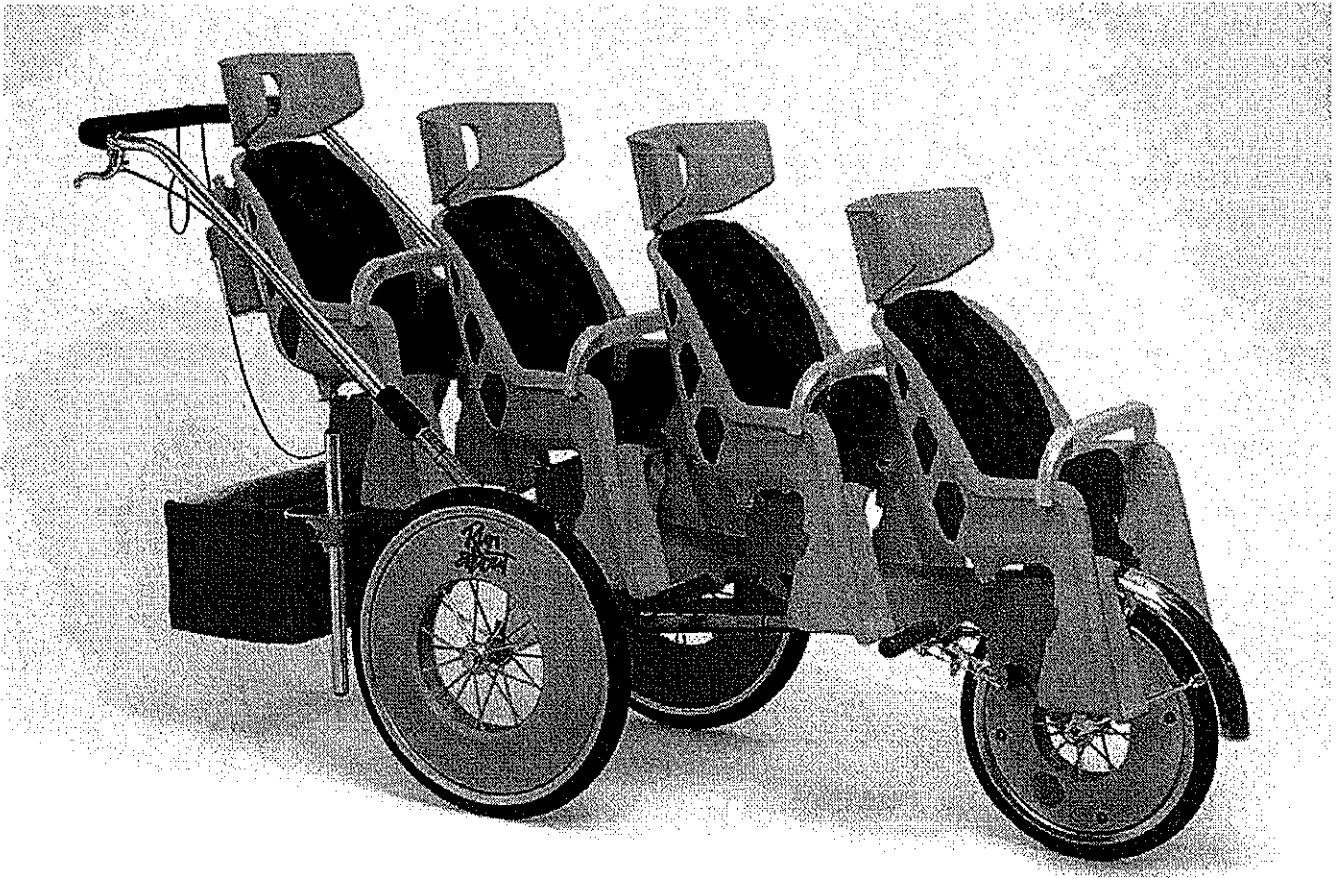


HAND-OUT  
TPC 04.09.10  
ITEM F. 3.









**Emelyne Ndayizeye, shown with her daughter, Layla, rides an OC Transpo bus from the Rideau Centre in this photo taken last fall. The transit committee is set to tackle the issue of baby strollers in aisles on OC Transpo buses next week, following a report about restrictions suggested by two advisory committees that have looked into the contentious topic.**

**Photograph by: Julie Oliver, The Ottawa Citizen, The Ottawa Citizen**

The fight over baby strollers in OC Transpo bus aisles is turning into a protracted battle. And once again seniors, the disabled, parents of young children and other bus riders are preparing for another round.

