
For Information

REPORT TITLE: TransHelp Celebrates 40 Years of Service

FROM: Kealy Dedman, Commissioner of Public Works

OBJECTIVE

To provide information about TransHelp's 40th anniversary celebration and highlight the evolution of the program during the past 40 years.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- TransHelp was established in 1981 to provide door-to-door transportation for Peel residents with physical disabilities.
 - Annual ridership has grown nearly 500 per cent over the last two decades alone.
 - In 2017, TransHelp's eligibility expanded to include residents living with physical, cognitive, visual, and sensory disabilities.
 - Although the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in reduced trip demand, the need for TransHelp service is expected to continue to grow as Peel's population increases and ages.
 - In 2022, the Accessible Transportation Master Plan, originally approved by Council in 2014, will be reviewed and updated.
 - The program continues to evolve and implement a multi-year modernization strategy.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

TransHelp, the Region's specialized public transit, is marking a milestone in 2021; 40 years of service to the Peel Community. Events and initiatives are planned to mark this occasion. These include:

- A celebration with TransHelp staff to express thanks and appreciation and to acknowledge the significant progress in the service over time
- Two TransHelp buses wrapped with a 40th anniversary thank you message put into service
- A special 40th anniversary website featuring photos, historical milestones, and heartfelt testimonials from passengers (www.peelregion.ca/transhelp/40)

TransHelp was established in 1981 to provide door-to-door transportation for 190 Peel residents with physical disabilities. At that time, the TransHelp workforce included just 13

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staff members, of which eight were Operators and two were Customer Service Representatives.

Its original fleet consisted of six modified vehicles. By 2008, low-pressure propane systems were installed on the fleet to lower greenhouse gas emissions and improve vehicle reliability, not to mention the lower cost of propane compared to gasoline.

By 2009, Automatic Vehicle Locators (AVL) were installed to provide turn-by-turn directions and critical pick-up and drop-off information to Operators. The introduction of technology allowed TransHelp to become much more efficient.

In the early days, schedules were made using paper and pencil, which meant service limitations that made accessing critical transportation supports difficult for some of Peel's most vulnerable residents.

- Service was available Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., with limited service on Saturdays and no service on Sundays.
- Trips had to be booked several days in advance, and even then, a ride was not guaranteed.
- Cancellations had to be made several days in advance to avoid a charge.
- It took months for passengers to be approved for service.

2. TransHelp Today

Today, TransHelp supports more than 10,000 passengers living with physical, cognitive, visual and sensory disabilities; all of whom experience a barrier to using conventional transit, some or all of the time. Today's fleet has more than 70 buses. Similarly, staffing levels have increased to more than 100 employees, including 72 Operators, to keep up with the increased demand for specialized transit in our community.

Over the past two decades:

- trip demand has increased by 499 per cent
- the number of passengers has increased by 567 per cent
- the number of applications has increased from 800 to 2,800, annually

By 2019, approximately 70 per cent of trips were delivered using a third-party vendor. This service model helps ensure each passenger is transported in a vehicle most suitable to their needs and in the most cost-effective way.

Passengers today can:

- Travel seven days a week, 365 days a year, from 6:00 a.m. to 1:00 a.m.
- Book and cancel trips same day.
- Book online, anytime, from any device and see where their TransHelp bus is in real-time.
- Ride TransHelp within two weeks of submitting their completed application, with immediate transportation provided for compassionate reasons.

TransHelp service has become more regular and convenient over the years thanks to the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* and Regional Council's support of the *Accessible Transportation Master Plan (ATMP)*, approved in 2014.

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3. Looking Forward

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in reduced trip demand, the need for TransHelp service is expected to continue to grow as Peel's population increases and ages. Staff will continue to monitor trip demand and revise service levels where necessary to best meet the needs of residents in a financially responsible manner.

In 2022, staff is planning to review and update the Accessible Transportation Master Plan (ATMP) approved by Regional Council. The ATMP continues to be the foundational roadmap in TransHelp's modernization strategy. Given the pandemic and the pausing of many activities, an update to the plan is necessary. Staff will also update the program's trip and financial models to align with current realities.

The TransHelp program will continue to evolve in the years to come to best meet the needs of the Peel Community. The vision for the program over the next three to five years will focus on creating opportunities for integration with our transit partners in the GTA, focus on online and digital efficiencies, and creating an even better passenger experience along the way.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of TransHelp over the past 40 years has been a collaboration of community partners and internal and external stakeholders all focused on removing barriers for individuals with disabilities. Thank you to all employees, passengers, vendors, Advisory Committee Members, community partners and Regional Council members, past and present, who have supported this vital service.

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