

HandyDART Modernization Program Customer & Stakeholder Engagement

Executive Summary

June 2021

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HandyDART is an on-demand door-to-door transit service for people in Metro Vancouver who are unable to use conventional public transit without assistance. The service has approximately 19,000 active customers and in recent years (excluding COVID-19 related impacts in 2020) has averaged over 1.3 million trips annually.

Demand for HandyDART has consistently increased over the years. Between 2014 (1,168,900) and 2019 (1,381,800), HandyDART delivered 18% more trips annually. Through the implementation of recommendations from the [2017 Custom Transit Service Delivery Review](#), TransLink has improved service quality by:

- Increasing HandyDART service
- Improving dispatching
- Providing high-visibility signage for taxis providing HandyDART trips
- Launching a travel training program

TransLink has continued to seek opportunities to improve HandyDART customer experience.

In spring of 2021, TransLink staff engaged on a package of potential HandyDART updates bundled as the HandyDART Modernization Program, designed to improve the customer experience from start to finish.

The engagement was conducted between March 29 and April 25, and included Compass implementation on HandyDART in 2021, updating fares to introduce age-based discounts, and updating the registration system to support long-term sustainability of HandyDART, and the future option of online booking.

Customers and stakeholders were informed of the engagement through multiple channels including, online (web, video, email, social media), print (postcards, newspapers) and traditional media. Feedback was sought through a survey (print, online and phone), virtual workshops, a telephone townhall, email and phone calls. The response was robust:

- Over 800 surveys were completed
- Over 100 people participated in workshops/townhall event
- Over 600 phone calls were received
- Nearly 50 email submissions of feedback

Some respondents raised concerns about the survey regarding length, complexity of content and the nature of the questions.

COMPASS ON HANDYDART

Through the engagement, staff sought feedback on how to best support HandyDART customers to adopt Compass, and to understand what aspects of the change might be most concerning.

Most stakeholders expressed general support for rolling out Compass on HandyDART:

- Convenience of Compass is appreciated; easy to load fares and passes
- Compass gives access to stored value fares which are cheaper than cash fares
- Familiarity factor – many HandyDART customers mentioned they already use Compass

However, some concerns were also raised:

- Potential barriers for some to obtaining, loading and checking card balances, such as Compass Vending Machine locations, familiarity with online tools, and language barriers
- Due to a physical or cognitive disability, some customers may not be able to use a Compass Card
- May be challenging for customers who need to carry multiple cards
- Health service providers expressed concerns with managing fares for multiple clients

POTENTIAL CHANGES TO HANDYDART FARES (AGE-BASED DISCOUNTS)

Through the engagement, staff sought input on the potential introduction of age-based discounts on HandyDART, to better align fares with the conventional transit system.

When survey participants were asked to indicate their level of support for age-based discounts on HandyDART, 78% of the 811 respondents indicated some level of support. Key reasons for supporting age-based discounts raised in the survey and workshops:

- Seniors and youth have limited income so cheaper fares help
- Helps seniors meet other life costs
- Discount is worth the small decrease in service availability (but some also indicated that they support cheaper fares but not at the expense of service availability)

Few stakeholders did express some concerns:

- Fares should be income-based
- Concession fares should be available to all HandyDART customers, regardless of age
- BC Bus Pass should be valid on HandyDART
- Concern that increased demand from age-based discounts will impact service availability

POTENTIAL NEW REGISTRATION PROCESS WITH A PERSONALIZED CONSULTATION

The engagement also requested feedback on changing the HandyDART registration process. The potential change was to include a mandatory in-person consultation in place of the current paper-based medical verification, to better understand applicants' abilities and support customers with the best transit options to meet their needs.

While customers and stakeholders agreed that increased demand is a growing concern and HandyDART should only be used by those needing the service, a majority expressed concerns about a mandatory personal consultation component to HandyDART registration:

- Barrier to accessing HandyDART service
 - Customers with cognitive disabilities may find it difficult to participate
 - Customers with language barriers may find it difficult to participate
- Personal consultation adds to the burden of paperwork and appointments people with disabilities already face
- Delays approval to use HandyDART
- Applicants could feel judged and not trusted
- Doctors familiar with applicants are best able to assess their transit needs
- A healthcare professional (e.g. occupational therapist) may not understand complex, invisible, or episodic disabilities

Some participants expressed support for a personal consultation component to registration:

- Applicants learn about conventional and HandyDART transit services
- Helps HandyDART staff connect with applicant family members to align understanding and expectations about the service
- Personal consultation cost covered by TransLink, whereas some doctors charge a fee to fill out and submit application forms
- The personal consultation healthcare professional would be informed about HandyDART and conventional transit services
 - A personal doctor is in a better position to advocate for patient's needs than to do an initial assessment
- Support travel training, but not as part of the registration process.
- Stakeholders expressed support for a personal consultation as an optional part of registration process

NEXT STEPS

The Compass project team will use feedback to inform the customer adoption plan that will roll out in advance of activating Compass on HandyDART in Fall 2021.

TransLink staff will use feedback on the potential changes to fares to inform their report to TransLink's Board of Directors and seek direction this spring. If approved by the Board, the fare changes would coincide with the introduction of Compass on HandyDART.

TransLink staff will use the feedback received to inform a proposal to update the HandyDART registration process and will seek direction from TransLink's Board of Directors. If approved by the Board, a new registration process is not anticipated to be implemented before 2023.

The Customer & Stakeholder Engagement Summary Report is available online: translink.ca/hdm