

# Much-needed transit service for disabled could start soon

By **JASON MISNER**  
*The Champion*

Alan Jordan looks out his bedroom window at Deborah's Home on Ontario Street North and all he sees is snow.

Born with cerebral palsy and confined to a wheelchair, snow isn't always a welcomed site because it makes it nearly impossible to use sidewalks to get to places like Milton Mall.

An interim service for the town's physically-challenged only provides trips for medical appointments and that's not good enough for Mr. Jordan, 42.

But after learning the Town of Milton is poised to introduce a new longer-term transit system for the physically-challenged, an excited Mr. Jordan feels he will re-gain some of his independence.

"It's really needed," he said, noting he's contacted Milton politicians about a new service. "It's pretty darn discouraging not to have transportation."

Town officials will recommend to town council at its January 26 meeting to contract Laidlaw to provide accessible transit service, starting as soon as possible until the end of June, at a cost of \$42,000. That money has been set aside in the approved 2004 budget.

Laidlaw has a contract with the Town to provide conventional transit service, which expires June 30.

The Town will need to enter into a new contract for transit by that point. Whatever company that happens to be, accessible transit will be appropriately looked after, whether it's with another operator or extending Laidlaw's contract, said Heidi Schlegl, Milton's coordinator of traffic and transit.

"No matter what, the service will be uninterrupted," she said.

It would be offered Monday to Friday from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. Weekend service would be handled by taxis for non-wheelchair users and Red Cross would accommodate wheelchair-bound users.

Users will be able to book rides between seven days and 24 hours notice for destinations anywhere in Milton, but priority will be given to those with medical appointments.

Costs for the rides will be \$2 for trips under 5 km, \$5 for trips over 5 km and \$20 (round-trip) for medical purposes outside of Milton.

There are eligibility requirements to be met to qualify for the service.

Statistics show most riders use the service for trips under 5 km.

Jennifer Reynolds, Milton's director of community services, expects the new system to be better and more reliable. "(The interim measure) is not ideal, we know that," she said. "There has been concern expressed about condition of vehicles and customer service

issues. I think we're looking forward to providing a reasonable level of service to Milton."

Transit for the physically-challenged has been in flux in Milton since mid-last year.

Last June, Milton Taxi stopped offering a wheelchair accessible van because the van's licence expired due to the age of the vehicle, and the taxi operator couldn't afford to buy a new van.

On a temporary measure, the Town of Milton has arranged that Milton Taxi users contact the Canadian Red Cross Society to use its wheelchair accessible van for medical appointments only.

Milton Taxi still offers service to non-wheelchair users.

Also, users who are associated with Community Living North Halton for other services, can use its wheelchair accessible van at no charge. This service will continue until the new service starts, Ms Reynolds said.

Based on previously-offered transit services for the physically-challenged, approximately 11,000 riders access it annually.

Meanwhile, Town officials will study the results of a transit study that could help shape how future specialized transit needs can best be provided for local residents.

Jason Misner can be reached at [jmisner@miltoncanadianchampion.com](mailto:jmisner@miltoncanadianchampion.com).

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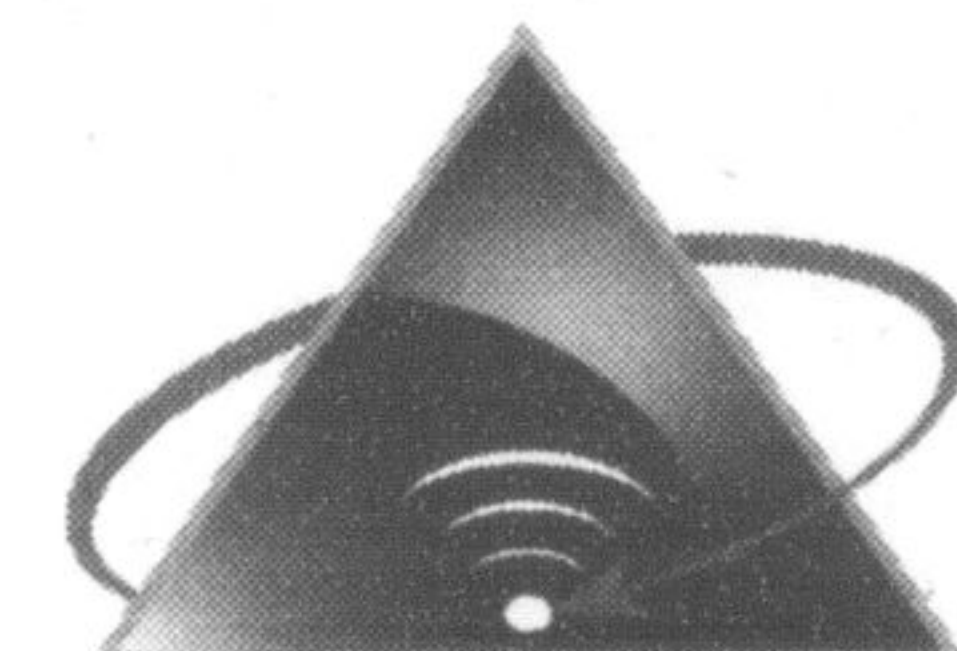
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