

TRANSPORT CONTACT

December 1999

Communication and information bukiletin for paratransit services users

SPECIAL SERVICE
December 31
to January 1
page 5

Accessible taxi

20 vehicules on hand

Last September, after two calls for tenders, the STCUM Board of Directors awarded new contracts for accessible taxi. The improvements brought about will have a significant impact on the volume and quality of the service.

The number of customized minivans will go up from 15 to 20.



The agreement states that owners will have to provide customers of the STCUM Paratransit Services at least 25 hours of service per week, per vehicle. Dispatching operations will be ensured by Boisjoly Taxi.

Customized vehicles

Customers will appreciate the roomier design. Two wheelchair users and three ambulatory passengers can comfortably take place in the vehicle. The seat on the driver's right was removed, thus doubling the space for wheelchairs.

Several of these vehicles will be on the road 24 hours a day. What's more, wheelchair users who can't use regular taxi services and who wish to use this service on a personal basis, should contact Boisjoly Taxi at 252-1313. Advance booking is strongly suggested. However, in this case, customers will

have to pay the ride's full fare as set up by the taxi industry.

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An important reminder

Reservation procedure for the Holidays

There are only a few days left for you to take advantage this year again of the *Holiday Season's Special Reservation Procedure*. Make the most of it!

This special procedure is set up in response to the suspension of a large number of regular activities and the many requests for occasional transportation.

What follows is a presentation of this procedure. If reading is difficult for you, note that the procedure can also be heard while on Hold when placing a call at the Call Center. And associates* whose names appear on Tele-releases' distribution list are already aware of this new procedure.

* Associates who are not on Tele-releases' distribution list can register by calling our Customer Service Dept. at 280-5341. We will ask for a fax number and the name of someone in charge.

How it works

From December 25 to January 3 inclusively

- All regular trips are cancelled.

Please don't forget to cancel as soon as possible any regular trips that will not be required in the

days prior to December 25, or following January 3.

- Regardless of the reason for the trip, you will be able to make advance requests for transportation until December 18 inclusively, in the following manner :
- **by phone :**
(taxi 280-5445, minibus: 280-5353);
- **by fax :**
(280-6113), no later than December 18;
- **by mail :**
requests must be received no later than December 18 at this address :

STCUM
Paratransit Services
3111 E. Jarry St.
Montreal, Quebec
H1Z 2C2

- Starting December 19, all requests for occasional transportation will be processed in the customary manner—by phone only—by calling the usual telephone numbers.

December 24

On Christmas Eve, a number of activities wind up earlier. Once

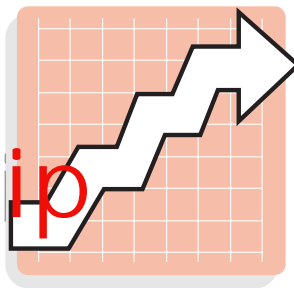
again this year, and for this one day only, we offer you the possibility of modifying in advance your regular return time. Subject to resources available on December 24, you can, as of today and up to December 18, request changes to the return time of a regular trip by telephone (taxi : 280-5445, minibus : 280-5353).

Or make your modification request in the usual manner starting December 22.

Please note that if you must change a reservation's destination or point of departure, you must cancel the programmed trip and make a new request for transportation. Don't wait till the last minute!

Ridership still growing

1999 Ridership



In the first nine months of 1999, ridership increased by 4.3% over last year. This could have been even larger were it not for the budget crisis that disrupted our services from July up to the end of October.

Because the demand is changing, requests for transportation by minibuses of ambulatory customers have declined. For a few years now, the restructuring of services in *Rehabilitation Centers for the Intellectually Impaired* (ambulatory customers) led to an increase in demand for regular taxi over minibus.

Right now, studies are done in order to modify part of the minibuses fleet into customized minibuses (with hydraulic lift, wheelchair restraint system, etc.) This would increase the volume of service provided to people who can't access regular taxi.

