



PARTICIPATE
WOOD BUFFALO

***WHAT WE HEARD ABOUT
VEHICLES FOR HIRE:
TAXIS, SHUTTLES & LIMOS***



Bylaw Services

Feb. 11 – Mar. 31, 2019

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We humbly acknowledge that the land on which we live, learn, work and play is Treaty 8 Territory, the traditional and ancestral lands of the Cree, Dene, and unceded territory of the Métis.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Everyone benefits from a healthy vehicle for hire industry and its services. It is important to the municipality that a review is conducted of any service from time to time, including the Vehicle for Hire (VFH) Bylaw.

In the following report, you'll learn about key themes emerging from an online survey, including rates and fees, trust and safety, customer service, and ridesharing among other topics of interest. The engagement also provided brokerages and drivers with an opportunity to discuss concerns and share ideas to improve the Vehicle for Hire Bylaw, including communication, training, education, and enforcement during one-on-one meetings.

Council initially asked Bylaw Services to review the existing Vehicle for Hire Bylaw No. 13/001 during Fall 2018. An extensive engagement was then completed Feb. 11 – Mar. 31, 2019. Feedback was compiled with interviews from various stakeholders, along with feedback from residents through an online survey. Although the vetting process had begun, the next phase of engagement – the Validation Stage – could not be completed as the 2020 flood, followed by the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, began interrupting everyday life, including how vehicle for hire services operated.

March 2022, Council passed two motions regarding vehicles for hire, including reengagement for the Vehicle for Hire Bylaw No. 13/001. Picking up at the Validation Stage, the RMWB can ensure additional thoughts are captured, as well as provide an opportunity to learn how feedback was incorporated into the draft bylaw.

Readers of this report are encouraged to complete a brief survey if they have additional feedback. Click [here](#) for the survey.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STAKEHOLDERS

- All licensed brokerages in the RMWB
- Drivers for brokerages
- Owner-Operators
- Fort McMurray International Airport
- Insurance service for the municipality/private insurance broker
- The Markaz-UI-Islam Imam Shaykh Abdurrahmann Murad
- Shuttles and limousines in Wood Buffalo



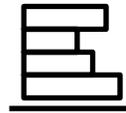
COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

This project was promoted on RMWB’s social media accounts and promoted by traditional media and direct contact with stakeholders. The existing bylaw was translated into Arabic, Somali, Amharic and Urdu to encourage diverse participation.

ENGAGEMENT TACTICS



In-Person Engagement Meetings



Online Survey

KEY FINDINGS

Throughout online and in-person engagement sessions, many themes regarding the vehicle for hire services were identified. An exploration of these themes was considered by the municipality prior to creating proposed updates to the Vehicle for Hire Bylaw No. 13/001. The following information includes important details on each of these topics in seven categories. An explanation of what was done with your feedback is included in this report.



COMMUNICATION



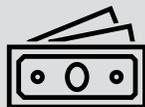
TRUST & SAFETY



RIDESHARING



TRAINING & EDUCATION



FARES & FEES



ENFORCEMENT



REPORTING SYSTEMS

INTRODUCTION

Feedback from previous engagement is detailed below, along with responses from Bylaw Services regarding changes proposed in the updated Vehicle for Hire Bylaw draft. Engagement opportunities at that time included in-person meetings and an online survey.

COMMUNICATION

Improved communication between brokerages, drivers, and Bylaw Services regarding inspections and enforcement was frequently discussed during in-person engagement on the bylaw. At the time of this engagement, brokerages acknowledged a gap in communication and want to enhance efforts with Bylaw Services and law enforcement to improve this relationship, and all other aspects of the industry.

Brokerages and drivers felt, at the time of this engagement, that there is a lack of open conversation about how the bylaw can help the industry change for the better, preparing them for industry changes such as meter and camera technology.

Drivers also shared that they would like more communications from RCMP when officers are looking for individuals or vehicles, since there are many drivers on the road 24 hours a day. Drivers felt this would be an opportunity to bridge the gap and improve relationships with law enforcement agencies in Wood Buffalo.

