

Rapid Transit Public Participation Meeting: The Importance of Proactive Accessibility

Introduction

Hello, my name is Sarah Hunt, and I am London resident and today I want to talk to you about the importance of proactive accessibility in the new proposed transportation systems. Thank you for allowing me to speak today. I hope to compel you to learn that proactive accessibility is so crucial to the success of this new proposed system that it needs to be a topic on the table at every step (or ramp) of the way or failure is inevitable.

Proactive Accessibility Definition

Proactive accessibility means welcoming in feedback from people with disability from the very early conceptual stages and making a commitment to revisit accessibility on an ongoing basis to ensure continued feedback, upgrades and maintenance. When I first viewed the photo of the proposed Light Rail Transit stops on the Municipality of London's Facebook Page, I too, missed a common barrier for people who use wheelchairs at first glance. After some research and discussion with various consultants at the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Alliance, I discovered the placement of the enclosed shelters at the stops for the Light Rail Transit Model (or LRT), are counter to the standards set for accessibility in the

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11>). While I appreciate this photo is only conceptual in nature, it sends me and others like me the message that Londoners with disabilities are not proactively being included in this exciting new endeavour at the level we deserve to be!

My Personal Experience

I, like at least ⁷⁶⁹⁰⁰~~15330~~ people, 21 percent (Statistics Canada 2006) of the London, Ontario population identify as a person with a disability. In 2012 I sustained a significant injury forcing me to use a wheelchair for two years and I learned the vast majority of services i use in london are not conducive to the needs of a wheelchair user. This is why I am so passionate that accessibility for the proposed new transportation system, needs to start now!

The Risks of Inaccessibility

The price of inaccessibility is significant! Reiss (2015) in Forbes, estimates that inaccessibility translates to approximately 8 trillion dollars of lost potential revenue from people with disabilities in the global market (Reiss 2015). For a municipality the size of London we are looking at potential available revenues of approximately ^{\$440 million}~~\$91.3 million~~ that will not be

spent on this new transit system without being proactively accessible and attracting ridership from the London Ontario community of disabled persons.

Additionally, another significant cost of not being proactively accessible is looming for 2025. This is the year the AODA has committed the province of Ontario to be completely barrier free. Advocates, just last month, April 2016, successfully pressured the Wynne government to update 11 statutes in the AODA and they continue to push for more (www.aodaalliance.com Accessed May 20, 2016). This means that without proactive accessibility this transportation system could be shut down in 2025 and a system that does not last more than 7 years is not the definition of sustainable!

The Benefits of Accessibility

Every single person in this room will require some form of accessibility in their lives whether it is due to injury, disease, or old age..

How powerful would the argument be in favour of the new transportation system if we were welcoming in those ^{76 900}~~15 330~~ people and enticing them to help us understand on which they would most like to spend their ^{2 440}~~\$94.3~~ million of disposable income?

You may be asking how proactive accessibility facilitates the needs of the able bodied. Research shows that most people prefer more open design concepts and that able bodied people too benefit from accessible structures. To that end, I have provided in the power point the examples on which the Region of Waterloo based its proactive accessible structure. As you can see from the photos, open awning type structures are used at stops as opposed to enclosed structures. When surveyed most people preferred the awning structure because it is more inviting and can safely accommodate more people during inclement weather.

3 Step Solution to the Implementation of Proactive Accessibility in either LRT or BRT or Hybrid Model

So what can London be doing differently to ensure proactive accessibility on the new proposed transit systems?

Step 1: Immediately involve our already established AODA advocates as well as invite members of the London community who identify as having a disability to provide feedback on the proposed transit system. Not just people who use wheelchairs, but people from the deaf community; people who are blind; people who may fall on the spectrum of Autistic Disorders

just to name a few of the Londoners who could give crucial feedback on making this structure sustainable and profitable.

Step 2: Get Involved! I challenge all of you to spend one day using a wheelchair! Help yourselves become more aware. The more aware those in power are, the better this is for London. !

Step 3: Use Person First Language. Awareness comes with an understanding of what it is like for the person using the wheelchair to navigate crowds; bad weather; and avoiding falling on the tracks

Recap

To recap this presentation, the take home points are as follows:

Number 1: Proactive Accessibility means fostering a sense of belonging for the approximate ⁷⁶⁹⁰⁰~~15-330~~ members of the London community who identify as having a disability.

Number 2: It does NOT matter if a structure fits basic AODA codes, if people with disabilities do not see it as a viable transportation option we will NOT use it and it will lose out on potential ridership and revenues.

Number 3: Ontario must be barrier free by 2025 (7.5 years away), standards keep increasing and this structure will be on the radar for audits and lawsuits at that time.

Number 4: Inviting ridership from Londoners with disabilities means significant revenues for this transportation system and London's taxpayers

Number 5: Proactive accessibility RIGHT NOW means long term sustainability for transportation in London.

Conclusion

With your help, I know we can ensure that this exciting and important idea for the city of London can be one that generates huge revenues for the city and that fosters connection and a sense of belonging for all of us here regardless of ability. Accessibility equals sustainability. Thank you for your time.

References

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