

Request for Decision

Transit Operator Compartment Barrier

Presented To: Community Services
Committee

Presented: Monday, Dec 02, 2019

Report Date Friday, Nov 15, 2019

Type: Managers' Reports

Resolution

THAT the City of Greater Sudbury directs staff to include Transit Operator Compartment Barriers in the procurement of new bus acquisitions required by Greater Sudbury Transit for replacement or growth, as outlined in the report entitled "Transit Operator Compartment Barrier", from the General Manager of Community Development, presented at the Community Services Committee meeting on December 2, 2019.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan / Health Impact Assessment

This report refers to Operational Matters.

Report Summary

Greater Sudbury Transit, in collaboration with the Transit Safety Task Force launched a Transit Compartment Barrier Pilot in February 2018. This report provides a summary of the objectives and workplan of the pilot, with accompanying results and next steps.

Financial Implications

The estimated cost (including installation) for each barrier is \$6,000. The cost of each barrier is already included in the estimated bus cost and included in current capital budget requests (i.e ICIP), therefore there are no financial implications for considerations.

Signed By

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Health Impact Review

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Manager Review

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Division Review

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Financial Implications

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Recommended by the Department

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Executive Summary

Safety and security are important aspects of service delivery, as actual or perceived lack of safety has a negative effect on use of Transit services, and affects employee's health and morale. During the October 23, 2017 Community Services Committee, a report titled "*Transit Safety Plan*" was presented, outlining several initiatives that could enhance safety and security measures for City of Greater Sudbury Transit Services Employees and Passengers.

The Transit Compartment Barrier (Barrier) pilot program, launched in February 2018, was one of the initiatives discussed in the Transit Safety Plan report. The Pilot has been a collaborative effort between Greater Sudbury Transit Management, Transit Operators, and the Transit Safety Task Force.

This report provides the Community Services Committee a summary of the Transit Operator Compartment Barrier pilot program objectives, the results of information gathered, and next steps.

Background

In 2014, a Transit Operator Compartment Barrier sample was presented to the City of Greater Sudbury Transit Operators. Transit Operators were given an opportunity to look at the sample, and then were given a survey to complete. The survey results revealed that the majority of Transit Operators were not in favor of the Barrier. No further action was taken at the time.

In response to a serious physical assault which occurred in May of 2017, the Transit Safety Task Force Committee and Greater Sudbury Transit Services agreed to review the benefits and disadvantages of Barriers once more, with a more in depth approach to gathering information and finding potential solutions to drawbacks.

In February 2018, Greater Sudbury Transit launched a year-long pilot project to gather all necessary information to assess the effectiveness of this safety tool and collect feedback from Transit Operators and Passengers.

The objective of the pilot project was to gather information as it related to:

- Effectiveness of the safety tool and impacts on potential assaults;
- Visual hazards, airflow and Operator physical comfort;
- Communication with passengers and customer service;
- Transit Operator feedback; and
- Customer feedback.

The Pilot Project work plan consisted of the following actions:

February 2018	Information on objectives of pilot shared with the Transit Safety Task Force during a regular scheduled meeting.
	Greater Sudbury Transit webpage updated, and Public Service Announcements (PSA) issued to inform public.
	Communication issued to Transit Operators, with a survey to assess how Transit Operators felt about the use of the Barrier prior to using one.
March 2018	One Transit Operator Compartment Barrier was installed and put into service.
September 2019	Second survey distributed to Transit Operators to gather information at the halfway mark.
February 2019	Third survey distributed to Transit Operators.
March 2019	Open House hosted by Union Representatives along with Transit Operations Management for Transit Operators, providing a setting for open dialogue.
	Information gathered shared with the Transit Safety Task Force Committee. Discussion on preliminary recommendations.
	Ongoing research of industry trends.

Transit Operator Compartment Barrier Pilot Final Results

The results below were concluded based on survey results with Transit Operators, Passenger feedback, as well as a review of best practices, and discussions with other Municipal Transit Agencies.

Effectiveness of the safety tool and impacts on potential assaults

Transit Operator Compartment Barriers are just one of many tools being used currently within the transit industry to reduce the severity of and, where possible, the occurrences of operator assaults. The Barrier's purpose is to restrict intentional or unintentional access by passengers to the Transit Operator's working area. Barriers are designed to reduce the severity of, and have the potential to prevent certain types of assaults from occurring in the first place, but they are simply a safety tool. No Barrier will prevent 100% of assaults from occurring.

