



PHASE 2: CARE-A-VAN PROGRAM REVIEW



Final Report

JUNE 2014



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1. INTRODUCTION



The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) creates strategic planning challenges and financial pressures that are unprecedented within Ontario's transit and specialized transit industry. In fact, the issue before the City of Sarnia is how to provide a level of Care-a-Van specialized transit service that satisfies the requirements of the AODA in general and the Provincial Transportation Standards (the *Integrated Accessibility Standards* (Ontario regulation 191/11)) specifically. Further, the City is challenged to develop a plan to deliver public transit services to people with a disability that satisfies community requirements and expectations in a cost-effective manner.



The Province of Ontario's **Integrated**

Accessibility Standards (Ontario regulation 191/11) requires transportation services to prevent and remove barriers so that people with

disabilities can more easily access transportation services across the province. Conventional providers and specialized transportation service providers must have started to meet the requirements of the transportation standards beginning last July 1, 2011. Certain requirements have various other effective dates depending on the requirement and/or type of transportation covered under the standard.

What is an accessibility standard?
An accessibility standard is a rule (set of measures, policies & practices) that persons and organizations have to follow to identify, remove and prevent barriers.

The issue is the *management* of demand. In other words, it is the management of the demand for specialized transit services that is important in order to help the City and their planning and funding partners plan effectively for the future. Alleviating all capacity constraints on the complementary specialized transit services provided by Care-a-Van represents a key risk factor in the City's efforts to balance community and regulatory requirements and budgetary realities. Efforts to accommodate future demand by simply adding capacity may in fact lead to an upward spiral of increased demand, possible refusal rates, and the need for more services. While this spiral will not perpetuate indefinitely, it is certainly likely to create untenable financial and operating pressures unless steps are taken to manage demand at the same time.

It is important to identify potential improvements in meeting fiscally responsible mandates in the delivery of specialized transit services -- demand management measures. These measures are intended to ensure adequate customer and revenue volume for services, or to divert demand from more costly to less costly services using incentives, information, and other voluntary measures.



The objective for the City in the near term includes the effective delivery of specialized transit and to accommodate the growing demand for public transit services by people with disabilities. To address this challenge, Sarnia Transit continues to develop an increasingly close relationship between accessible conventional transit services and the delivery of Care-a-Van specialized transit service.

The review of Care-a-Van found that specialized transit in Sarnia faces several challenges - growing demand, changing community expectations, accessible conventional/fixed-route transit services, and increasing costs - that present challenges in the delivery of specialized transit services.

In light of these challenges, the review proposes a set of recommendations that would result in enhancements to the delivery of specialized transit service in the City, modeled on industry best practices and regulatory trends. *At its heart, the recommended service model would ensure the continued compliance with AODA, as they evolve in the province, while simultaneously implementing demand management strategies to preserve the Care-a-Van service for those who truly need it and shifting some trips to more cost-effective transportation services.*

1.1 Summary of Recommendations

The recommended approach (Section 6) addresses:

- Service Structure and Operations
 - Reduce the advance booking requirement to 24 hours in advance (and up to seven days);
 - Formalize the use of a twenty-minute scheduling window;
 - Elimination of trip purpose restrictions as they impact standing orders and advance booking requirements;
 - Place a moratorium on standing orders/subscription trip requests;
 - Need to migrate to the use of commercially available scheduling software for route optimization and enhance system productivity;
 - Pursue automated Care-a-Van trip reservation, scheduling and trip management capabilities; and
 - Enhanced integration with conventional transit to encourage the voluntary use of Sarnia Transit fixed route services by Care-a-Van registrants (for some of their trips – some of the time).
- Eligibility and Certification
 - Adopt the use of a revised application form (provided as part of review process) reflecting an applicant's functional limitations (rather than current focus on physical disability);
 - Recertification of existing Care-a-Van registrants; and
 - "Grandfather" existing registrants.
- Service Standards reflecting service delivery and operating performance.

The Financial Plan (Section 7) is premised on no expanding levels of service or resources with marginal increases in demand to be accommodated through scheduling efficiencies and the adoption of demand management strategies or interventions as recommended in Section 6 (and summarized above).

From 2014 to 2018:

- Passenger trips are projected to increase 3.1%.
- Productivity, as measured by passenger trips per hour is projected to increase 10.7%.
- Total operating costs are projected to increase 7.1% while net operating cost will increase 8%.
- The net cost per passenger is projected to increase 4.8%.
- The net cost per capita is projected to increase 9.7%.

1.2 Study Objectives and Work Program

This 5-Year Service Plan has been designed to achieve several key objectives, specifically:

- Set strategic direction for improvements to specialized transit services over the next 5 years;
- Identify opportunities and obligations of the City in cost-effectively meeting the mobility requirements of the City's elderly and disability communities within a framework of providing shared ride public transit for those unable to use accessible conventional transit. This will include a more integrated approach with the accessible fixed-route, Sarnia Transit services;
- Review existing Care-a-Van policies, procedures, operations and organization to ensure the delivery of efficient, effective and fiscally responsible service delivery in compliance with the Province's AODA (including implications of the Provincial Integrated Accessibility Standards/Ontario regulation 191/11); and
- Provide estimates of future demand for Care-a-Van services and assess the implications of growth and increasing demand on operational and capital budgets.

Existing Care-a-Van specialized transit services provide tremendous benefits to people with disabilities, but because of increasing demands and high costs, it is important that the service be provided with maximum efficiency. Improving cost efficiencies requires the review of current processes, and implementation of other creative and innovative solutions to best respond to emerging specialized transit needs over the next five years. To this end current issues and financial realities have been addressed, including:

- Is the best service being provided, given the financial and operational resources available?
- How does Sarnia Transit service latent and increasing demands for Care-a-Van, given fiscal and budgetary limitations?
- What efficiencies may be gained through enhancements to administrative and operating processes including eligibility and certification, advance booking, trip purpose policy, etc.?

- What is the most effective manner of providing specialized transit services given the differences in needs for persons with different functional disabilities and the range of service delivery options available?
- To what extent can the future accessible conventional transit services meet the mobility needs of persons with disabilities?
- What initiatives and policies can be implemented to promote the use of lower cost options, while providing quality service to customers?
- What opportunities exist to potentially coordinate, through a community collaborative effort, the operation and funding of transportation services for persons with a disability?