Impacted by the budget crisis

Generally, mid-August marks the beginning of our annual marathon of regular schedule processing. Not this year. The budget crisis forced us to push back a whole month the beginning of this very heavy work period. (See **The budget crisis and the Fall schedule**).

Unfortunately, this created complications in the processing of

transportation requests which didn't settle until the end of October. During that time, there was a month-worth of backlog work to catch up on, plus the increase of occasional transportation requests generated by this situation. In September alone, we processed 2,200 more occasional transportation requests than in September 1998.

As a consequence, with the Call Center clogged up, we were not able to properly answer all transportation requests. Furthermore, to help unblock the call center, we ask customers to request as soon as they can their regular transportation schedule for the Fall season.

Transportation refusals

From January to September, the average percentage of refusals for regular taxi was less than 1% (0.7%). The average percentage of refusals for minibus is 3.51%.

Intershore trips

The number of intershore trips is right now still quite low, and accounting for 0.5% of requests—

has had a negligible impact on the service. However, since the year began, requests for transportation have steadily increased to reach a high of 500 in July.

The number of customers from other transit corporations (STL and STRSM) registered with the STCUM for the new service jumped 67% since the beginning of this year, going from 96 customers in January to 160 in September.

Ridership as of September 10, 1999			
	ACTUAL '98	ACTUAL '99	ACTUAL DIFFERENCE
Minibus ^(for ambulatory customers)	96,425	92,000	-4.4%
Customized minibus	244,596	252,406	3.8%
Regular taxi	514,323	531,004	4.0%
Accessible taxi	20,699	38,726	87.2%
Total	876,043	914,136	4.34%

The budget crisis and the fall schedule

The summer recess was disrupted by a budget crisis over which we had no control. It caused a lot of inconvenience for users, complicated greatly our work, and the effects lingered on from July till the end of October.

The fall season started on a sour note : the Call Center phone lines were all clogged up and consequently callers had to stand through long delays to confirm regular transportation schedule. Customers, associates and employees alike had to put up with the drawbacks **(See Ridership for more details.)**

Crisis review

The Quebec Transportation Dept. was informed in the spring that a further \$2 million was needed in order to provide the service required. The cost increase was largely due to a growth in ridership stronger than anticipated and an unforeseen and quite high increase in the cost linked to taxi service.

Following last spring calls for tenders, discounts remited by taxi companies were severely cut down to less than 1%. The cost now paid by the STCUM to most companies is equal to the cost of the ride as it appears on the meter.

With a possible shortage of money, we were forced to a very tight management of resources, until the

situation clarified itself. Expenditure restraining measures were adopted (major cutbacks in overtime, delays in processing regular transportation schedule and postponement of non-compulsory spending). On top of these measures, service cuts were also given consideration.

Lobbying before the Quebec Transportation Dept. continued all summer long. The STCUM sent representatives from the Paratransit Service, the General Management and the Board of Directors. Many customers joined in the effort, as well as users groups representatives and associates.

Help from the MUC and a positive answer from Quebec

Before the Quebec Transportation Dept. final verdict, the municipalities of the MUC had given their support to the STCUM Board of Directors. They were ready to contribute up to 25% of the cost increase(including ridership revenues), as per the Paratransit Assistance Program. But, first, this new expenditure for the current year had to be approved by the Quebec Transportation Dept.

During the second week of September, the Quebec Transportation Dept. finally announced to the medias that it was about to pump an additional \$1.2 million to cover part of the STCUM demand. With the MUC contribution and customer revenues, it added up to \$1.6 million.

As soon as this was known, the STCUM management authorized the Paratransit Service to commit the money needed for a massive processing of regular transportation schedule requests (regular transportation schedules constitute 73% of all the services we provide). Nevertheless, the task was so huge (one whole month to make up for) that the Call Center was back to normal service at the end of October only.

Combining savings made from July on to the additional money distributed by Quebec and the MUC was enough to ensure that no service cuts became necessary anymore.