Visual hazards, airflow and Operator physical comfort

The Transit Operator must be able to fully operate the vehicle safely therefore visual hazards, airflow issues or discomforts are elements that must be taken into consideration. Several questions in the third Transit Operator Survey were geared to assess risks associated with these elements.

The following table summarizes the general comments received through surveys and one-on-one conversations.

Visual Hazards	Although most did not feel that the glazing material used on the barrier generated glares or reflections while driving, almost half of the Operators felt that the Barrier affected sight-lines.
Airflow	Most Operators felt that the barrier had minimal effect on air flow within the work station.
Physical Comfort	Most Operators felt that there were minimal changes to the physical comfort level with the Barrier in place.

As the results from the Operator survey pointed to visual hazards being present, the Transit Operations Manager along with the Operator Training Manager tested the barrier on the road to assess the risks. It was concluded that there are no visual barriers if an Operator follows proper training technique of “rocking and rolling”. The “rocking and rolling” technique requires that the Operator physically move forward and backwards in the seat to see around obstructions.

During discussions with other Municipal Transit Agencies, it was confirmed that they had similar concerns from Operators prior to installing Barriers. Additional training of proper driving techniques and additional engagement resolved Operator concerns with visual hazards.

Communication with passengers and customer service

In the survey, Transit Operators were asked if the barrier allowed them to interact with customers and it was a split response where 54% said it allowed them to interact, and the rest were either undecided or did not agree. These results are not surprising, as most Operators enjoy their position due to the high level of interaction with passengers.

There are several designs for a Barrier, and the one selected has a window that can slide open, thereby still providing an opportunity for communication without obstruction.

Peer Municipalities confirmed that they also had a large number of Operators that felt strongly against the Barrier due to the reduced level with Passenger interaction. They ensured that the Barrier installed had a sliding window, and most Operators grew comfortable with the glass partition.

Transit Operator feedback

The survey was completed by 56 employees, which is less than a 50% response rate. Many verbally provided their feedback through the Open House.

Overall, 75% of those who participated in the survey confirmed that they would support the installation of Transit Operator Compartment Barriers.

Customer feedback.

Generally, the public did not have any concerns with the Barrier.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Compartment Barriers

The installation of Transit Compartment Barriers on buses has been a controversial topic over the years not only here in Greater Sudbury, but Industry-Wide. There are misconceptions that the Barrier will prevent assaults, and also that it can introduce other safety risks relating to glares and visual obstructions. Further, many Transit Operators enjoy the interaction with Passengers, and fear being enclosed behind a wall.

The results of this information gathering have confirmed the benefits and disadvantages of the Transit Compartment Barrier as a safety tool:

Advantages:

- Provides a sense of security for Transit Operators.
- With proper training and standard operating procedures in place, the Barrier is an additional safety tool at the Employee's disposal.
- Passengers do not seem to mind the glass structure and support the use of Barriers.
- The majority of Transit Operators support the installation of Barriers in their workstation.
- The majority of Transit Operators confirmed that the Barrier does not interfere with their comfort level or the air flow.

Disadvantages:

- Barriers do not prevent 100% of assaults from occurring and can provide a false sense of security.
- The proper model must be chosen, as the design can interfere with Passenger Interaction and surface glares.
- If proper driving techniques are not followed by the Transit Operator, there are visual hazards that could increase risk of incidents.

Based on the information gathered, it is recommended that all new City of Greater Sudbury Transit Fleet procurement include the Transit Operator Compartment.

To mitigate the disadvantages of this tool, Greater Sudbury Transit will ensure that:

- Training on the use of Transit Compartment Barriers will be added to the curriculum of new employees.
- A refresher on the importance of the “rocking and rolling” technique to remove visual barriers will be included in the annual refresher training program of all Transit Operators.
- The design of the Barrier will include a sliding window.
- Standard Operating Procedures will be defined to ensure proper use of this safety tool.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Greater Sudbury Transit's objective is to continuously develop, implement and improve strategies and processes to ensure that Transit achieves the highest practicable level of safety and provides a comfortable, inviting and safe environment for Passengers and Employees. Based on Council's direction, staff will move forward with the next phase of implementation.

References

Transit Safety Plan, Community Services Committee, October 23, 2017
(<https://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=agenda&action=navigator&id=1154&itemid=13102&lang=en>)

Transit Operator Compartment Barrier, Community Services Committee, February 5, 2018
(<https://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=feed&action=file&attachment=22314.pdf>)