick up notice. They have something called 'life happens points' they recognize that things happen so they give freebies every month. Just like York Region late cancellation is 1 point and no show or cancel at the door is 2 points. They let you get away with a lot but it can result in a suspension. So, it does get more severe but there is no financial fine.

>>>With a two-day suspension, can I pick which two days I want?

[Laughter]

Sasha: New York City, they have something similar to the 'life happens' policy. There is kind of a trend that more and more agencies are getting away from the financial penalties but they are trying to get away from the behavior. A lot of people are saying 'oh I all just pay the fine' whereas removing the services is different. It is trying to remain fair and equitable. Grand River Transit also does a fair job, they provide a clear explanation of what a no show is or isn't, a similar definition to Transit Plus as to what is a no show. Three occurrences in one month violates policy and next time results in a one month's suspension. Most of our

peers have gone away with financial fines there is one town in Ontario that still has fines but that is about it.

>>>In terms of being equitable and if the customer doesn't board within 5 minutes, I usually have a voice-recorded option on my phone that plays a message saying that my ride will be there in 5 minutes. What about the individuals that are cognitively disabled, they think that it's something else and they don't answer the phone? Rather than having a worker actually going to the door?

Sasha: Thank you. Yep, I will, just so in terms of a no-show summary, a point-based system is most common. All the point-based systems involved service suspensions. It isn't trying to penalize those that maybe have a bad day or can't make it, it is trying to address those that abuse the system.

>>>How did you come up with the requirement for the scheduled rides? Because if you can't take the ride because of a health issue, what kind of punishment would you get...

Sasha: If you aren't feeling well that day and have to cancel? So, the way this would work would be you would have the ability to say 'I can't travel this day' and you'd have points that you could use. If you start doing it too much and use your points then that would be an issue.

>>>People like this probably need an escort and maybe that's not always available at the last minute, there needs to be some sort of a system, like a direct line to accept no shows, ASAP Handi-Transit, as much advance notice of that no-show which is fairer to everybody, especially in a situation where someone is relying on another for a ride.

Sasha: Sure, thank you, this gentleman has been waiting for a while.

>>>What do you do about a driver no show? I was at a medical appointment at HSC and there was a gentleman with a wheelchair and every time he saw a Handi transit vehicle he would rush out. I asked him why don't you call them and he said he didn't have a phone. So, I said okay let's call them, so I called them and they asked for the number I gave them the number and they said he had been picked up. I said he is

sitting right beside me! He hasn't been picked up! After a while I kept talking with them about it...

Kevin: So, we're about 20 mins over time and about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way through the presentation, so we're going to have to end the questions until the end of the presentation, but until Sasha has finished, I'm going to have to ask everybody to not ask any more questions or make any more comments so that we can have thorough discussion afterwards.

Sasha: So, in terms of considerations of the Transit Plus program for no shows we would suggest eliminating fines. We think there is currently 1 freebie every 6 months but we think this isn't enough. We think there should be more understanding and leeway as things happen. We are recommending to expand the cancellation time to 2 hours to go with other standards and it would give time for Winnipeg Transit to redeploy the ride. So, there is a tradeoff, we will give you more points but there needs to be a bigger time window. We are advocating that it should be more transparent as to what is a no-show.

Sasha: So, let's talk about booking times and trip delivery. When you currently request a trip, you are given an exact time your vehicle will be there i.e. at 8am. In my experience that is unrealistic, when the vehicle is dispatched they can get stuck in traffic, with someone else getting off etc. with the call center there is people booking trips and people asking about their trips. It also reduces the ability to share trips, the purpose of this program is a share-ride program. I noticed in my two days riding I didn't share a ride with anyone. So that is something we need to change. Considerations for trip requests and delivery, most peers use a booking window, customers are provided a 30 minutes time frame for when to be ready. Maybe the vehicle shows up early or late, having the booking window we would also have a pick-up window; once the vehicle arrives we would wait 5 minutes or 10 minutes until someone is deemed a 'no-show'. So, it works really nice, this is common in other agencies. It is a lot smoother as it sets up expectations, it is interrelated with the no-show policy. They all work together and once you've exceeded the pick-up policy...

