

Dear Ms. Woodard:

Thank you for your e-mail of April 15 to Alain Mercier, Director of OC Transpo, regarding service animals, to which I am responding on his behalf. I hope you can appreciate that this is a complicated issue and we do not take it lightly.

As you indicated in your e-mail, OC Transpo - including Para Transpo - is federally regulated. The issues and questions you have raised therefore fall under the jurisdiction of federal organizations such as the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA). We also are governed by the City of Ottawa Transit By-Law No 2007-268, which states that service animals used in therapy may be allowed on the transit system provided that they are trained by and registered with a recognized organization for the purpose of being used in therapy.

In your case, OC Transpo's Accessible Transit Specialist, Kathy Riley, issued you an Assistant Card, a mechanism prescribed by the above-mentioned by-law, after receiving a request from your physician. Mrs. Riley used her discretion to issue the Assistant Card for you to access the transit system with "Patches", your ferret, even though your animal was not trained and registered. Mrs. Riley did so after reviewing the Province's Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and other law that may have influenced the decision to grant similar access to transit in other cities. Yet, all of that law falls outside of federal jurisdiction and there is no legal obligation for us to grant access to the City of Ottawa transit system to people with untrained or non-registered service animals.

I trust that you understand our need to balance the interests of all of our customers and employees. Concerns about the presence of animals on the transit system include allergies, certain types of zoophobia (e.g. relating to rodents), the incidence of respiratory problems among the transit-riding population in general and Para Transpo users in particular, and unforeseeably disruptive reactions from other animals, such as guide dogs.

You have shown your awareness of some of these concerns as you discussed with Mrs. Riley possible mitigation measures that you would contemplate when bringing your animal on the bus: should its presence trigger an allergic reaction for the driver or a customer, you would exit and wait for the next bus; you would make an effort to keep the animal well groomed; you would fit it with a collar and leash and you would not take it out of its bag while travelling on the bus. I appreciate your good will even though the proposed measures do not fully alleviate the risks that fuel the concerns noted above.

Both the legal context and the concerns described above reinforce us in continuing to apply the above-mentioned by-law and deny access to the transit system - including both conventional transit and Para Transpo - to non-service and untrained or non-registered animals. We therefore urge you to consider alternatives when required to travel with your animal, until it falls into an allowable category. In the meantime, we would appreciate your returning the Assistant Card you currently hold to OC Transpo (1500 St. Laurent Blvd., Ottawa, K1G 0Z8), as it remains OC Transpo property.

I thank you for your inquiry and for giving us the opportunity to address your concerns.

Brigitte  
Customer Relations