These issues and study objectives are subsequently translated into work program, which included:

- Data collection: (primary and secondary);
 - Profile of Care-a-Van services
 - Census data / Transport Canada's TransAccess database
 - Operating and demographic data from the City and County of Lambton.
- Development of travel demand forecasts;
- A series of stakeholder consultations including the public, Care-a-Van customers, agencies/organizations representing the City's elderly and disabled populations, City's Accessibility and Transit Advisory Committees and Sarnia Transit officials/staff including operations staff and operators.
- A review of existing Care-a-Van operating policies, service characteristics and budgets, and reservation, scheduling and trip management processes; and
- Development and analysis of alternate service strategies and related implementation.

1.3 Mobility Vision – A Way Forward

Through multiple initiatives addressing quality of life considerations, the City ensures a healthy, connected, supportive environment for its residents. It is within this spirit that the following *guiding principles* provide the foundation for the recommended Care-a-Van service plan strategies:

Universal access including an accessible infrastructure;

Flexible mobility options with a cost-effective mix of accessible shared-ride, public transportation services; and

Maximize the utility and investment in accessible conventional transit (mobility management strategies) to encourage a shift from specialized to conventional public transit.

These guiding principles recognize the requirement for an accessible infrastructure including a commitment to the future procurement of accessible, low-floor transit buses.

Care-A-Van: shared ride public transit for those unable to use accessible public transit

As a transit provider, the City of Sarnia has facilitated a more integrated approach between accessible conventional transit services and specialized (Care-a-Van) transit services. Transit has created a user friendly, accessible conventional transit service that may provide additional mobility options for many specialized transit service registrants. An accessible public transit system provides a higher degree of trip making flexibility and facilitates greater travel spontaneity and independence. A truly accessible transit system can become the preferred choice for many people with a disability.

In order to fully implement an effective 5-Year Service (Mobility) Plan, Sarnia Transit must build on its current successes in developing a corporate and community culture that recognizes and supports the strategic, social and economic benefits of a Mobility Plan. This culture must be fully accepted and supported by the City as well as Care-a-Van program management and frontline staff. The longer term vision is to move towards the concept of *universal access* to conventional public transit services. While preserving the integrity of Care-a-Van specialized transit services for those with no alternatives, universal access to conventional transit services requires the need to address ancillary considerations including an accessible infrastructure, streetscape, audible signals, etc.

2. PROFILE OF EXISTING CARE-A-VAN TRANSPORTATION OPERATIONS

The City of Sarnia operates two public transit services, the conventional bus system and Care-a-Van the specialized system. These two systems complement each other to ultimately provide an accessible public transit system. Care-a-Van provides local public transportation in the Sarnia and Point Edward areas to people who are unable to use regular Sarnia Transit service, due to a physical disability, and who are registered with Sarnia Care-a-Van. Care-a-Van service provides accessible door to door transportation using lift equipped vehicles.

2.1 Key Statistics

Care-a-Van serves a population of close to 72,000 with a service area of 167 square kilometres. Care-a-Van service is provided throughout the entire city, a service area beyond that of the urban transit service area.

The following provides key Care-a-Van operating characteristics:

- Over 1,600 registrants
 - Persons with physical disability
 - Some seasonal: visual impairment – Nov. to March
 - Application process: validated by health care professional
- Pre-booked.
 - Advance bookings
 - 30 days in advance for medical appointments
 - 5 working days for other trips
 - Standing orders (subscription) for regular work or school trips

- Approximately 35,000 trips/year
- Annual operating cost in excess of \$735,000.
- Net cost per trip: \$18.40
- 2.7 trips per hour
- Since the fares paid for both conventional (regular service) service and Care-a-Van service is the same, tickets and passes offered by Sarnia Transit may be used on either service.
 - Cash fare: \$2.50
 - Tickets (sheet of 20) \$44.00
 - Support Persons (attendants) travel free
- Care-a-Van operates the same hours of service and same days of week as conventional transit.

CONVENTIONAL & CARE-A-VAN
 Monday to Friday — 6:30am to 10:45pm
 Saturday — 8:00am to 10:45pm
 Sunday — 8:30am to 6:15pm

2.1.1 CARE-A-VAN PERFORMANCE RELATIVE TO POPULATION GROUP SPECIALIZED TRANSIT SERVICES

Operating characteristics and data for a select number of peer specialized transit services as well as Population Group 2¹ (50,000 to 150,000) summary was reviewed for general comparison. Salient observations are presented below.



- Care-A-Van’s cost per trip is marginally less (6.6%) than the Population Group average.
- The City’s investment in specialized transit as measured as the cost per capita, of \$9.42 is marginally less (6.1%) than the Population Group average of \$10.03.
- The number of Care-a-Van trips per capita is virtually identical to the Population Group average (at 0.48 and 0.50, respectively).
- The number of trips per capita is 21.6% greater than that of peer averages.

	Cost Per Passenger	Cost Per Capita	Passengers (trips) Per Capita	Trips Per Registrant
Care-A-Van	\$21.10	\$9.42	0.48	21.6
Peer Properties	\$22.59	\$10.03	0.50	17.6

¹ The Canadian Urban Transit Association’s (CUTA) national and Ontario *Specialized Transit Services* Fact Books include population group summaries. Population Group 2 is those communities with a population of 50,000 to 150,000.

In short, the City's Care-a-Van service is performing similarly to peer properties. That said, Sarnia's Care-a-Van program is faced with similar challenges (and opportunities) as many specialized transit services throughout Ontario, including:

- The need for Legislative compliance;
- The need to effectively manage demographics and growth in travel demand (while the population projections indicate a decline in Sarnia's population over the next ten years, the percentage of people 65 years of age and over will increase more rapidly than the provincial average);
- The need to address a range of functional disabilities including cognitive, sensory, etc.; and
- The need to address program administration and trip management considerations in order to address increasing costs, fiscal accountability and service and scheduling efficiencies.

The status quo is not sustainable without interventions.

2.2 Functional Areas

There are four main functional areas in the delivery of specialized transit service. They are as follows:

- Funding and Oversight
- Eligibility and Registration
- Reservation and Scheduling
- Service Delivery

The following sections describe each functional area as it pertains to Sarnia Transit.