Sasha: The Family of Services - it is empowering mobility, we have a picture up here [reference to PowerPoint presentation] from Toronto we like to call it 'mobility on your schedule'. It leverages investments from the city in terms of infrastructure. In Toronto we coordinate services with conventional bus schedules so there is a seamless hand off. They would help you off the bus and on to the conventional bus route. We look at trip eligibility we look at where are you going.

Sasha: As I mentioned, in Toronto, we guarantee 'same-day trip' if it's a family trip. By doing a lot more trips that are shorter, it helps to provide more service. It's more flexible for people in the program. I met an individual before, Daniel, he's a high school student, had never gone on his own anywhere, but we had him travel trained, his mother complains now that he's never home and always at the mall. Good on the one hand, bad on the other. [Laughs] but we've seen how this has changed people. And we also see that people still book trips for medical appointments, but when it's something social, they do family service trips instead.

Sasha: So, we start with the individual at home, takes them to an accessible bus stop, train station, or railway line, and depending on what the end point is, another vehicle will meet them to bring them to their final destination. There are a lot of people in Toronto that have said they *want* to do this and it's good to be able to see people go out and live their lives the way they want to. I mentioned driver assistance, from door to door, but it's different from the door of a conventional transit system rather than a hospital door, but they provide 13,000 trips per day, and their goal is to get 50% of trips to be delivered by FOS. It's coming along very well, but for this to be successful, it's teaching people and showing them what it's like. A lot of people are scared, they've never been aboard a conventional bus, so it's just about bringing a street car or a bus, having the individuals on them when it's not in service, understand how to move along them - it's worked really well in Toronto. But it also looks at co-mingling, one comes to mind where, we have a Transit Plus vehicle coming to pick up someone, but there is a neighbor next door that isn't disabled, but needs a ride, and they ride together. It's mobility for all, and that's the way it's done in Oakland, it's all about co-mingling, and it works really well. There are challenges too, nothing's without challenges, the conventional fleet for Winnipeg Transit doesn't have securement devices. In other provinces, there are four-point securement to make sure that someone in a wheelchair isn't jostled around too much. Not all of the bus stops are accessible right now, there is an inadequate sidewalk network in the city. Ice, snow, and weather which was mentioned, and getting by, not just the ride program, but the people that deliver the service too and to make sure that everyone is on the same page. It's a challenge but this program is being worked on.

Sasha: So, our recommendations, things that we're working on that we'd like to hear your thoughts about after. First and foremost, eliminate trip prioritization, it doesn't go with legislation and isn't equitable. Next is to change the no-show policy, to something like the TTC's Points Program. Also, to adopt the two-hour no-show window, and understanding why we need to do this, and developing a clear list of what is a no-show and what isn't.

Third is implementing a booking window, we recommend a 24-hour booking window, and also a 50-minute pick-up window. In the first year, we need to implement fare parity, we need to make sure that they are one in the same. And we've covered some board optics but the agency is taking a dive into the tactical implementation and how they are actually going to implemental of this. Reviewing eligibility requirements is needed, that has to happen. Updating the criteria to match best practice across the industry, and making sure that we provide the best service for each person, and also expanding the service boundary-right now it's 500m within each bus stop, but we're looking at expanding that to basically cover all of Winnipeg. So, if you live in Winnipeg, you should be able to get a Winnipeg Transit Plus ride if you need one. We need the new eligibility criteria set up and then re-evaluate everyone under that new criteria, that would usually happen over a 3-year period. We also recommend adopting a Family Services delivery model, expanding who is eligible for the program but also to accommodate everyone regardless. We're also suggesting to investigate the feasibility of only 'return dialysis trips'. A lot of provinces have moved to this, i.e. a lot of people have said that they are okay to get to the appointment, but they don't feel so good afterwards and would need help getting back. So, they would either use Conventional Transit, or something, but we suggest that it needs to be vetted. So, we also mentioned the other providers in the city, looking at having everyone as part of that mix and having Winnipeg Transit saying that you'll ride with *this* company and deploying the trip in real time.

Sasha: So that's the end of the formal presentation. Are we breaking out or...? Okay so I open the floor to questions.

>>>Okay thank you I have an issue with AMA, there is a building in downtown Winnipeg, the WRHA at 490-496 Hargrave that is inaccessible for Transit Plus, reason being they changed the parking from parallel to the curb to angled parking. Transit Plus says they cannot put their ramps down there. This building houses community health services, street connection which is a harm reduction service and volunteer services. I volunteer there and I am not able to take a trip there with accessible transit, and it would cost me \$50-60 round trip for a two-hour meeting which is not feasible. There is a parking lot across the street but they said no because you need door-to-door. There is a restaurant next door but they said no, I don't know who the stakeholders are with designing this and I would like to personally see this rectified and I do not know what the solution is i.e. go back to parallel parking or something with a drop off zone. I'm not sure.

