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# FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

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## It is time to stop contracting Transit Plus out

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**F**or years, an open secret in Winnipeg has been the poor quality of service associated with Transit Plus (previously Handi-Transit), which exists to provide a parallel Winnipeg Transit for those with disabilities. The service provides transportation to approximately 7,500 people a year. Due to problems with the services, the Independent Living Resource Centre (ILRC) was able to, with the assistance of the Public Interest Law Centre (PILC), submit a complaint to the Manitoba Ombudsman.

In January of 2019, the Manitoba Ombudsman's report on Winnipeg's Transit Plus was released, and it publicly highlighted numerous issues that users and advocates of the system had been saying for years. The report made 19 recommendations that addressed a myriad of concerns brought forth by the ILRC.

The release of the report provides the potential for a new direction for Transit Plus. The recommendations are numerous and wide ranging, including making a process for complaints and appeals publicly available, a review to clarify eligibility criteria, and removing the Transit Plus manager from the appeals process. As well, Transit Plus should be working to clarify its "no show" policy, which has caused major headaches

for users. Finally, the Ombudsman recommended that the sexual harassment policy, which had shockingly been removed from the driver's manual, be restored.

Additionally, the Ombudsman recommended that Transit Plus "review its functionality and impact to ensure it reflects reasonably equivalent service to the fixed-route transit system."

This recommendation tells us what we really need to know: Transit Plus is not living up to its mission to provide an alternative service to those who rely on it. With so many problems arising from the way this service is being delivered, City Hall must ask if it is worth bringing Transit Plus back in house and offering as a public service. This is a timely consideration, given that the Transit Service Master Plan is being created and due to be released in August 2019.

At the heart of the perils facing Transit Plus, and one not addressed by the Ombudsman, is the fact that Transit Plus service is contracted out instead of provided as a public service. As noted in the report, as of December 2017 there were seven private contractors providing services under a total of 15 separate contracts. Contractors attempt to cut costs by paying their workers minimum wage while not investing in proper

there is an alternative.

CCPA-MB  
205-765 Main St.  
Winnipeg, MB  
R2W 3N5

phone

(204) 927-3200

email

[ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca](mailto:ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca)

website

[www.policyalternatives.ca/  
manitoba](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/manitoba)

blog

[www.policyfix.ca](http://www.policyfix.ca)

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infrastructure or training. For example, the report noted that prospective Transit Plus operators – those who drive the cars and vans – are responsible for paying for their own training. This is in contrast to bus operators who, once hired, as provided comprehensive training as part of their employment.

It's time the City of Winnipeg consider operating Transit Plus in house as a public service, not as a for-profit enterprise for private business. People living with disabilities utilize public services and benefit when the services are of good quality opposed to ones that are poorly delivered by the private sector. People with disabilities deserve service at a comparable level. This is a human rights issue that must be addressed by the City of Winnipeg.

In the most recent edition of CCPA's Manitoba's Winnipeg Alternative Budget, and in the 2018 State of the Inner City Report "Green Light Go: Improving Transportation Equity" one of the important calls was to bring Transit Plus back in house, operated by the public sector.

It is when City Hall acts on this critically important issue that we will see an improvement in the services provided to people living with disabilities within the City of Winnipeg.

### **About the authors**

**Carlos Sosa** is a graduate of the University of Winnipeg, a member of the Board of Inclusion Winnipeg as their Advocacy Chairperson and a past Co-chair of the Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities.

**Zach Fleisher** is the Director of Communications at the Amalgamated Transit Union 1505 and a volunteer director at Bike Winnipeg. He is based in Winnipeg, on Treaty One territory.

**Sara Atnikov** has spent the last decade working in the non-profit field in development and communication positions in Winnipeg, on Treaty One territory.

CCPA-MB  
205-765 Main St.  
Winnipeg, MB  
R2W 3N5

**phone**  
(204) 927-3200

**email**  
ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

**website**  
www.policyalternatives.ca/  
manitoba

**blog**  
www.policyfix.ca

**twitter**  
@ccpamb