

1543 Stelly's Cross Rd
Saanichton, BC V8M 1S8

27 April 2025

The District of Central Saanich
Attn: Councillor Gordon Newton
1903 Mount Newton Cross Road
Saanichton, BC, V8M 2A9

RE: Changes to booking with HandyDART effective 24 April 2025

Dear Mr Newton:

I want to begin by saying how much I value the BC Transit/HandyDART employees with whom I interact on a daily basis – the call takers, bus drivers, trainers and the occasional supervisors that I meet or speak with are without exception ALL exemplary employees – courteous, competent, efficient and when required, patient and compassionate. Each of them is a credit to the company. In no way are any of them to blame for the dissatisfaction which the rest of my letter expresses.

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the sudden issue I experienced last Friday, 25 April in booking a ride for an appointment for 0930 which I have been booking without difficulty every Tuesday and Friday for the last two years. The call taker did his best to explain why I could not get a booking time that would get me to my appointment in time, but his explanation made no sense given that I had zero issues just three days prior in the same week. After talking to Paul, a supervisor with HandyDART, later that afternoon, though he tried, I still do not fully understand the rationale for the sudden change.

To summarize my concerns:

1. BC Transit/HandyDART have done the disabled community of Greater Victoria a great disservice by changing how rides are prioritized and doing so drastically and suddenly, resulting in many registered clients being unable to book rides to arrive at appointments in time, be they medical or otherwise and on which their mental and physical health may well depend.
2. BC Transit/HandyDART have apparently devised a prioritising system unknown to registered clientele which is used by call takers to decide which riders can get bookings for rides during peak hours. I acknowledge that clients needing rides to the renal clinics are a priority over all others. For all other HandyDART users, the priority system is unclear.
3. BC Transit/HandyDART have been irresponsible with taxpayer money (via provincial and municipal government taxes) by not providing sufficient notice and clearly worded messaging regarding the implementation to a change in their service model, which has resulted in confusion for both employees and clients, and a net result of extra time spent per call trying to explain something they either do not understand or are not at liberty to speak about, which has the snowball effect of referring more calls than usual to supervisors who then multiply the expenditure of time spent per client in trying to clarify the confusion on an individual basis. The cost in labour almost certainly outweighs the cost of a website statement and 1000 letters mailed out to registered clients.

4. BC Transit has a mandate from the Government of BC to provide reasonable public transportation service to all, which includes the disabled community. The cost to the provincial government's health care system will be far more substantial if people who are attempting to prevent a decline in their physical or mental abilities (and thus stay out of long term care) are prohibited from doing so for the simple reason that they cannot get to their appointments because the public transportation system the government is paying for cannot afford to maximize the number of HandyDART buses they put on the road during peak user times.
5. I was told by Paul, a supervisor with HandyDART on Friday 25 April that there has been a sudden increase in ridership accessing HandyDART, and that he has 12-14 drivers available but not booked for shifts, and additionally has buses available and not committed to routes, but cannot use either. The obvious question is – why not?
6. A sudden increase in new ridership in one week is unlikely, given the assessment process required to become a registered HandyDART client, so I am assuming this is established ridership that is causing the increased pressure on the system. Why?

It is not lost on anyone using HandyDART that not only did fares per trip recently increase, but that the new HandyDART facility opened to great fanfare just two weeks ago. Until last week, most people I spoke to recognized that fares going up slightly for the first time since 2010 was reasonable, and that the new facility was much needed. Unfortunately, an \$84M facility and an increase in fares have occurred simultaneously with a sudden and unreasonable cut in service for HandyDART clients and frankly the optics are not good. This is compounded by the fact that the website states proudly that the new facility has been designed with future expansion of service in mind. I fail to see how decreasing service to the point that existing ridership cannot book rides for appointments can possibly fit with future expansion.

Please be assured that I am taking this issue to whomever in my municipality and the provincial government who may be able to assist BC Transit in improving the HandyDART service for the disabled community of Greater Victoria. In an effort to keep this letter relatively short, I have omitted a lot of details and specifics. Please feel free to contact me with questions or for further information. I look forward to a thoughtful reply in the near future.

Thank you,

Dawn Holland

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[REDACTED]

CC: Victoria Regional Transit Commission, Ryan Windsor, chair;
District of Central Saanich, Gord Newton, council Accessibility Advisory committee rep;
MLA for Saanich North and the Islands, Rob Botterell;
BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit, Mike Farnworth; and
BC Secretary for Accessibility, Dana Lajeunesse