Sasha: Thank you. Did you also have a comment? This gentleman here.

>>>Is this supposed to be for accessibility? Why are the vehicles getting smaller and smaller and making it impossible to get into them? [applause] And some of the vehicles, its physically impossible, I'm too tall, I can't crouch, I can't get into the vehicle. What am I supposed to do?

Sasha: No, your comment is well taken. I would suggest the agency do a fleet review for this.

>>>A lot of them are Volkswagen golfs and they are awkward to get into and have a big lip that people can't get their foot over.

Sasha: I understand. This lady?

>>>This has to do with booking. There are 4 or 5 of us that live in the Riverview area and we go to the Riverview hospital every day and each time we all arrive at different times and the same thing with going home. And we all pass by each other's apartments. It's such a waste of gas and time.

Sasha: Correct, yeah, it's the system and the prioritization. Thank you.

>>>I just have a question about the window of time frame, so if you wait 20 mins and your driver is 10 mins late, we're told to phone in, and it takes a while to get on the phone and get through, then you're going to miss that connection trip. Does that seamlessly work as well?

Sasha: It does. In other agencies it has worked really well. York agency has been doing it since 2003, they have it mastered. They have it set so if the fixed buses are early the bus will wait until the next one. A lot of what we have been reviewing is enabling Family Services on high frequency routes so if you miss your bus it isn't that big of a deal as another bus will be there shortly. Or there is frequent enough service so that if someone is already on the bus there will be another one close by.

>>>Will that 20-minute period be at the same time every day or at different time frames?

Sasha: Typically, different, so let's say you have a subscription trip that's booked every day. Then it would be at the same time, yeah.

>>>You talk about extending the service boundaries within Winnipeg but Assiniboine racetrack and [inaudible] cemetery is just outside the boundaries, I think it would be very nice to be able to attend the Assiniboine racetrack and in my case be able to visit my daughter at the [inaudible] cemetery. At one time it was included within Transit Plus but it is not anymore. It thinks it would be really good for many people.

Sasha: That's a good suggestion, sir! Yes?

>>>So, I think everything we've been discussing so far is good, but I just have something that I don't think we discussed yet. To be honest with you, the times are a bit frustrating, but I can deal with it, my biggest thing is driver training and customer service. [Applause] like I would treat them with the utmost respect, I would never ask the driver why they're late or where they're coming from, but I've had instances where I haven't gotten that in return. I've received disability language that is outdated, and if I told them that it was offensive, they'd give me a lecture. I would expect them to say "oh sorry, I won't say that again." like another time I found the curb with my cane and they said "oh wow, you're really smart!" so I'm not blaming them, maybe they don't have the training, and they work long hours, but maybe that could be part of the training and be aware of those things.

Sasha: I agree with you and that is part of our recommendation is all of the training.

>>>My question is we register with eligibility over the next 5 years but for those of us that are totally blind that our condition will never change will there be a note on our file that will indicate that nothing will change?

Sasha: No that's fair, there are other severe disabilities as well that are permanent, we haven't gotten to that level of specificity, but with other agencies, yes, the process is a lot lighter, so maybe it's basic paperwork, it's just good policy to make sure that people are eligible and get their service.

>>>we shouldn't have to be tested or have an eye screening just to show it.

>>>Some suggestions, one thing we haven't discussed is the ability for those of us that are technology savvy to do online bookings because Toronto Real Transit is amazing and I would love to have something like that here. And documentation in alternative format, we don't all read print and as part of this accessibility thing we need to have documents in other forms.

Sasha: Thank you, I'll respond by saying first, Winnipeg Transit is working on online booking, it's in the works, but it's not ready yet-

>>>It should also have, it should-you should be able to book rides, check our ride frequency and our history...

Sasha: Yes! That's all very common and they're working on that, Route Match, I've worked with them elsewhere and they are very robust. I'll also comment on the second issue, I would agree that it is common in most programs, having different formats, speech to text, and I would agree with you on that as well.

