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**SUBJECT: Revised Custom Transit (handyDART) Registration Process**

**PURPOSE**

This update on Revised Custom Transit (handyDART) Registration Process in the Victoria Region is provided to the Victoria Regional Transit Commission (the “Commission”) for **INFORMATION**.

**BACKGROUND**

When Custom Transit began, it was the only option for accessible transit since there were no accessible conventional transit alternatives. Since then, there has been diversification within the BC Transit fleet, leading to improvements in accessibility by means of low-floor vehicles capable of transporting persons using wheelchairs, scooters, walkers and other mobility aids. Many persons with disabilities can benefit from this change in transit accessibility, however many are unaware of the changes because the current paper-based, self-assessment application form does not reflect the options in transit services that are available.

In 2015, BC Transit piloted and implemented the BC Transit Revised Custom Transit Registration Process after recognizing that increasingly transit systems across North America had adopted a more personalized method of registering custom transit riders in accordance with recommendations from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This new registration process involves a personal approach whereby an individual applicant’s travel needs and abilities are taken into consideration during a transit-based assessment with a mobility specialist. The mobility specialist evaluates both the applicant’s cognitive and physical abilities, with regards to using both custom and fixed-route transit services. An additional focus of this registration process assesses the safety of an applicant’s ability to travel alone, and whether their mobility aids are safe for conventional and/or custom transit.

Custom transit is essential for persons with limited mobility and/or cognitive abilities, to ensure they can access services, medical appointments, and attend social gatherings, among other travel reasons. With the additional factor of population growth within the Greater Victoria area, the high demand for custom transit services is evident, emphasizing the need for a process to ensure that they remain focused on and available to customers who require the specialized services the most.

**DISCUSSION**

The current handyDART registration process is outdated compared to a number of transit systems across North America, who have moved towards a more personalized approach. In 2015, BC Transit implemented the Revised Custom Transit Registration Process, based on best practices in use throughout Canada and recommendations of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This new registration process includes an in-person assessment with a mobility coordinator, enabling an applicant’s needs and abilities to be matched with the most appropriate type(s) of transit services available. As the population within Greater Victoria grows and more people move towards ‘aging in place’, the demand on an already inundated Custom Transit service will continue to increase. This increasing demand necessitates the modernization of old processes, bringing practices more in line with industry standards. Implementation of the revised custom transit process would help ensure that custom transit services remain available for those most in

need of them as well as to provide an educational opportunity for riders to learn about the diversified suite of accessible transit services.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

Implementing the revised custom registration process will offer a more accurate, consistent and personalized approach to registering Custom Transit applicants and provides a platform to educate riders about the suite of transit services available. This process would help identify where there may be conditions which would make it difficult for an applicant to use fixed-route transit all or part of the time, leading to a differentiation in eligibility categories. An applicant may be ineligible, conditionally eligible, unconditionally (fully) eligible, or temporarily eligible. In the case of a temporarily eligible designation, there is a provision for this category to be approved solely by the handyDART office without the use of a mobility coordinator, for up to a three month period (with 1 month extension possibility).

Use of the mobility coordinator to educate applicants about accessible transit service options, broadens the applicants possibilities of finding a transit solution that works best for them. It would also identify those applicants that can use fixed-route transit all or part of the time, keeping the custom transit services for those with a demonstrated need. Appointments with the mobility coordinator will include a handyDART ride to the location, if desired, at no cost to the applicant. The assessment itself would last from 30 to 60 minutes, observing transit-related skills and abilities, providing transit education, and discussing safety in transit including use of the applicant's mobility aids and the rider's ability to travel alone. The objective of this process is to determine if the applicant is more suitable for custom transit, is able to utilize fixed-route transit or is suited to a mix of both transit services.

At this time, the transit systems within British Columbia that use this revised custom registration process, include Campbell River, Comox Valley, Cowichan Valley, Central Fraser Valley, Chilliwack, Kamloops, Kelowna, Vernon, Penticton, Shuswap, Prince George and Sunshine Coast. Implementation in the Regional District of Nanaimo is slated for early 2021, followed by Victoria Regional in March 2021.