2.2.1 PROGRAM OVERSIGHT

Care-a-Van is administered, funded and operated by the City of Sarnia through the Transit Department. Sarnia Transit operates and maintains a fleet of 23 buses on the conventional transit system and operates 6 specialized vehicles on the Care-a-Van service. Transit is a city department reporting to the City Manager and City Council.

Sarnia Transit is responsible for Care-a-Van: eligibility certification; policy development and enforcement; service monitoring, evaluation and planning; funding; budget adherence; public relations; the direct operations and the provision of service vehicles, maintenance and fuel. Direct operations management includes the booking, scheduling and dispatching of trips; and the preparation of monthly service performance reports.

The *Sarnia Accessibility Advisory Committee* (SAAC) is established by Sarnia City Council according to its requirements under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA) and Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). The committee has been meeting since January, 2003. The 13 appointed members of the SAAC make recommendations and provide advice to Sarnia City Council on matters pertaining to the City of Sarnia's delivery of services to persons with disabilities, as defined under the ODA and AODA.

The *Sarnia Transit Accessibility Advisory Committee* (TAAC) is a committee of Council that works with Sarnia Transit administrative staff in an advisory capacity. Their mission

is “to be proactive in initiating strategies for public transportation services in the Sarnia Transit Services area aimed at providing accessible, reliable, professional and affordable services to its citizens in a cost effective manner. The members consist of one representative from Sarnia City Council, at least one representative from the disabled community, three city residents (riders/non riders), one representative from Point Edward Village Council, one Transit Operator (as required) and two Transit administrative staff.

2.2.2 ELIGIBILITY AND REGISTRATION

2.2.2.1 Eligibility

The role of Care-a-Van in providing door-to-door specialized transit means that it requires a significantly higher subsidy to provide an equal level of mobility. As such, to be responsible to the integrity of service, eligibility requirements are put in place to ensure that people using the service have a true need for it.

Virtually every specialized transit service across North America incorporates some type of eligibility criteria and registration process before a person can become a registered customer.

Current Care-a-Van eligibility criterion focuses on applicants’ physical limitations: “persons who are physically unable to climb or descend steps used on conventional public transit services and/or persons who are unable to walk a distance of 175 metres (575 feet). Further, persons who have a visual impairment are eligible to use Care-a-Van from Nov. 1st to March 31st”. Eligibility criteria *conditions* include permanent and temporary.

A physician must provide verification of an applicant's disability. Specifically, the physician is asked to clearly state (a) the physical disability which prohibits the applicant from “boarding a regular bus”, and (b) whether the applicant requires the assistance of a support person in order to travel – yes, no, or occasionally.

2.2.2.2 Registration Process

A relatively simple registration process is in place at the City for admittance into the Care-a-Van program. The applicant must submit an application form to the City, which includes a section to be completed by their physician. The application form is reviewed by transit staff.

2.2.3 RESERVATION, SCHEDULING & DISPATCHING/TRIP MANAGEMENT

Like most specialized transit systems, Care-a-Van requires advanced booking for all trips taken by its registered users. Advance bookings can be made up to 30 days in advance for medical appointments and five working days for all other trip requests. Limited same-day service is accommodated on a space available basis. Standing arrangements (subscription trips) are available for work or education trips only.

Trip booking, scheduling and dispatching responsibilities are not broken out to specifically designated positions. Trip volumes are low enough that the three processes can be handled by a “dispatcher”. There is one dedicated Care-a-Van call-taker/dispatcher position with other transit staff providing coverage on an as required basis.

The client database, trip bookings and the building of schedules are maintained in a software application developed in-house (by the City) several years ago and is no longer supported by the City’s IT Department (Corporate Services). This antiquated

software does not provide for a scheduling algorithm or an ability to do schedule optimization. Trip requests are manually entered into

Trips can only be booked via telephone by reaching the reservationist/dispatcher that is available on weekdays only, during regular office hours. Trips are generally booked in real-time on the phone. Return trips are booked at the same time, with the exception of trips for surgical procedures, where the customer calls after the procedure is complete. Booked trips are typically confirmed at the time of reservation.

Some same day trip requests are accommodated on a space available basis. Care-a-Van trip requests are accepted by a transit staff person and entered into a spreadsheet application. Trip assignment or the building of schedules is done manually (in the absence of any commercially available scheduling software that is able to optimize scheduling efficiencies – reflecting trip origins and destinations and time of travel).

Trip requests are entered into the database in half-hour increments. Again, the software application does not provide for any route optimization capability. The building of Care-a-Van runs, in half-hour increments reflects the dispatchers understanding of the city and the spatial distribution of trips. In short, runs are built manually based on a determination of the “best fit” on the various buses available. Trip times provided to customers are provided within a fifteen minute window. This provides flexibility to the schedule and to operating conditions. Drivers are instructed to wait a maximum of five minutes before departing and the trip is marked as a no-show.

Some two or three (return) trips a day are not able to be accommodated. Sarnia Transit has an arrangement with Lambton Elderly Outreach (LEO) to provide supplemental specialized transit. Unaccommodated trip requests are faxed to LEO, requested their transportation service accommodate (at a fare greater than Care-a-Van’s). There is no confirmation process in place that unaccommodated trip requests were accommodated.

Trip cancellations are made by customers phoning a dispatcher during business hours, leaving a voicemail outside of business hours or by calling the inspector. Staff reports that no-shows and same-day cancellations are problematic given that they consume unproductive service hours. Current data suggest that these number approximately 8 percent of service. Cancellations received at least one day in advance are less problematic as staff is able to effectively insert trips in available times.

Dispatching takes place on the day of service and is juggled with the dispatcher’s responsibilities to book trips, process cancellations and optimize schedules for the next day. The dispatcher is able to reassign trips from buses that may be running behind schedule to buses that have extra time between pick-ups and drop-offs.