>>>I was holding my arm up for this lady-my arm hurt-okay this report came out 4 years ago, and there are a lot of things that need to be fixed. They have new vehicles and they need suspension fixed and the city is knowingly hurting people with disabilities. I have not been to the gym since August because you are sitting at the back of the bus and your sciatica acts up and you are in pain and the bus driver tries to accommodate you by driving slowly and I was told to take a painkiller. I've had two partial knee replacements and the sitting is not accommodated. So, you are sitting at the back of the bus bouncing around hoping your sciatica does not act up. And I would like them to ask drivers and us and we are the ones that use it. They had vans and those worked great and now we have those bouncy buses.

>>>We all know that Winnipeg has terrible roads, but the suspension! When you're sitting in the back and they're going over the roads, the bumps!

>>>Is there is going to be a service where you can opt out of going on those buses and you could just take a car?

>>>See and I have no choice, no cars will take me because I have hip issues, and they have small cars, but then with these new busses, they're smaller, and the first time I saw one, I cried. The driver told me once that they would sit on

the wheel well! I've been trying to resolve this since August, the city councilor hasn't done a lot, has told me to take painkillers instead of trying to fix the problem.

Sasha: Okay, thank you. Go ahead? Yes, I have to give someone else the opportunity.

>>>I am glad to see the 500-meter rule gone away. Will there be any protection for people if the transit lines are redrawn? My second question is whether the privatization of the system has been looked at? It is now entirely privatized, where previously it was completely the City of Winnipeg complaints went up 122% last year. Has the privatization of the system been discussed?

Sasha: That's not in the scope of what we're studying for the purpose of this plan. So, no.

>>>The seats are small and when you've had a knee replacement, it is difficult to get out of the seat. Maybe we need something to hold on to get up ourselves. Another thing the vehicles are so filthy they need to clean them. And I don't like that.

>>>I almost forgot what I was going to say going back to the beginning. I have problems with the people that are taking the calls; you can press 1 if you are confirming, press 2 if you want to go to the automated system, press 3 if you want to talk to someone all three are the same. I sat on the phone for 15 minutes waiting to talk to someone. I was at the doctor's office and I was trying to get on to Handi Transit as I was offered a ride and was on the phone for over 45 minutes. I then talked to the nurse afterwards and she said she was on the phone for over an hour waiting.

>>>I have to agree...being on the buses is so painful first there needs to be an advisory committee...[inaudible]

Sasha: I'll just repeat her comments so that everyone can hear: she mentioned that Winnipeg Transit should have a committee that meets regularly - they actually do have an action committee that meets monthly and they represent everyone in the community. With other provinces, when there is a selection of a vehicle, usually that input is decided there. Going forward, I'm saying that should be implemented there.

>>>And we should not just see it but go in there and do a test run.

Sasha: In other companies where I've worked usually they tried out the vehicles 'no I don't like this one because of...' 'yes I do like this one' etc.

>>>Perhaps getting one or two of the vehicles to try, and you know why? I'd like to do to these people that have never experienced pain is to see when they have knee pain and throw them in the back of a Prius and drive around the city all day!

Sasha: So, can I ask the question I understand there are challenges with the fleet mix and the vehicles chosen, does everything else seem reasonable for where we are going in the future?

>>>The no-show is a little harsh, even in the other cities. Like 2 hours, that might be if someone gets offered a ride, but you have to say no and stay for Handi-Transit because there is a two-hour window. I can see expanding it to an hour, and I understand that-

Sasha: But the offset you would have 5 freebies or whatever a month. You don't just have two hours but you have 5 get out of jail free cards. They would reset every month.

>>>Oh good!

Sasha: And at the same time, you would get freebies so that if something comes up, you're covered.

>>>And I think suspension is against our accessibility.

Sasha: Well, what would you recommend?

>>>Monetary fines, and if there is repeat, then yes, but not this minimal repeat, maybe put them on progressive program like on the workplace, so you get the points, then if you don't work with the points *then* you get suspended. I don't think it's progressive enough of a system.

Sasha: Well I mean we haven't figured out the details we are generally thinking 2 hours and life happens points but we haven't figured it all out. Typically, we would say first month we'd let it go by but we are trying to get at those that habitually abuse the system. It is a wakeup call. It is progressive.

>>>What were the costs of Route Match was?

Sasha: I'm not sure, I wasn't a part of that planning.

