

City of Mississauga Memorandum



Date: June 12, 2023
To: Chair and Members of Transit Advisory Committee
From: Geoff Marinoff, Transit Director
Meeting date: June 20, 2023
Subject: **Messages on MiWay Bus Destination Signs**

Recommendation

1. That the Transit Advisory Committee provide comments to staff for inclusion in a future report to General Committee with respect to Messages on MiWay Bus Destination Signs.

Executive Summary

- MiWay bus destination signs can only display up to two messages at once and two service-related messages are often required for service delivery (e.g. Route 1 – Dundas East and “Masks Recommended” for health and safety).
- Transit Operators can choose to display additional, pre-programmed, non-service-related messages (e.g. Happy New Year or Happy Canada Day) on bus destination signs by manually inputting corresponding codes into the sign system.
- General Committee approved changes on June 15, 2022 to the list of non-service-related messages available on bus destination signs to recognize dates and events at the City.
- Benchmarking of other large transit systems in Canada found little consistency in how and which non-service-related messages are displayed on buses. The Toronto Transit Commission (TTC), for example, displays only route/service information.

Background

All MiWay buses have electronic destination signs on the front and curbside of the vehicle to display route/service information (e.g. Route 1 – Dundas East) in compliance with the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA).

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Transit Operators can choose to display additional, pre-programmed, non-service-related messages (e.g. Happy New Year or Happy Canada Day) on bus destination signs by manually inputting corresponding codes into the sign system.

Given display limitations and AODA requirements the messages are very limited in length. When the need arises to display two service messages due to road construction, for example, (e.g. Route 1 – Dundas East and “On Detour”), other messages cannot be displayed because the signs can only display up to two messages at once. Other key service-related messages such as “Masks Recommended” for health and safety always take precedence over non-service-related messages. Non-service messages always compete with service messages for display time.

On June 15, 2022 a corporate report entitled “Recognizing Dates and Events at the City of Mississauga” was approved at General Committee. The report outlined official dates and events for the Corporation to recognize, and provided direction on which non-service-related messages should be available on bus destination signs (see Appendix 1). MiWay staff implemented the changes, and subsequently added four more messages in December 2022.

Comments

From an operational perspective, destination signage messages are loaded into the sign program for each bus on an individual basis. It is then up to each Transit Operator (more than 900 total staff) to decide if they would like to display another optional message, or not, along with the required route information. If they choose not to select a message, the destination sign displays only the route information (e.g. Route 1 – Dundas East). However, if they do input a message code into the sign system, the bus destination sign will alternate between displaying the route information and the non-service-related message (e.g. Happy Canada Day).

As the MiWay fleet of vehicles vary in age and technology, there is currently no mechanism for centralized control or oversight of the messages displayed. For example, “Happy Canada Day” could be displayed on buses in December if that particular code was inputted at the wrong time and there would be no data record of it.

Expanding the list of available, optional destination sign messages places undue pressure on both Transit Operations and Maintenance staff. The logistics of reviewing and loading new messages onto each bus is difficult and time-consuming. Not all buses are available at the same time and in the same place due to the transit system’s operational and maintenance schedules. The complexity of loading messages manually into the sign program also requires shifting resources away from other maintenance priorities and negatively affects service delivery to customers at times due to the logistics involved in coordinating access to the buses.

Transit Operators are required to remember the message number and as the quantity of messages increases the likelihood of the individual Operator remembering the code decreases.

From the customer perspective, displaying non-service-related messages increases the amount of information the destination sign must scroll through and therefore the time it can take a customer to determine the route/service provided by a particular bus. This adds friction to the overall customer experience. Many bus stops throughout Mississauga are served by more than one route, and a delay of even a few seconds can interfere with loading times when multiple customers have to pause to check and confirm if a bus destination sign is displaying the route they want before they board.

A benchmarking exercise of other large transit systems in Canada found little consistency in how and which non-service-related messages are displayed on buses. For example, the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) does not allow any message other than route information based on feedback from its Advisory Council on Accessible Transit, and 21% of MiWay passengers connect daily with the TTC. Furthermore, while Brampton City Council approves the dates and events for Brampton Transit to recognize each year on its bus destination signs, Milton Transit has no formal process for determining or approving messages.

Strategic Plan

Making it easy for all customers to quickly identify the route/service provided by a bus helps to provide a positive MiWay customer experience, which supports the following strategic goals:

Move: Developing a Transit-Oriented City

- Build a reliable and convenient system.

Belong: Ensuring Youth, Older Adults and New Immigrants Thrive

- Ensure Affordability and Accessibility.

Connect: Completing our Neighbourhoods

- Provide mobility choices.

Conclusion

MiWay is committed to providing a transportation system that ensures its services and operations are accessible to everyone. Bus destination signs can only display up to two messages at once and two service-related messages are often required for service delivery (e.g. Route 1 – Dundas East and “Masks Recommended” for health and safety).

Transit Operators can choose to display additional, pre-programmed, non-service-related messages (e.g. Happy Canada Day); however, doing so increases the amount of information the destination sign must scroll through and the time it can take a customer to determine the route/service provided by a bus. MiWay should display only service-related messages on bus destination signs so that all customers can easily identify the route provided by a bus, which supports a positive customer experience.

Attachments

Appendix 1: Available Non-Service-Related Messages TAC 0371-2023



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