A review of a sample period of driver logs/Trip Schedule Reports (October 2011 and April 2012) combined with observed experience spent riding Care-a-Van buses, suggests minimal ride-sharing. Exceptions include standing orders to key sites including Wawanosh Enterprises, Kiwanis Centre and day programs. The absence of commercially available scheduling software and the half-hour time slot scheduling mode presents limitations regarding trip optimization and subsequently, more ride sharing. Additional ride sharing will result in a marginal increase in average travel times but will enable accommodating more trip requests with the existing level of service and resources.

2.2.4 OPERATOR ASSIGNMENT

Care-a-Van shares its pool of operators with the conventional Sarnia Transit services, with sign-ups for shifts in order of seniority. There is currently a core group of operators

consistently assigned to Care-a-Van, with part-time operators filling in the balance of shifts. All operators are required to undergo Care-a-Van training prior to their first shift on the service.

2.2.5 DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS

Based on interviews with drivers, the current method of service delivery is efficient and effective; however, there are concerns expressed that growing demand, trip distance, and traffic conditions are making it difficult to accommodate all trips in a timely manner. However, with minor changes to the schedule, such as the changing of pick up sequences, and swapping of pick-ups, operators are able to coordinate to ensure that they stay on-time. Under ordinary circumstances, almost all trips remain within the provided fifteen-minute booking window and trip or travel times rarely exceed one half-hour. The ability of the operators to maintain their schedule is a key strength of the service today and stretches the overall efficiency of the system.

2.2.6 CUSTOMER SERVICE

The front lines of Care-a-Van customer service are its drivers and extend to the dispatcher and other staff members. The general consensus received from customers and stakeholders is that they are highly satisfied with the current level of service. Although this gold standard of service is exemplary, the operator's primary duty is to transport their customers from point A to point B (to and from inside the first set of accessible doors), and added tasks could delay operations and expose the system to potential liability. Moving forward, there should be an emphasis on clarifying the definition of the operator's responsibilities – providing passenger assistance in boarding and alighting to and from the first set of accessible doors.

2.3 Care-a-Van Service Standards

For Sarnia Transit's conventional transit services, a robust series of service standards exist.

Virtually no such service standards exist for Sarnia Transit's Care-A-Van.

Chapter 5: *Recommendations – A Way Forward* presents a series of recommended service standards for Care-a-Van services.

3. TRAVEL DEMAND

Changing demographics (i.e., aging population), growth in population through migration, and changes in settlement patterns certainly affect the demand for transit, whether it be conventional or specialized transit services. These changes are, however, usually anticipated and, as such, are generally included in the City population projections used in this demand analysis. The projections from 2013 to 2023 take into account things such as an aging population. There are however, issues that are not as easy to project, and are almost impossible to include in a transportation demand model. These issues are usually more socio/political in nature and affect the need and use of many kinds of transportation services. They include, but are not limited to:

- Trends towards community-based living;
- Expansion of adult day programs;
- Health care restructuring;

- Social policy framework; and
- Changes to service standards and other operational policies.

Recent research commissioned by AARP (formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons) suggests that the boomer generation, the first wave of which turned 65 years of age in 2011, will typically be “healthier” than that of previous generations. With greater expectations for mobility, this somewhat more affluent boomer generation will be a product of a more health conscious age group, while experiencing medical advances unprecedented in medical history. Future directions suggest the incidence of disability with aging will not escalate at the same rate that we have seen over the past quarter century. The increase in older adults does not necessarily indicate a proportionate need for the current mix of transit services. The increase in the percentage of older adults as a total of Sarnia’s population will not result in a direct proportional increase in the demand for Care-a-Van services. As the “baby boom” generation ages, the older adult population will generally:

- Be healthier and more physically fit
- Have a higher level of education
- Have a higher disposable income
- Be less transit dependent with greater automobile ownership/access
- Be living independently
- Have a wider range of lifestyle preferences and higher mobility expectations

The following section profiles travel demand and trip rates specific to the transportation disabled populations in the City and Care-a-Van services. Data specific to the incidence of disability is from Statistics Canada’s 2006 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS), the Canadian Survey on Disability (2012) and to a lesser extent, the *TransAccess*[™] database (based on Statistics Canada’s Health and Activity Limitation survey).

3.1 TRAVEL DEMAND AND TRIP RATES

This section profiles travel demand and trip rates specific to the transportation disabled populations in the City and Care-a-Van services.

One objective of this study was to develop demand estimates and travel trip rates for persons with disabilities. This data is to be used for transportation modelling and the development of operational and service delivery solutions to meet these demands.

Exhibit 3.1 profiles the travel demand for the years 2013, 2018, and 2023. The calculations use national incident rates for disabilities to estimate the future number of persons with disabilities in The City. The exhibit also illustrates the potential increase in demand for Care-a-Van service. As the population grows, the demand for Care-a-Van service will naturally increase. There is reason to believe the request rate may also increase due to a larger proportion of seniors in the community. In 2011, the percentage of the population aged 65 and over in Sarnia was 18.6%, compared with a national percentage of 14.8%.

It is important to note that these calculations are based on recognized trip rates and comparisons of levels of service of communities in the population group of 50,000 to 150,000 people.

Exhibit 3.1: Care-a-Van Travel Demand

YEAR	POPULATION *	PEOPLE	REGISTRANTS	TRIPS	
				At Current Rate	Peer Average
2013	71,895	4,125	1,640	35,900	34,570
2018	70,495	4,230	1,695	37,290	38,040
2023	68,845	4,475	1,730	38,060	41,220

* *Population Projections* – County of Lambton, Planning & Development Services Dept. (7/21/10). “Reference” growth scenario.

These projections assumes various demand management strategies are implemented to ensure alternate mobility options for the City’s elderly and disability communities and for the City to ensure the provision of quality Care-a-Van services for registrants unable to use other options.

4. STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

An integral component of this Care-a-Van review and preparation of a 5-Year Service Plan for specialized transit was seeking input from key stakeholders.

Input was sought through a number of sources including:

- A series of Stakeholder Consultations including the public, Care-a-Van customers, agencies/organizations representing the City’s elderly and disabled populations, and the City’s Accessibility and Transit Advisory Committees. Multiple public meetings took place throughout the study process specifically in November 2012 and June 2013.
- Solicitation of written comments from members of the community; and
- Meetings with Sarnia Transit/Care-a-Van officials/staff including operations staff and drivers.