At the time of this survey, visual communication between rider and driver appears to have significant value. When asked how important it is to see a route displayed to users, nearly 75 percent of survey responses said it was either important or very important to them. Equally significant, 94 percent of respondents said that seeing the cost of the ride was either important or very important.

WHAT WE DID: COMMUNICATION

BYLAW CHANGES:

Council has mandated that the Taxi Advisory Committee (TAC) or similar form be reinstated. Administration agrees that communication is an important piece for the taxi industry and those it serves. Recommendations for clear and ongoing communication include a Council Appointed Committee in place of a TAC.



Did you know?

- Regular communications to all brokerages and drivers has and continues to be standard practice.
- The Vehicle for Hire office is open daily to the public. The Chief Taxi Inspector is available to meet with drivers and brokerages when requested as well.
- All parties can communicate any level of inquiry by contacting PULSE or Licensing Clerks.
- Bylaw Services works closely with the RCMP to educate on the VFH Bylaw and its requirements so they can better assist VFH operators with calls for service.



TRUST AND SAFETY

Users of vehicle for hire services expressed concerns regarding trust and safety while using these services. Many comments included sentiment that drivers and/or brokerages are not trustworthy, as indicated by online survey responses. Over 80 percent of respondents shared that they either do not feel safe or only somewhat safe with these services. Interestingly, some participants responded about their own safety, while others felt this way about using taxi services for their partner, family members, or out-of-town visitors.

Comments from nearly 86 percent of survey respondents indicated an interest in accessing a rating system similar to what ridesharing companies provide – to learn more about their driver and have the option to choose their driver.

Drivers also shared issues with trust and safety relating to Bylaw Services and law enforcement. This feedback is explored in the *Enforcement* section below.

WHAT WE DID: TRUST AND SAFETY

BYLAW CHANGES:

The updated bylaw proposes enhanced criminal record checks which would deny persons convicted of serious criminal offences to obtain approval for a Vehicle for Hire license.



Did you know?

Bylaw Services will continue to have regulations in the bylaw for brokerages to complete prior to operating in the RMWB to support safety for residents and drivers. Examples of current regulations and enforcement operations include:

- Criminal record checks
- Vehicle mechanical inspections
- Scheduled vehicle inspections
- Functioning video cameras in the vehicles
- Proactive roadside inspections

Cameras are a safety feature used to keep both the driver and the passenger safe. Video footage assists in proving or disproving allegations made by either a driver or passenger, as well as for collision investigations.

Additionally, residents are encouraged to submit any trust or safety inquiry through PULSE for Bylaw Services to take action.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

There is a general lack of understanding of the bylaw itself, as evidenced by drivers who often asked during previous engagement sessions to read the bylaw before providing comments on the document. Although some drivers are well-versed in the bylaw, brokerages expressed their desire for drivers to better understand the bylaw and what is expected of them.

This educational element is easily transferred to conversations about existing bylaw requirements (e.g., infant car seat installation), and how these responsibilities are communicated between drivers and riders for a better experience.

Driver training and customer service was a primary point of concern for participants of the Vehicle for Hire Survey, who felt more education was required. Although training courses had been available at the onset of this bylaw in 2013, these courses are no longer required or available. Further, when participants of the survey were asked if their driver was knowledgeable of the local area, over 45 percent of respondents answered 'no', while over 40 percent of responses indicated the driver did not take the best route to their destination.

An opportunity to educate riders includes when a client would be refused service and why, how fares work, and how to hire the right vehicle for their needs (e.g., pet-friendly, car seat capable, wheelchair accessible). Roughly half of all respondents felt their vehicle for hire was clean, while 43 percent felt their vehicle for hire was not in good repair.

Interestingly, how participants felt about their driver being professional and courteous was split: Fifty-two percent felt their driver was courteous and professional, while 42 percent felt their driver was not. However, nearly 98 percent of all survey participants shared that professionalism was either important or very important to them. When asked if quick and timely service was important, over 98 percent of survey responses indicated it was either important or very important.

