

## Shuttle Bus criticized as not accessible

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*Cannot take free ride from Don Mills o Fairview Mall, says wheelchair user; others praise service*

By Karolyn Coorsh

The new shuttle service transporting displaced shoppers from the Don Mills Centre to Fairview Mall has left members of the community wondering why a wheelchair accessible bus was not provided to accommodate the many seniors living in the area.

Cadillac Fairview began operating the shuttle bus on June 15 and is running it as a free service during the construction overhaul of the Don Mills Centre, which is expected to last two years. Right now, the mall remains closed except for a few stores that will stay open, including Dominion and Shoppers Drug Mart.

Pick up and drop off points for the shuttle include the bus stop on Don Mills Rd. in the parking lot opposite Dominion, and E.P. Taylor Place, a senior's centre located at 1 Overland Dr. The bus operates in a continual loop between 11:00am and 3:00 pm, Monday through Friday.

While some say the shuttle bus is a welcome and useful service, others are disappointed with its limited accessibility.

Joan Hanlon, who lives close to Don Mills Rd., is angry that the shuttle is not wheelchair accessible and said it's difficult to board for people with less mobility or extra baggage, like a stroller. The bus has steep front steps that are hard for many seniors to climb, she added.

"Everybody is noticing it. I've gone up now three times on the bus and it's complaints every time."

Hanlon is undergoing knee replacement surgery in the fall and said there is no way she'll be able to use the bus while she recuperates.

"It's to their advantage anyway that we go (to Fairview Mall) and shop and they couldn't provide us with anything better than this?"

Neil Murphy, spokesman for Cadillac Fairview, said the shuttle bus is a courtesy service and is not meant to function like Wheel-Trans.

“We would be happy to look into the issue. We’re not saying no to accessibility at all. If we assess it and get enough calls then absolutely, it’s something we’d look into.”

Cadillac Fairview has received a positive response from the community regarding the shuttle bus, said Murphy, who estimates that 20 to 30 people ride it daily.

“The reality is we cannot provide service to people who would prefer to speak to the **\*\*Town Crier\*\*** newspaper rather than to the management group at Don Mills Centre.”

Murphy also said he encouraged people to call Wheel-Trans because their specific needs might be met more handily.

“We’re doing services the best we can, it’s not perfect and it won’t be perfect until the mall reopens.”

“I think that’s unacceptable,” said Jane Pitfield, councillor for Don Valley West. “I just think it’s a terrible inconvenience not being able to use the Don Mills Centre and it’s a major bus trip to these other shopping centres. On top of all of that to have to arrange Wheel-Trans is unacceptable.”

Pitfield said she knows many seniors in scooters or wheelchairs that frequented the Don Mills Centre when it was open and added that she plans to call her contacts at Cadillac Fairview this week to recommend that they provide an accessible bus.

Despite frustrations with the service, some users say they’re just happy to even have a shuttle bus.

Colin Needham is a senior who lives close to Taylor Place. He and his wife have used the service six times and find it very convenient.

“For us it’s fine,” he said. “The driver is always very courteous and very conscious of people getting off safely. There was one lady that got on, who had a walker. The bus driver helped her aboard and stowed the walker.”

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