Attached is a Frequently Asked Questions document that details the Custom Transit Registration Process for prospective applicants (Attachment 1). Additionally, a Sample Functional Skills list (Attachment 2) details the abilities required to safely use fixed-route transit independently. Mobility specialists are trained to assess these skills.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Total costs for the Revised Custom Transit Registration process has been estimated at \$130,000 - \$150,000 annually. This cost is based on the contracted mobility coordinator and would thus depend on the successful proponents bid. However, established costs in other systems are in line with approximately \$95 per one hour visit. The assessment and the cost to transport applicants to their mobility assessment would be provided free of charge to the applicants. These costs have been included in the annual budget.

Respectfully,

Danielle Harriott

Regional Manager, Operations

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1: Revised Custom Registration Process – Frequently Asked Questions

Attachment 2: Sample Functional Skills List

# Attachment 1

## Revised Custom Registration Process – Frequently Asked Questions

### Why is BC Transit implementing a new registration process for handyDART service?

BC Transit is implementing the revised custom registration process in order to bring it into alignment with current best practices in use across Canada. This new process will enhance the quality and personalization of handyDART registration so that it is based on a conversation rather than a paper form.

As the population continues to grow, it is increasingly essential that handyDART resources are focused on the customers who require this specialized service, and that fully accessible conventional transit buses are used to their full capabilities. The revised custom registration process includes the use of an in-person assessment with a mobility coordinator, and it is designed to match the applicant's needs with the most appropriate type of transit services available.

### Is this type of process being used in other transit systems?

Yes. The majority of urban transit systems across North America are moving away from a paper-based application to a more accurate and personalized method of registering custom transit riders. The Revised Custom Registration process was successfully piloted in two of BC Transit's systems – Vernon Regional and the Comox Valley – in 2014. It was officially endorsed by the BC Transit Board of Directors in 2015.

### Why do I need to be assessed?

There are several reasons why BC Transit has chosen to use in-person assessments for customers applying for handyDART services.

1. To make sure that you are matched with the public transit option(s) that best meet your needs.

Some customers may not be aware of the full scope of accessible services offered in their transit system. These assessments are intended to determine your abilities related to the use of public transit and also to provide you with information about the variety of transit options that may be open to you.

2. To provide you with individualized education about how to safely use BC Transit's services (including handyDART).

It is important that handyDART customers understand how to use the system. During the mobility assessment, the specialist will talk with you about things such as:

- How to book a handyDART trip
- How to wait for your ride
- How the system works and what to expect on board the bus
- The roles and responsibilities of a handyDART driver
- The full range of transit options available, including fully accessible fixed-route transit buses
- The specialist will also spend time answering any questions you may have.

3. To ensure your safety by assessing the equipment you may use on handyDART.

We ask that customers bring their mobility equipment (walker, wheelchair, scooter or cane) with them to the appointment. The mobility specialist will check your equipment and make sure that it is safe to be used while traveling on public transit.

### **How long is the assessment?**

Most assessments take less than one hour

### **What does the assessment cost?**

The assessment is free of charge to anyone who has applied for handyDART services

### **Can I bring a family member or caregiver?**

We encourage you to bring a family member, friend or caregiver to the mobility assessment

### **What should I bring to the assessment?**

You should bring all the mobility equipment that you use when out in the community (i.e. walker, cane, power or electric wheelchair, scooter)

Wear or bring clothes that are suitable for going outdoors

### **What will happen at the assessment?**

The mobility specialist will spend time talking with you about the difficulties that you experience getting around in the community. You may be asked about relevant medical diagnoses (that might make it difficult for you to access the fixed-route transit system). You may be asked about changes in your physical or cognitive (thinking) abilities. If you wish, you may invite a family member or caregiver to attend and help to provide this information.

If you have physical difficulties, there will be an assessment of your mobility. The mobility specialist will observe how you get around (standing up/sitting down, walking, using your mobility aid(s) or using your wheelchair or scooter).

If you have cognitive or emotional difficulties that affect your ability to get around in the community, the mobility specialist may ask some memory and problem-solving questions designed to assess whether you can safely use the bus.