Within the survey comments section, participants shared the importance of drivers not taking personal calls while having someone in the vehicle. When asked how important it is for drivers to not accept personal calls during a trip, 82 percent of responses indicated it was either important or very important.

WHAT WE DID: TRAINING AND EDUCATION

OPERATIONAL CHANGES:

Bylaw Services recognizes that the current bylaw can be confusing to the reader. The draft bylaw includes updated verbiage and a modern format that will allow easier viewing for all parties.

The department will be adding the Vehicle for Hire Bylaw to its annual educational blitz as well. Booths will be set up in high traffic areas to be accessible to the public where they can engage with officers, learn about current legislation, and ask questions.

FARES AND FEES

Currently meters start at \$3.80, increasing by 10 cents per 52 metres. Waiting for an hour will cost riders a flat \$30 fee. When survey participants were asked how they felt about these rates, nearly 55 percent said the rates were too high, while 22 percent shared their preference for flat fee rates. During engagement sessions, taxi brokerages and drivers expressed their deep concern regarding the need to increase rates based on growing costs.

Although 58 percent of survey respondents felt they were not charged extra fees during their ride, 27 percent said they weren't sure if they were overcharged or not – revealing an opportunity to educate riders on how fares work.

Forty-three percent of responses indicated an unwillingness to prepay for services, while 37 percent of respondents would preauthorize payment if that was necessary. Comments regarding prepayment if required

often included a sentiment of distrust.

When asked if riders paid for their trip how they wanted (e.g., cash, credit, debit), over 80 percent of participants agreed that they were able to pay through their preferred method. This is significant as 92 percent of respondents said it was either important or very important to have a variety of ways to pay for services. Comments from respondents did include experiences where riders were refused service if they could not pay cash, while others experienced issues when the debit machine wasn't working in the vehicle for hire.

WHAT WE DID: FARES AND FEES

BYLAW CHANGES:

Administration recommends fare deregulation, where the RMWB will set a maximum metered rate and allow brokerages to determine their rates (metered or flat). The proposed bylaw would set the maximum metered rate at \$5.00 for the first 52 m and \$.15 for every .52 m thereafter. The driver may negotiate a flat fare, but it must be decided on prior to the trip.

Fare Deregulation is part of an Open Market model which allows brokerages to be competitive with industry professionals. It also eliminates the need to go through the Taxi Chief Inspector and Council to change rates.

It will be the responsibility of the brokerages to display new rates and educate new rates to customers prior to accepting a fare.



Did you know?

As a community hit hard by the economic downturn, the 2016 Wildfire, the 2020 Floods, and the ongoing pandemic, the fares have not been increased. Benchmarking was completed for communities within Alberta and although regional rates have not increased, the RMWB is still one of the highest.

ENFORCEMENT

Drivers shared that they do not feel supported by Bylaw Services or law enforcement, feeling a sense that enforcing and fining were Bylaw and law enforcement's only interests. Examples of how this negatively impacts drivers included slow response calls from law enforcement to ensure fares are dutifully paid by riders, or, that some companies provide lower fares to users because drivers feel there isn't a lot of enforcement for those who do not abide.

Enforcement was brought up by all participating brokerages and drivers, who shared their desire for scheduled enforcement instead of spot checks in the public as well.



WHAT WE DID: ENFORCEMENT

BYLAW CHANGES:

The proposed changes include a passenger fine of \$500 for those who avoid payment for service. In addition, a \$250 biohazard cleaning fine can be charged to the passenger for the cleanup of vomit, urine, feces or blood.



Did you know?

- Random inspections ensure vehicles for hire maintain vehicle standards. In addition to scheduled inspections, field inspections are important to ensure the safety of the public at large.
- RCMP's primary focus is criminal code offences. Responses to calls for service are prioritized based on urgency.
- Taxi vehicles are equipped with recording systems and GPS. These were implemented to enhance the safety of the riders as well as that of the drivers.