The Quebec Transportation Dept. announced an increase of money for transit corporations in 2000. Lobbying has already started in order to let resources be allocated where they are needed. We are looking for a quick and hopefully positive—answer by the Quebec Transportation Dept.



New Year's eve

December 31
to January 1

Starting December 31, the STCUM regular services will run all night long during the eve of January 1. Adapted minibuses will do the same for Paratransit Services. The service will be based upon the demand generated by this offering as well as by the availability of resources at that point in time. This should be much appreciated by customers who are limited to riding adapted minibuses.

The service will not be extended to taxi, as companies cannot guarantee a sufficient number of vehicles. In that case, we rather offer an exclusive service by minibuses. Considering that we will have to make due with limited resources, please take note that no group reservation will be accepted for the period of 1.30 a.m. to 8 a.m.

For transportation requests, take advantage of the *Special Reservation procedure for the Holidays* up to December 18. The customary procedure will be reinstated after that point.

1999 Paratransit Conference

"This important open forum between customers and transit bodies sent a clear message to decision-makers in government and created a bond amongst the groups defending disabled people's rights." Those were the words used by the conference co-chairmen, Mr. Raymond Desjardins, general manager of the ARUTAQ (Alliance des regroupements d'usagers du transport adapté du Québec) and Mr. Pierre Lamoureux, section head of the Management and Relations with customers and associates Division (STCUM-Paratransit Services) to summarize the discussion in which participated 200 people during the 1999 Paratransit Conference held in Montreal from September 29 to October 2.

Under the theme "Sharing responsibility about public transit... a question of fairness", the forum was set up jointly by the CUTA (Canadian Urban Transit Association) and the ARUTAQ. This was the first time an event like this one was organized in such a fashion and it goes to show how the idea of partnership is growing on customers of paratransit and transit bodies. The evolution of the context imposes a new dialogue.

With the ageing of the population and the necessity for down-to-earth measures favoring access to transit, open forums on these topics must be held. What's more, this conference played on backdrop of



an ongoing public funding crisis along with the many projects for municipal tax reform casting long shadows over the proceedings.

But, after three days, issues were already better defined. An observer from the Quebec Transportation Dept., with a 20-year involvement in paratransit issues, said that this certainly was the most impressive conference he ever attended.

Let's hope this is only the beginning...



NOTEPAD

A no-show at the pick-up point means the cancellation of the return trip!

What happens if a driver, after showing his or her presence at the pick-up point, finds that the customer is a no-show ? He must contact immediately either the communication agent (minibus) or the dispatcher (taxi) and report that the customer didn't show up for boarding.

The no-show is then filed by the person in charge and the return trip is automatically cancelled—if there was one. This is only common sense. Think about it : if one doesn't need a 'going' trip, then one must not need the return trip either.

Avoid any unpleasantness by never leaving a pick-up point without first signalling a delay in the arrival of the vehicle or by cancelling yourself your trip.

Please note it is possible to cancel a trip while keeping your return trip active, you just have to pick up the phone and tell us in advance!

Cancellation taxi and minibus :
280-6325
Info-Delay : taxi :
280-5444,
minibus :
280-5313.

A little indulgence for the driver who takes over

Because of bad weather (snowstorm, intense cold, and so on), because a mistake is always possible or by reason of a mechanical failure, the vehicle you are waiting for... could be late.

In such a case, wait the mandatory 30-minute period after the confirmation time, then call Info-Delay (taxi : 280-5444, minibus 280-5313). In many cases, another vehicle and—consequently—another driver will be send to pick you up. You have a right to be

dissatisfied, but please don't take it out on the incoming driver, he doesn't deserve to be blamed for the situation.

Call our Customer Service instead, let us know how you feel about what happened. The Customer Service is open Monday to Friday, from 8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m., and the number to call is 280-5341.

Don't give the incoming driver a hard time... He's there to help.

Keeping accesses clear of snow



With winter knocking on our door, we would like to remind you that it is important to ensure that snow is adequately cleared from accesses to boarding and disembarking points.