Generally the assessments also include a walk/roll outdoors so that the mobility specialist can see how you manage getting around in the community. Make sure that you bring clothing appropriate for the weather on the day of your assessment.

**Will it be unpleasant?**

No! The mobility specialists are there to make the experience a pleasant one. Based on follow-up telephone surveys with applicants who participated in an in-person assessment in Vernon Regional, all those surveyed found it to be a positive and respectful experience.

**Is there an option for the mobility specialist to assess me in my home or residential care facility?**

We understand that a trip to and from the assessment can be inconvenient for some people; however, as this is an assessment that directly relates to accessing the community (through the use of public transit), it is most appropriate to have an assessment within the community. If you do not have a ride to and from the clinic, handyDART will provide transportation free of charge. This provides you with an opportunity to trial the system that you are applying to use, and discuss any questions or challenges with the mobility specialist once you arrive.

**What if I'm having a better day than usual on my assessment day?**

The mobility specialists have extensive experience and education regarding assessment and treatment of individuals with a wide variety of conditions and impairments. All of the specialists have Masters Degrees in their areas of practice, and specialize in understanding how a condition, disease or impairment affects a person's function. When assessing function, the full picture is always considered. The specialists rely on information that you provide during the interview, and they are aware of the typical functional difficulties (and fluctuations in function) that occur with many medical conditions.

**When will I hear back?**

BC Transit will make every effort to ensure that you receive a letter outlining your eligibility for handyDART service within 10 days of your assessment.

## **Attachment 2**

### **SAMPLE FUNCTIONAL SKILLS LIST**

The following sample list is used in assessing abilities to use fixed-route transit services. Tasks must be performed independently or with assistance of a mobility aid.

With a reasonable level of effort or risk, can the applicant consistently:

1. Get and Remember Transit System Information
2. Walk/Wheel to and from Transit Stop/Station
  - Throughout area – up to 1,250 metres
  - Over various surfaces
  - Over various terrain
  - Up/down curbs
  - Up/down curb-cuts
  - Cross streets of various widths and with various controls
  - Find way in familiar and unfamiliar settings
3. Enter and Exit Transit Stations / Major Exchanges
  - Navigating complex stations / major exchanges
4. Wait at a Stop/Station for Transit Vehicle
  - With and without benches/shelters
5. Locate and Recognize Bus/Train to Take
  - Single route and multiple routes with transfers
6. Board and Exit Vehicle
  - Inaccessible vehicles
  - Accessible vehicles (lift, ramp)
7. Pay Fare
8. Get to Seat/Securement Area
9. Ride in Seated or Standing Position
10. Recognize Destination
11. Signal for Stop
12. Perform Above Tasks in Various Weather and Environmental Conditions
  - Snow, ice, rain, heat, humidity, cold, smog
  - Bright light, low light, background noise
13. Handle Unexpected Situations
14. Travel Safely in the Community

## **PHYSICAL FUNCTIONAL SKILLS**

Physical functional abilities needed to perform tasks required to use fixed-route transit system.

1. Walking speed
2. Endurance
3. Coordination
4. Strength
5. Balance
6. Gait
7. Range of Motion
8. Dexterity

## **COGNITIVE FUNCTIONAL SKILLS LIST**

Cognitive functional abilities needed to perform tasks required to use fixed-route transit system.

1. Orientation to Person, Place and Time
2. Judgment and Safety Skills
3. Problem Solving
4. Coping Skills
5. Short and long-term memory
6. Concentration (Attention to Task)
7. Ability to Seek and Act on Directions
8. Ability to Process Information
9. Ability to Communicate Needs
10. Consistency
11. Behavioral Skills



## **SENSORY FUNCTIONAL SKILLS LIST**

Sensory functional abilities needed to perform tasks required to use fixed-route transit system.

1. Orientation to Place
2. Directional Wayfinding
3. Ability to Detect Changes on Surfaces
4. Ability to Detect Environmental Cues (Hearing)
5. Proficiency in Using Mobility Aids