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ATU 1724 Submission on British Columbia Framework for Accessibility Legislation

Date November 28, 2019

Name and purpose of organization:

Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1724 represents the workers in the Greater Vancouver regional area with the paratransit service known as HandyDART.

Connection to the topic of accessibility legislation for British Columbia:

ATU Local 1724 believes that the present state of HandyDART service in Metro Vancouver is an important example of the kind of situation good accessibility legislation and policy should rectify in a timely manner, and prevent from reoccurring.

In 2017 the Mayors' Council on Regional Transportation released a backgrounder titled HandyDART: A Backbone of Provincial Healthcare, which notes that 67% of HandyDART trips are to access health services. The Mayors asserted that TransLink's "10-Year Vision . . . will still leave Metro Vancouver with about half of the accessible transit trips per capita that are provided in other similar Canadian cities, including the Capital Region. This service shortfall is in large part a reflection of the lack of provincial support for this service."ⁱ

More HandyDART service can reduce long-term care and hospital stay expenses. The BC Seniors Advocate states "On average, a long-term care bed costs taxpayers \$27,740 more per year than two hours of daily home support."ⁱⁱ Forcing people with disabilities into care, rather than enabling them to live independently, is also a human rights violation.

The service increases in TransLink's 10-Year Vision are substantial, but are only enough to maintain a crisis of inadequate service given the aging population. The Mayor Council backgrounder states "Demand for this service is expected to increase as the population of residents aged 70+ increases by 55% over the next decade, and as the provincial healthcare system continues to shift more services to community-centered care."

Adequate HandyDART service is essential for many seniors and people with disabilities to live independently rather than going into long-term care. *Investing in improving HandyDART service would likely result in at least an equivalent savings in provincial long-*

term care costs. ⁱⁱⁱ In addition, reducing the barriers to employment and education for people with disabilities would result in large social and economic benefits.^{iv}

People with disabilities should not be victims of a situation where different levels of government are pointing fingers and avoiding responsibility, rather than cooperating to provide crucial services to people with disabilities.

As requested, our submission answers the following questions posed in British Columbia Framework for Accessibility Legislation.

What is most important to you about accessibility legislation for B.C.?

Our workers care about HandyDART riders, and cannot have satisfying work lives if they cannot provide good service that respects the rights of people with disabilities. Accessibility policies and legislation should have the explicit goal of ensuring that people with disabilities who need HandyDART service get service that allows their full participation in society on an equal basis with others.

What do you think about the suggested model for legislation and scope of legislation?

The general ideas are inspiring, and we strongly support the inclusion of “temporary or episodic” disability as per the Accessible Canada Act. Many people need HandyDART service on a temporary or episodic basis, and these people should not be discriminated against.

As per the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, provincially funded transportation agencies should be required to provide service that allows people with disabilities “full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

Do you have other ideas for the model for legislation and scope of legislation you would like considered?

It is not clear if the policies and legislation will cover provincially funded agencies such as BC Ferries, TransLink and Coast Mountain Bus on the same basis as crown corporations such as BC Transit. We believe that the legislation and policies should cover all aspects of TransLink’s operations on the same basis as BC Transit.

We also believe that the economic status of people with disabilities should be explicitly considered and emphasized. Policies that only work for relatively wealthy people with disabilities are discriminatory, and people with disabilities who are living in poverty should be involved in designing the legislation and policy.

What do you think about the suggested purposes and principles for legislation?

We strongly support the purpose of ensuring “there are adequate mechanisms in place to track progress on accessibility.” For example, we would like to see regular monitoring and reporting of HandyDART service levels per capita and per person with disabilities (which can be approximated by indicators such as population over 70 years old). Agencies with a provincial mandate and/or funding, such as BC Ferries and TransLink, should be subject to tracking under both legislation and policies.

Do you have other ideas about the purposes and principles that should guide accessibility legislation?

The purposes and principles, including mechanisms to track progress, should apply to all entities with a provincial mandate or which receive provincial capital or operating funding. E.g. TransLink and BC Ferries.

What do you think about the suggested approach to accessibility standards?

Transportation should definitely be included in accessibility standards, and standards should be binding on entities such as TransLink.

What do you think about the suggested approach to timelines for accessibility legislation?

Timelines should be adopted, and these timelines should apply to organizations such as TransLink. Timely funding should be available to help organizations meet these timelines.

What do you think about the suggested approach to governance for accessibility legislation?

Whatever structure is adopted, an effective governance mechanism will require adequate resources to oversee the wide range of entities, including TransLink, providing crucial services to people with disabilities.

What do you think about the suggested approach to incentives, compliance, and enforcement for accessibility legislation?

We believe that direct funding to improve services to people with disabilities will be crucial to success. For example, funding should be available for TransLink to install accessible washrooms at transit transfer points and to increase HandyDART service. Enforcement is also important, but incentives and direct funding should be the leading mechanism.

What other initiatives or actions would you recommend to promote a culture of accessibility?

Accessibility should be made a major consideration in significant policy initiatives such as the CleanBC climate action initiative and regional/provincial transportation plans. For example, the benefits of bus lanes to HandyDART riders should be considered when considering transportation investment priorities.

Sincerely,

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ⁱ www.curecongestion.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Backgrounder-HandyDART-1.pdf

ⁱⁱ www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/osa-reports/report-home-support-review/

ⁱⁱⁱ CUTA (2013) *Value Case for Accessible Transit in Canada*.
cutaactu.ca/sites/default/files/cutareport_valuecaseforaccessibletransitincanada.pdf

^{iv} Metro Vancouver's Aging Population and the need for Quality HandyDART Service (2017)
<http://ecoplanning.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Quality-HandyDART-Final-Oct-16-2017.pdf>