Major stumbling blocks (quite literally!) are snow banks created by street and sidewalk snow removal operations. In such a

case, it becomes essential to check for accessibility before a vehicle arrives.

If conditions do not allow for boarding or disembarking, the trip should be cancelled as soon as possible to avoid having a vehicle dispatched needlessly..



MIRA's dogs are getting used to the minibuses

Guide dogs provide an invaluable source of assistance for their owners, and they're essential to increase their hope for a successful social integration. However, it was founded out that some dogs became edgy on board minibuses. Something needed to be done.

Talks with customers representatives and meetings with various managers from MIRA led to a very interesting experiment. Since last summer, MIRA's dogs—along with a trainer or an owner—can get acquainted with minibuses in ideal training condition. To that effect, a minibus is at their disposal on the premises of Paratransit Services.

To this day, this experiment is a hit. And we are witness to the excellence of MIRA's trainers and to the professionalism of this organization. To no-one surprise, MIRA is considered a world leader in this field.



Users petition

At a public meeting of the STCUM held on July 7, four paratransit customers—along with their spokesperson, Mrs. Lyna Vandal—handed out a petition to the Board of Directors.

The main issues raised in the document were a) the necessity to buy a new computer system, b) the reduction of the time wasted in phone waiting, c) the relieve of phone lines congestion, and d) the identification of agents.

Two meetings held on July 8 and September 15 with the Bus System

Operations manager and the manager of Paratransit Services allowed for a more thorough integration of customers' representatives to the ongoing process of improvement at the STCUM services

To answer these requests, the group was handed out a document outlining what action is taken concerning the requests.

We would like to thank this group of people for their involvement in the improvement of the services we provide to all our customers.

INTERACTIVE LINE



Cancel a trip...

it's easy with the Interactive line !
Dial 280-7400
and follow the instructions.

Replacing ACCES at the paratransit centre

From 1981 to 1998, the number of trips carried out per year by Paratransit jumped from 175,000 to 1,2 million. The inability to process requests rapidly has always created dissatisfaction among customers and translated into chronic difficulties to even get on line. Moreover, the current computer system does not allow for an efficient optimization of the resources assigned to the service (up to 5,000 trips on weekday.)

To solve this problem, the STCUM has undertaken the replacement of the current computer system, ACCES 1, by an improved system showing superior performance and also started to modify the traditional way of doing things. Two systems were evaluated between January and June, and the Corporation chose the ACCES 5 software produced by GIRO, a

Montreal-based company. GIRO is about to be entrusted with a first mandate : thoroughly detail all computer development required to fill the needs of the Paratransit Services Centre.

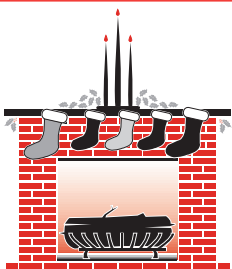
Improving customer service On top of savings that should be generated by better linkings, the STCUM is aiming for a major reduction in the time needed to get an agent on the line and a confirmation for a transportation request. Another priority target is improving punctuality.

Typically, the objectives that are set forth for the STCUM Paratransit Services will be modelled after the performance observed at the Toronto Transit Commission Call Center, who is also using ACCES 5 by GIRO. Whereas waiting time and time needed to process a request at the STCUM Call Center (minibus

and taxi) is about 15 minutes and the average number of calls per month was around 134,000 from January to November; working with the same software, waiting and processing time is under two minutes at the Toronto Transit Commission. And there is two and a half time more calls.

Expected for 2001

The replacement of the current computer system is quite a big project. Work is being done in collaboration with the Quebec Transportation Dept. to establish a framework for the funding of this project. It will not be brought on line until after a long series of computer development, conversion, data handling (subscribers, addresses, road network, and so on) and tests. The system is expected to be fully operational in the fall of 2001.



Season's Greetings

Employees of the STCUM Paratransit Service and members of the Admission Committee wish you and yours a very merry Christmas, and may 2000 bring you health and prosperity.

TRANSPORT
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