For the second time in three months, the transit committee will discuss whether open strollers should be allowed in bus aisles, after a pair of council advisory committees -- representing seniors and people with disabilities -- suggested restrictions.

"Unfortunately, it's a conflict between the need of parents with small children to use the bus system and the ability of others to be able to get on and off the bus reasonably," said Bay Councillor Alex Cullen, chairman of the transit committee. "We're trying to resolve a situation where different needs are in conflict."

There have been complaints and tales of disagreements between passengers, as well as reports of falls and injuries caused when people tried to navigate around strollers.

Late last year, staff proposed banning strollers in aisles in an attempt to better manage congestion at the front of the bus. They would have been allowed in empty wheelchair bays, but if full, parents would have to fold and stow strollers.

But several parents told transit committee that folding strollers can be a challenge. One woman demonstrated how difficult it is to collapse a stroller while carrying a child, while another said the change would target low-income families and discourage people from using the bus.

In the end, the committee decided that if wheelchair bays are available, open strollers must be placed in them; if not, strollers would be permitted in the aisle "unless they interfere with other passengers or with the safe movement of passengers within the transit vehicle."

However, the committee's recommendation was referred by council to the seniors advisory committee and the accessibility advisory committee, who wanted to take another look.

Those citizen volunteers made recommendations and, according to a city staff report, support the original staff proposal and "would prefer a more stringent policy" on strollers.

The transit committee meets Wednesday and could decide to accept some or all of the advisory committees' recommendations, stick with its earlier decision to reject a ban, or roll over and go with the staff recommendation to ban strollers from aisles after all, Cullen said.

The seniors' committee says the bus aisles should be clear of all "mobility devices" when a bus is moving. It also says that in the seating area at the front of a bus, priority should be given to people using wheelchairs or scooters; then to people with disabilities, seniors and people with walkers; and finally to children in strollers.

(Staff say in their report that it would be difficult in practical terms for drivers to enforce this, and it would require a bylaw change.)

The seniors advisory committee says a bus-borne stroller can't be bigger than 1.2 metres long and 60 centimetres wide -- oversized and jogging strollers would not be allowed at all. OC Transpo would be asked to examine the feasibility of expanding the priority seating area at the front of the bus.

Meanwhile, the accessibility advisory committee wants "fold and stow" to be the default policy for strollers, although there would be an exception for double strollers holding two children.

If a driver allowed an open stroller on board, it would need to be placed in a wheelchair position if possible, but would be allowed in the aisle unless it interfered with other passengers or their safe movement, the accessibility committee recommends.

Catherine Gardner, chairwoman of the accessibility advisory committee, said that committee also wants a stroller size restriction. Even if her committee's recommendations win, some members were concerned that strollers could remain in the aisles, which could cause problems during emergencies, she said.

Gardner said there are other "mobility devices" that parents can use, such as pouches and strollers "that they can carry and fold."

As a result of the seniors' committee recommendations and "lengthy discussion and consultation" with the accessibility committee, city staff believe "that both advisory committees support staff's proposed stroller policy and that they would prefer a more stringent policy," staff says.

So the city officials suggest councillors approve the policy they rejected last fall, after all.

"Based on the number of complaints by customers, and the sensitive nature of conflicts reported by operators, a more clearly defined policy is required," the report says. "The advantage of staff's proposed policy is the operator's ability to communicate the stroller requirement to the customer prior to boarding, rather than attempting to negotiate the outcome later, when the bus environment changes."

The city has been trying to settle problems at the front of buses. On Tuesday, it launched a campaign on "co-operative seating," which includes new colours and decals at the front of buses to "emphasize the 'co-operation message'," according to a press release.

The stroller issue, however, remains unsolved.

"We do need to establish clear, sensible rules. It means one side or the other is going to have to accommodate," said Cullen, adding that "90 per cent of the time we don't have a problem, but when we do, that's when we need these rules.

"There's no easy solution. Part of this is having a conversation with our public about priorities."

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Have your say Tell us what you think about strollers on

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