REPORTING SYSTEMS

An important part of in-person conversations included required recordkeeping of Trip Sheets. According to the existing Bylaw, a physical copy of the trip sheet must be stored for six years, along with other data required by the law. All this data is currently stored digitally as well and could more easily be found using a computer. Brokerages feel recordkeeping for reporting systems should move to an electronic system and accepted by the Bylaw.

WHAT WE DID: REPORTING SYSTEMS

BYLAW CHANGES:

Bylaw Services understands the importance of keeping up with technology changes. The proposed bylaw states that brokerage records must be kept on file, but may now be stored in an electronic database, creating improved opportunities for brokerages and their preferred records-keeping method.

RIDESHARING

Survey respondents were asked about their interest in ridesharing, and if they would be inclined to use the service if ridesharing companies were to come to the region. Eighty-six percent of respondents said they would be interested, six percent felt unsure, seven percent felt they would not use the service.

Almost 80 percent of survey respondents said they have used ridesharing apps outside of the region before, sharing their familiarity with the service. Several comments focused on the reliability and ease of use of these types of apps, which they felt could be well-received in Wood Buffalo.

Many survey commenters were knowledgeable of the difference between ridesharing and more traditional vehicle for hire services such as taxi services. Comments included the benefits of bringing ridesharing companies such as Uber or Lyft, suggesting ridesharing could be more economical for the rider, competitive for the industry,

and that they have more trust in the system (knowing how much you will pay before accepting, perceiving this is a cheaper option than taxis, knowing who your driver will be and what their rating is, knowing when to expect them, and having an improved experience with drivers taking better care of their personal vehicle).

However, there were also a cluster of comments that revealed some residents are not aware of the difference between more traditional and newer modes of vehicle for hire services.

WHAT WE DID: RIDESHARING

BYLAW CHANGES:

Ridesharing services is proposed in the updated bylaw, more formally known as Transportation Network Companies (TNC). Regulated by both the Alberta government and municipal bylaw, this would allow vehicles to operate as a rideshare if they are licensed by the Municipality and associated to the TNC.

Designated driver services are also introduced in the draft bylaw, allowing users of the service to have someone drive them and their vehicle home for a fee. Ridesharing services and designated drivers will have similar regulations to operate in the RMWB to enhance safety measures when using either service.

WHAT WE DID SUMMARY

The feedback from this engagement has provided the project team with important insights into the values and priorities shared by the residents of Wood Buffalo. Following is a summary of how the RMWB used the feedback provided, as described in greater detail in the report sections above.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE BYLAW INCLUDE:

- Ridesharing, or Transportation Network Companies (TNC) and designated driver services are included in the draft VFH Bylaw.
- Fare Deregulation is introduced in the draft Bylaw where the RMWB will set a maximum rate through the bylaw. Fare Deregulation allows the use of the meter, or alternatively users may negotiate their fare prior to the trip (removing the use of a meter).
- As directed by council, Administration will explore a Vehicle for Hire Committee and suggests a Council Appointed Committee.
- A \$500 fine is introduced for non-payment by users.
- Drivers can charge passengers \$250 for the cleaning of biohazards (vomit, blood, urine, feces).
- Criminal record requirements enhanced to enforce even greater safety.

Operational changes based on community feedback:

- VFH Bylaw verbiage and structure updated to make it more user friendly and modernized.
- Annual educational opportunities to be completed by vehicle for hire industry.



NEXT STEPS

Bylaw Services has drafted proposed changes to the Vehicle for Hire Bylaw which is available for review until May 20, 2022.

Once final feedback is collected on the *What We Heard Report* and proposed bylaw changes, the municipality will make updates to the Vehicle for Hire Bylaw before sharing the final document with the public.

CONCLUSION

Do you have more to say about this bylaw? Let us know by completing [this brief survey](#).

Thank you for participating! Vehicle for hire services impacts our community greatly, and your involvement in this engagement isn't taken lightly.

We encourage you to continue using your voice to make our region even better by learning about all current projects. Visit participate.rmwb.ca to stay connected!



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