These consultative sessions were designed to solicit input from the community and other stakeholders. Topics of discussion included: conceptual service alternatives/approaches, trip making characteristics, demand management strategies, and general perceptions about service quality.

Much of the discussion with and comments received from consumers were favourable towards the Care-a-Van program in general and the dispatcher and operators/drivers specifically. The latter receiving much praise for the quality of service including driver assistance “above and beyond the call of duty”.

Many were thankful for the availability of Care-a-Van service and the City’s commitment to providing this service to its residents. In short, Care-a-Van provides a “life-line” for many older adults and people with disabilities in Sarnia – enabling them to “get out and about” and partake in all their daily living needs. Further, many expressed concern that the service not be reduced although there was some recognition of the significant cost of delivering the current level of service.

A summary of comments follows.

a) ELIGIBILITY:

- Preference for a 'functional' limitation criteria rather than the present "physical" definition.
- Refer to the functional need and not the medical 'label'.
- May need to be more restrictive to ensure those with no alternatives will always be able to get a Care-a-Van trip.
- Need to reflect the "safety" aspect especially for persons with a visual impairment.

b) OPERATIONS / SERVICE DELIVERY

- Service reliability for the Care-a-Van service is problematic. Reports of vehicle break downs and vehicles running late.
- Prospect of introducing 24 hour advance booking requirement, scheduling windows and more ride-sharing received mixed reaction. Many recognized the need to bring the delivery of specialized transit more in line with shared ride public transit, compliance with provincial legislation and ensure it remain fiscally responsible for all taxpayers.

d) ACCESSIBLE CONVENTIONAL TRANSIT

- Using accessible conventional transit may be appropriate for some Care-a-Van customers but likely not that practical during the winter months.
- Discussion of the need for an accessible infrastructure including accessible paths of travel to access transit – snow removal, curb-cuts/ramps, accessible bus stops and shelters, etc.
- Isolated comments on difficulties with the manoeuvrability of scooters on the low floor buses.
- Suggestions that operators should receive more thorough training on disability awareness, sensitivity as well as the securement of wheelchairs/mobility device.
- Need to ensure that certain routes of conventional transit are always accessible/available for people with disabilities. It was suggested that Exmouth Road and London Road are two areas where large numbers of people with disabilities live, and where those individuals travel for education, shopping and health care.
- Bluewater Community where there is a relatively high proportion of older adults, do not have easy access to Sarnia Transit buses without having to walk significant distances (and cross London Line Road). Residents would like to have conventional transit serve the community.

e) GENERAL COMMENTS

- Access to medical appointments is problematic with the Care-a-Van service for a number of reasons:
 - Difficult to make same day bookings (spontaneous travel); and

- Sometimes don't know what time will be finished at the doctor and don't know what time to book a return trip.
- Some expressed a willingness to pay a premium fare for same-day service (suggestion of \$4. for same day vs. \$2. for advanced booked trips).

5. AODA / INTEGRATED ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS – COMPLIANCE

To specifically address accessibility issues and particularly the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) in general and the Provincial Transportation Standards (the *Integrated Accessibility Standards* (Ontario regulation 191/11)) specifically, the City has as a staff person responsible for its corporate accessibility plan.

The *Integrated Accessibility Standards* (Ontario regulation 191/11)) provides for standards in order to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures, and premises on or before January 1, 2025.

The Minister responsible for the AODA has established a process to develop and implement the accessibility standards necessary to achieving the purposes of the Act. Within this process, standards development committees have been established by the Minister to develop proposed accessibility standards.

Standards developed under the Act include:

- Customer Service
- Information and Communication
- Employment
- Transportation
- Built Environment

The following table presents select elements of the Integrated Accessibility Standards specific to specialized transit, the timeframe for compliance and an indication of Sarnia Transit's status relating to compliance. The Conventional Transit Service Plan document provides discussion of accessibility and legislative compliance for conventional transit services

AODA / Integrated Accessibility Standard / Requirement	Sarnia Transit / Care-a-Van Current Status Regarding Compliance
<p>Training: Including safe operation of accessibility equipment; transportable mobility aid securement systems; boarding and alighting assistance procedures; etc.</p>	<p>Compliant</p>

<p>Accessibility public transportation policy and planning Preparation of an accessible public transportation plan; maintain in consultation with a local accessible public transit advisory committee; identify and report actual results against performance measures; etc.</p>	Compliant (required to update annually)
<p>Type of service Deliver accessible origin to destination services considering the functional limitations of passengers</p>	Compliant
<p>Time of service Provide the same hours and days of service as provided by fixed route public transit in the same catchment area</p>	Compliant
<p>Area of service Specialized public transit service area be the same catchment area as the fixed route transit catchment service area</p>	Compliant Exceeds requirement in terms of Care-a-Van's service area exceeds that of the urban transit service area.
<p>Reservations Accept trip bookings between the opening of the booking period the previous day and 3 hours prior to the published close of the booking period the previous day</p>	Compliant Have operationalize 24 hr. advance booking requirement ² Need to revise Care-a-Van brochure
<p>Pick-up times Where possible and practical notify eligible passengers of pick up delays</p>	Compliant
<p>Fares Same base fare structure for all public transit services within a jurisdiction. Same fare media options.</p>	Compliant – same cash fare
<p>Personal care attendant fares Shall not charge a fare to personal care attendants, recognized by the transportation provider, accompanying a passenger with a disability.</p>	Compliant (City's Support Persons Policy – April 2010)
<p>Trip restrictions Not restrict the number of trips an eligible passenger is provided or any operational practices that limits the availability of service.</p>	Non-Compliant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to trip purpose restrictions for standing (subscription) orders. • Need to address few trip denials, possibly through negotiating pick-up times.
<p>Eligibility Shall provide specialized transit services to individuals with disabilities that prevents them from using fixed route public transit temporarily or</p>	Non-compliant as current eligibility is based on physical limitations ³ only

² Effective January 2014 - Ultraguard takes trip requests after regular dispatch office hours.

³ Current eligibility includes physically unable to use Sarnia Transit - the ability to walk a distance of 175 metres.