>>>I never got to figure that out yet, but I don't understand the scheduling, for example, that means I have to add 15 mins to stand out in the cold.

Sasha: Right, I understand. There are concerns with the schedule and Route Match. Thank you, for your comments. Yes, sir?

>>>A couple of weeks ago I called the auto system to confirm and I was told it was unavailable for the heck of it I phoned the personal service and she said [inaudible]...even if it's isolated it could happen again. I'm concerned it will happen again and like I said I decided to contact them.

Sasha: The gentleman here, yes sir?

>>>Okay, well sometimes you have to cancel with the two-hour's notice, because I think before you punish the person, I think Handi-transit should find out *why* it was cancelled.

Sasha: Correct and that was what we were suggesting even if there is an appeal and yes this is a no show or no it was the doctor and it was out of my control.

>>>Homecare can be an issue for some people too. So, I wanted to build off the comment for the automated system, when it asks for my registration number, I'll enter it, and they said that it's an invalid registration number. That's not - I mean, I just keep trying and eventually it works, but what about people whose disability makes them sound different or has one where they would have to type - I'm wondering if whether or not we have an automated system, I think those other disabilities have to be included.

>>>Um I have two questions, okay first thing I would about the Family of Services getting picked up by the Transit Plus and at my door and getting dropped off at the bus station, would I need a transfer? [Sasha: No.] And who

decides if I get dropped off at the bus stop or if they drive me the whole way?
Would that be determined by my eligibility?

Sasha: Okay, I'll answer that here. So, who would make the decision on the FOS trip and if you would receive one or not? So, in York Region would decide how you would travel that day, so from A to B, and where you're starting from is not accessible but where you finish *is*. Then we would pick you up from your home, bringing you to the closest convenience stop, then you would complete the trip on your own, but if it was somewhere where you also needed help to complete the trip, then FOS would be there. It would be the eligibility based on where you are travelling that day.

>>>Is there going to be some kind of an appeal process? Even if it looks fine for someone else what if I have medical issues that aren't seen? Do I have a chance to say 'no that won't work for me'?

Sasha: So right, that was just an example from York Region. We would have to figure out a way that this would work here. When we go through the program we'd look at the conditions that apply here, and you'd capture that when registering, or when something changes in the program you'd update your profile.

>>>Can we ensure there is an appeals process?

Sasha: There typically is, some agencies do it voluntarily, others don't. That stuff is tactical in publication, so that's one road to take with it, but right now we're talking about framework and how the details are going to be sorted out, but we're a long way from that stuff.

>>>I have one question: is there a way that a driver is able to contact the client to see if they are there and let them know that they may be late? Or to prepare?

Sasha: That's common in most programs, or even something like, your vehicle is nearby, please get ready. Again, that's something that Route Match does, and Winnipeg Transit is looking into something like that now with an app.

>>>It should also work for landlines not just cell phones.

Sasha: Yes, they are looking at that right now.

>>>I know the presentation also discussed that other provinces use taxi chips like in BC. I know there are issues with Route Match because it has drivers going everywhere. The other quick thing about the conditions under which drivers work I don't know if that's under your purview but they go over 12 hours a day barely get any breaks or use the facilities to be polite or get something to eat. I have heard some of them say we aren't roadblocks or machines. That's just a note there.

Sasha: Yes, and that's unfortunate. Thank you for the comment.

>>>Okay two things, I've had it cancel my ride home now. Grocery shopping, I don't know if anyone brought that up, but we're very limited to what we are allowed to bring into the vehicles and if we're going shopping for groceries. We can't get very much with the current system, I'd like to see them take a look at that.

Sasha: Sure. You are referring to the two-bag limit? Or a bag on your lap and underneath your spot? I can say that is common in most programs. Right I understand that is common in most places.

>>>These are small parcels that you have to put on your knee. The other thing is that - I think it might have gotten covered, but the 500m rule? Does that involve trips anywhere within the perimeter? Oh... and how long would take to do?

Sasha: We are looking at expanding the boundary, we don't know what it looks like yet but we are looking and considering changing it. Anyone in Winnipeg should be able to travel. There were some other comments related to the race track etc. it can be a slippery slope and then it's just a little bit more and a little bit more..

>>>But every community that does tax to Winnipeg, like Oak bank, and they are attached to the city, so they should be included.

Sasha: That's a fair point, we will note that.