<p>permanently.</p> <p>Consider eligible unconditionally (unable to use fixed route), temporarily, or conditionally (environmental or physical barriers limit ability to consistently use fixed route transit).</p>	
<p>Eligibility process Make eligibility application information available in accessible formats.</p> <p>Consider an applicant provisionally eligible if an eligibility determination has not been made within 7 calendar days following submission of the completed application.</p> <p>Establish an independent appeal process for eligibility decisions that are unfavourable to the applicant with a final decision rendered within 14 calendar days upon receipt of an appeal.</p>	<p>Compliant</p> <p>Compliant</p> <p>Compliant</p>
<p>Visitor service Make specialized transit services available to visitors. Consider as eligible, visitors who provide confirmation that they are eligible for specialized transit in the jurisdiction in which they reside or meet the eligibility requirements of the host jurisdiction.</p>	<p>Compliant</p>
<p>Companions May allow companions to travel with an eligible passenger if space is available and will not result in the denial of service to other eligible persons.</p>	<p>Compliant</p>

6. RECOMMENDATIONS – A WAY FORWARD

The following section presents a series of recommendations designed to:

- Preserve the integrity of Care-a-Van services for those persons with a disability who are unable to use accessible conventional transit;
- Maximize the utility of current and future investments made by the City in accessible conventional transit and accompanying infrastructure;
- Provide flexible mobility options with a cost-effective mix of accessible shared-ride public transportation services;
- Recognize the legislative guidelines of the AODA in general and the Provincial Transportation Standards (the *Integrated Accessibility Standards* (Ontario

Care-A-Van: shared ride public transit for those unable to use accessible public transit

regulation 191/11)) specifically; and

- Be fiscally responsible and accountable.

Care-a-Van specialized transportation services provide an invaluable service for the City's elderly and disability communities. It remains imperative that there exists, however, nondiscriminatory access to accessible conventional services, where available, with Care-a-Van acting as a "safety net" for people who cannot use the conventional transit services. Philosophically, specialized transportation is not intended to be a comprehensive system of transportation for individuals with disabilities but simply a system that can provide individuals with disabilities the same public transportation service opportunities everyone else gets.

Recommendations address: service structure and operations; eligibility and certification; and service standards. The recommended timeframe or dates for adoption or compliance is subject to further review by transit staff.

6.1 SERVICE STRUCTURE & OPERATIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1.1 CARE-A-VAN OPERATIONS AND SERVICE DELIVERY

6.1.1.1 Service Delivery Framework

Care-a-Van specialized transit is shared ride public transit requiring an equitable approach between Sarnia Transit's conventional or fixed route services and specialized. The current delivery framework of Care-a-Van service (including area of service and days and hours of operation) is compliant with the legislative requirements. Logistically, wherever and whenever conventional transit operates; Care-a-Van service shall be available to customers whose trip origin and destination are within the same catchment area as fixed route transit services. The "same catchment area" would reflect route by route considerations with Care-a-Van operating within 1,000m of that route. For example, if there is no evening service on a specific conventional transit route, then Care-a-Van need not provide evening service in an area up to 1,000m of that route alignment. The current Care-a-Van service area (reflecting the entire municipal boundaries), exceeds the urban transit service area.

The use of an automated scheduling function including route optimization capability (Recommendation 6.1.2) will enable Care-a-Van buses to be used to their maximum productivity and efficiency. Further, with enhanced ride sharing (and marginal increases in an individual's travel time), some fifteen to twenty percent increase in productivity should be realized.

Increases in productivity combined with demand management interventions (including enhanced integration with accessible conventional transit services) will enable Sarnia Transit to accommodate any anticipated growth in demand without the need for an expansion of level of service or resources.

6.1.1.2 Trip Booking/Advance Booking and Scheduling Requirements

A trip booking requirement of 24 hours in advance (and up to seven days) will contribute to maximizing productivity without a degradation of service quality. The user defined⁴ parameters available within commercially available scheduling software algorithm can be amended to reflect marginal increases in maximize travel times in order to foster greater ride sharing.

It is recommended that the Care-a-Van booking requirement shall be 24 hours (1 day) in advance (and up to seven days).

Same day service will be available where practical (on a space available basis).

Comply by January 2015

It is important to incorporate additional flexibility in the scheduling of passenger trip requests through the use of scheduling windows. For example, trip times provided to customers are provided within a twenty minute window, plus or minus ten minutes of the trip time. This provides flexibility to the schedule and to operating conditions. While common in the specialized transit industry, some Care-a-Van customers may perceive this as an inconvenience. It is however imperative to accommodate growth in demand, eliminate trip denials and provide the added customer convenience resulting from a significant reduction in advance booking requirements. Further, as is also common in the industry, scheduling shall be done in real time (per the capabilities of commercially available scheduling software). This means that not only will there be a significant reduction in administrative burden in staff not having to call passengers back to confirm trip requests but customers will be told of their pick-up window at the time of making their trip request.

It is recommended that Care-a-Van introduce the use of a 20 minute scheduling window.

Comply by January 2015

It is recommended that scheduling be done in real time (with trip confirmations done at time of trip booking)

Comply by January 2015

6.1.1.3 Elimination of Trip Purpose Restrictions

Trip purpose restrictions relating to advance booking requirements (medical up to 30 days in advance) and standing orders (subscription service) for only work and education trips are not compliance with the legislative requirements. Anticipated efficiencies with automated scheduling and other demand management interventions will enable all trips to be reasonably accommodated without regard to trip purpose.

It is recommended that Care-a-Van eliminate any reference to trip purpose.

Comply by July 2015

6.1.1.4 Moratorium on Subscription Trip Bookings

Ideally this will limit the peak hour capacity and bus pull out required to serve the increasing number of social agency program trips, and possibly encourage high trip volume agencies to accommodate their current and future program-related travel needs with alternative transportation services. Within the parameters of the legislative environment, specialized transit can limit the volume of subscription trip bookings when

⁴ Typical commercially available scheduling software incorporates several parameters that can be adjusted by the user agency to reflect local operating conditions. These include travel time, dwell time, physical/geographic barriers, etc.

there is not sufficient service capacity to accommodate advanced booked/reservation trip requests made at least one day in advance. Available service capacity is restricted by annual operating budget limitations.

It is recommended that Care-a-Van place a moratorium on standing orders, where practical.

Comply by September 2014

6.1.2 TRIP RESERVATIONS AND SCHEDULING – GOVERNANCE

Study outcomes have recommended all trips be scheduled with the use of commercially available scheduling software within a framework of prescribed scheduling parameters. As previously stated, this will foster greater scheduling efficiencies and hence increased productivity.

It is recommended that City officials pursue automated Care-a-Van trip reservation, scheduling and trip management capabilities.

Building on outcomes from the *Transit Technology Plan Task 3: Implementation Plan*, (available under separate cover) Care-a-Van scheduling software may be incorporated in the recommended procurement of Smartbus software and scheduling software implementation. This deployment is targeted to be implemented three years out.

6.1.3 INTEGRATION WITH CONVENTIONAL TRANSIT

It is recommended that Sarnia Transit encourage the voluntary use of accessible fixed route services for those Care-a-Van registrants able to use (possibly for some of their trips, some of the time) by providing referral and information dissemination services relating to travel training and in-house capabilities to provide trip planning.

It is recommended that Sarnia Transit introduce Care-a-Van registrants travelling free on fixed route transit on a trial basis in off-peak hours, to start once the new network is introduced in 2015/2016.

Bluewater Retirement Community: As provided for in the Transit Master Plan document, two service concept options are proposed to serve the Bluewater Retirement Community, based on a hybrid service using Care-A-Van. Care-A-Van is proposed to overcome the difficulty in accessing the Bluewater Community with regular transit buses and insufficient time to divert Route 15 (Bright's Grove) into the community. The two approaches include:

- Treating community members as a regular Care-A-Van registrant. With this option, trip at specific times throughout the day would be scheduled daily as though it were requested by a Care-A-Van registrant, regardless of whether or not it was actually requested by a community member. This would provide regular, scheduled service connecting Bluewater Retirement Community to the Lambton Mall transit terminal. Regular fares would apply with full transfer privileges.
- Adding specific Care-A-Van service hours to serve Bluewater. With this option, additional revenue service hours will be added and the community would be served by a regularly scheduled Care-A-Van vehicle. This would avoid the criticism that

service is being provided at the expense of existing Care-A-Van registrants. This option would incur substantial cost in additional revenue hours.

Either option would meet the request for service to the Bluewater Retirement Community; however, travel demand is anticipated to be low. A trial service utilizing one of these two options is proposed to test ridership and operational demand.

6.2 ELIGIBILITY & CERTIFICATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Care-a-Van eligibility and certification processes provides for the initial opportunity to ensure that specialized transit is provided to those who cannot use accessible conventional transit services. *A key goal ought to be that of integration and ensure that persons with disabilities can use public transportation without encountering unnecessary barriers.*

6.2.1 ELIGIBILITY

The City's specialized transit services are shared-ride public transportation for those persons unable to use an accessible public transportation system, not for those who find it more difficult or are reluctant or unwilling to use an accessible public transportation system. Similarly, it is important to determine an applicant's need for an attendant including the need for such attendant care to function independently in the community as opposed to only for the purposes of transportation on Care-a-Van.

It is therefore critical that Care-a-Van services are reserved for those having no other public transportation option. Given the move towards a fully accessible conventional transit fleet, more people will be able to access these services.

Recognizing the broad range of disabilities, including how a person's functional disability may affect their ability to use conventional transit services, the amended application form reflects three categories of specialized service:

- Category I: Persons unable to board ride or disembark independently from a conventional or community bus vehicle, even if accessible.
- Category II: Persons with a temporary disability.
- Category III: Persons whose specific disability, or disability plus environmental barriers (e.g. distance, terrain, weather), prevents them from getting to the boarding location or from the disembarking location of a conventional transit vehicle.

It is important to recognize the transport needs of persons with a cognitive disability or mental illness where functional limitations may be less straightforward to assess. The application form drafted as part of this project reflects the requirements of those with a non-physical functional limitation and reflects the transit trip cycle of getting to a bus, waiting for a bus, boarding a bus, and being able to function independently in the community. A copy is included as Appendix A.

6.2.2 CERTIFICATION

Certification is the process by which applicants confirm that the functional disability information conveyed in their application form is true and accurate. As discussed above, Care-a-Van service eligibility will be based on a functional, rather than medical model. Persons are not qualified or disqualified on the basis of a specific diagnosis or disability. An individual will be certified as eligible if there is any part of the conventional

transportation system which cannot be used or navigated by that individual because of a functional disability. Alternate approaches to certify an applicant’s eligibility range from self-certification to having a doctor sign applications forms. The most common approach appears to include the latter but ought to include any medical practitioner including occupational therapists. Further, certification ought to include a process whereby applicants, specifically Category II and III eligible persons, are encouraged to participate in a travel or mobility training program. Various incentives may be provided ranging from travel training participants including free travel vouchers for use on conventional transit to frequent user (of conventional transit) programs when participants may accumulate points redeemable for free travel or other rewards.

6.2.3 APPLICATION PROCESS

The following provides a framework for a series of recommendations for an amended eligibility and certification process requiring:

- An update of all client data; and
- A revised paper application providing significantly more information relating to functional limitations.

In addition to the certification process related recommendations, a number of administrative related recommendations have been made. These address processes, roles and responsibilities. The comments *in favour* and *comments against* are based on discussions during stakeholder consultation.

Issue #1: Should current registrants be granted automatic eligibility rather than requiring all registrants to undergo a recertification process?

Stakeholder Comments in Favour	Stakeholder Comments Against
“Grandfathering” (automatic eligibility for current registrants) would be administratively simpler	Unfair to future applicants who would have to undergo a more comprehensive application process. Also unfair to current registrants who either choose to use Care-a-Van infrequently or are unable to use Care-a-Van more frequently but are unable to due to capacity constraints
Less likely to encounter community opposition	Care-a-Van needs to maintain an accurate client database. Client data will be required for any automation of the booking scheduling functions.
A proportion of the applicants would probably be found eligible anyway	As registrations continue to grow, the capacity of the system to provide an adequate level of service will become increasingly constrained

Recommendation #1: Existing registrants will be “grandfathered” however all registrants will be requested to complete the application form in order for Sarnia Transit to develop and maintain a comprehensive client database. The recertification process should be completed within a 6-month period.