>>>I was wondering if it was within the purview of your research to address people who come in from out of town so if I was a mobility able person and I hitchhiked my way in to Winnipeg I could then take the bus anywhere. I have a sister who pays taxes in Winnipeg and she has a parent that visits her at various times of the year and if that person was a resident of Winnipeg could use Handi Transit to attend the

medical appointments they have in the city. I wonder if there are options for people that are temporarily residing in Winnipeg for appointments?

Sasha: Yes, the answer is yes. If that person is registered in another program in another city - if not, they'd have to go through the process, but someone that is living in the city would also have to go through that process.

[audience member]: So, if we have people flying in to Winnipeg from isolated communities and would just have to present themselves to be enrolled?

Sasha: Sure, correct. So, if they are coming from a city where they are eligible for accessibility transportation, then they would have to go through the process of applying.

>>>Another thing that I'd like to be seen taking into consideration is your medical issue, because there are a lot of us on oxygen that only has x amount of time out, they have you waiting two hours to get picked up and to get home and your oxygen runs out, I'm always in need. I have a machine now, but when I had tanks, I had to haul tanks out with me because they don't take into consideration that those with oxygen are limited into their amount of time out.

Sasha: Thank you yes that should be-

>>>I have a customer service question, what should we do about drivers that take calls and speak in their foreign language and they have customers in the vehicle. And it is not courteous. Yes, this while they are picking me up and dropping me off. They have a Bluetooth...

Sasha: And I saw that too when I was riding, I mean, you should be reporting that to Winnipeg Transit each time, because that's not appropriate. Their policy specifically states that it's not allowable. They shouldn't be taking any personal phone calls during their work time.

>>>But then if we report it again and again, we should not have it come back on us.

Sasha: Yes, that is a part of their contract. The contract with the City of Winnipeg does not allow for personal calls. It does allow for business calls. And just to check in with everyone we have about 10 mins left.

>>>And I know that you are listening, I can feel that, but with my son, what does he have to do to get the service? The OT that they have there, why is she better than the doctor that is recommending the care? Tell me what I can do further? And he doesn't like me interfering with his process, but give me an idea of what I can do.

Sasha: I wish I had an answer but I don't. Well you have to appeal but-keep applying and perhaps they are seeing something but I can't comment. I understand, there isn't much I can do I'm sorry.

>>>Is there someone other than them I can go to?

Sasha: Sorry, no.

>>>I just wanted to comment and see what other cities are doing, hopefully transit will keep in mind, well when they closed a bunch of ERs here because of what they did in other cities, but hopefully transit keeps in mind for what works here just because of what works in other cities. I just want them to take that into consideration, just to remember that we're different.

Sasha: Exactly Family Services won't work in the winter if we don't plow the sidewalks. I agree what we are looking at here is a 'Made for Winnipeg' solution. And that's what today is about to see if we are out to lunch or if we are on track. Thank you for coming today.

>>>You mentioned that there is a monthly consultation committee. When and where is that?

Sasha: You can contact Winnipeg Transit Plus it's usually every month, a policy advisory committee, and you can usually get agenda items ahead of time, and you can contact attendees with concerns or comments. Anything else? First time we've gone quiet in two hours! [Laughter] Wouldn't want you to be a no-show. If there is nothing else then that's it for day! Thank you all for coming, if you have time please complete the exit survey and hopefully they won't fire me after!

>>>Is the survey online or will it be emailed?

Sasha: This is a simple survey but there will be a subsequent survey online, this is more about the session today.

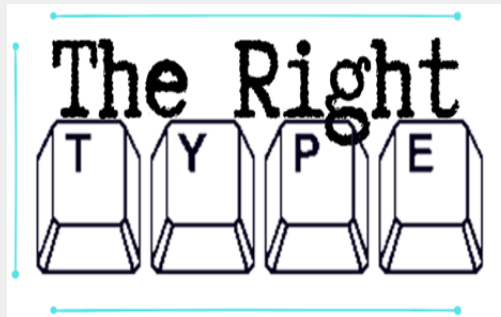
>>>Thank you for those that helped us getting called who can't see.

Sasha: Thank you! Kevin will be reporting in March about everything that we talked about today. If you find you didn't get enough we also have a session tonight! And tomorrow we have two as well. John is presenting so maybe it will be a better experience! Thank you!

[End]

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