Begin re-registration/certification by September 2014

Issue #2: Should the eligibility process continue to be limited to paper applications as opposed to incorporating an in-person interview?

Stakeholder Comments in Favour	Stakeholder Comments Against
Process is familiar	Paper applications provide very limited information to make accurate determinations
Less expensive to implement in short-term	Useful follow-up with professionals to verify certification can be just as time-consuming to staff as an in-person interview
Politically (potentially) less challenging to grassroots community as process won't appear to be significantly changed	Agency does not have the opportunity to inform applicants about other services and to accurately determine candidacy for mobility training
Possibly easier to administer	Increased accuracy will result in far greater cost savings that could be used to enhance service to those who truly need it
In-person assessments can be intimidating to some applicants, particularly seniors or those with depression	

Recommendation #2: Implement the use of a more detailed application form.

Implement amended application form in September 2014.

Issue #3: If a form of in-person assessment is selected, should all applicants (or those being recertified) be required to come in for the assessment rather than allowing some to be certified through a paper process?

Stakeholder Comments in Favour	Stakeholder Comments Against
Requiring all current registrants to come in is more equitable and avoids getting into arguments of why one person's application is more clearly eligible than another's	Some individuals have disabilities, which will always prevent them from riding conventional transit. Why put them through the bother of an in-person assessment?
Allows everybody to hear about other transportation/transit services available to them	Universal in-person assessments is more costly (at least in the short term) than selective interviews
Care-a-Van eligibility is so valuable that it is not too much to expect an individual to come in for one interview	It would lengthen the process of recertification to have everyone come in
If the person is unable to come in for an interview, how will they be able to use Care-a-Van service if they are found eligible?	

Recommendation #3: A more comprehensive paper application process will preclude the requirement for all applicants to come in for an in-person interview or assessment. If additional information about the applicants disability and how it affects their use of Sarnia Transit's accessible fixed route transit services, an applicant may be requested to attend an in-person interview.

6.3 CARE-A-VAN SERVICE STANDARDS

The following are recommended service standards for the Care-a-Van program.

Service Characteristic	Recommended Service Standard
<p>Trip Coverage/Trip Denials</p> <p>An unaccommodated trip is when Care-a-Van cannot schedule a trip within one hour before or one hour after the desired time of pick-up. A trip is denied if pick-up cannot be accommodated within this time window or if the customer does not have the flexibility to travel at another time.</p>	<p>The Care-a-Van program shall accommodate 100% of all trips requested by eligible registrants (within recommended parameters including 24 hour advance booking requirement).</p>
<p>Span of Service</p>	<p>Care-a-Van services will operate hours of service and days of the week comparable to the conventional service.</p>
<p>On-time Performance</p>	<p>All vehicles shall arrive at the pick-up points no earlier than 10 minutes before and no later than 10 minutes after the scheduled pick-up time, 95% of the time.</p>
<p>Maximum Travel Times</p>	<p>The maximum time any passenger is aboard a Care-a-Van vehicle shall not exceed 1.5 times the travel time it would take to make a comparable trip on conventional transit, 100% of the time.</p>
<p>Cancellations & No Shows</p>	<p>The objective is to have no more than 5% of the scheduled trips cancelled by the passenger up to one hour before the pick-up, and to have no more than 2% no shows within 5 minutes of the scheduled pick-up time window.</p>
<p>Complaints</p>	<p>The objective is to keep complaints to an absolute minimum but not to exceed 1 complaint per 1,000 passenger trips on average on an annual basis.</p>
<p>Service Utilization Standards</p>	<p>The vehicles dedicated to the Care-a-Van service should achieve a minimum utilization or productivity level of 3.0 passengers per revenue hour on a daily basis on average.</p>
<p>Cost Recovery Targets</p>	<p>A minimum cost recovery of 12% based on a Care-a-Van fare identical to the regular adult cash fare on the conventional fixed route services.</p>
<p>Door-to-Door Service</p>	<p>Passenger assistance at any trip origin or destination will be limited to inside the first set of accessible doors.</p>

Care-a-Van shall incorporate service standard measures in a Monthly Service Report.

Comply by January 2015

7. CARE-A-VAN 5-YEAR FINANCIAL PLAN

Exhibit 7.1 provides a Care-a-Van 5-Year Financial Plan reflecting projections for each of the years 2014 through 2018.

The trip or travel demand estimates and corresponding financials reflect the recommended approach / service enhancements previously described.

Exhibit 7.1: Care-a-Van 5-Year Financial Plan						
<i>Assumes Integration of Transit and Specialized Transit Services and Implementation of Care-a-Van Service Plan</i>						
	Budget	Projections				
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
City Population	71,895	71,615	71,335	71,055	70,775	70,495
In-Service Vehicles	6	6	6	6	6	6
Revenue Vehicle Hours	13,300	13,300	13,300	12,900	12,450	12,400
Care-a-Van Registrants	1,640	1,650	1,660	1,670	1,680	1,695
Passenger Trips	35,900	36,180	36,460	36,740	37,020	37,290
Passengers/Hour	2.70	2.72	2.74	2.85	2.97	3.01
Passenger Revenue	\$ 74,285	\$ 90,450	\$ 90,470	\$ 90,800	\$ 91,200	\$ 91,500
Average Fare	\$ 2.07	\$ 2.50	\$ 2.48	\$ 2.47	\$ 2.46	\$ 2.45
Total Operating Cost	\$ 735,310	\$ 700,400	\$ 721,400	\$ 735,840	\$ 743,200	\$ 750,600
Total Cost/Passenger	\$ 20.48	\$ 19.36	\$ 19.79	\$ 20.03	\$ 20.08	\$ 20.13
Net Operating Cost	\$ 661,025	\$ 609,950	\$ 630,930	\$ 645,040	\$ 652,000	\$ 659,100
Net Cost/Passenger	\$ 18.41	\$ 16.86	\$ 17.30	\$ 17.56	\$ 17.61	\$ 17.67
Net Cost/Capita	\$ 9.19	\$ 8.52	\$ 8.84	\$ 9.08	\$ 9.21	\$ 9.35
Revenue/Cost	0.10	0.13	0.13	0.12	0.12	0.12

APPENDIX A:

Draft Care-a-Van Application Form