

January 6, 2020

Whistler Mayor and Council

Subject: Negative impact of Sea to Sky Corridor's lack of accessible transportation

Dear Whistler Mayor and Council,

Whistler's modern legacy of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic games have made it a gem of tourism, recreation, and sport year-round. Whistler's wheelchair accessible accommodations, vibrant community life, and access to spectacular recreational opportunities has inspired Spinal Cord Injury BC to invite 50+ people with physical disabilities and their families to Whistler each year to participate in a life-changing weekend of adapted outdoor recreation. Although the program facilitation through Whistler Adaptive Sports Program and the accommodations at Whistler Athletes Village are world class, the lack of accessible transportation in the Sea to Sky Corridor continues to be a significant disappointment and a barrier to our participants.

Since 1957, Spinal Cord Injury BC has been helping people with physical disabilities and their families adjust, adapt, and thrive as they deal with a new injury or struggle with the ongoing challenges of living and aging with a physical disability. Through our Provincial Peer Support Program, we have been bringing introducing people with physical disabilities to recreation-based experiences at our Whistler adaptive sports camp since 2014. Interest in participating in this event is exceptionally high but every year, our participants struggle to find wheelchair accessible transportation options to get them from Vancouver to Whistler, and we are forced to turn participants away who cannot afford to own a personal, adaptive vehicle.

Currently, there are no publicly or privately available wheelchair accessible bus companies operating in the Sea to Sky Corridor. For years, we struggled with Greyhound, having participants denied the purchase of a seat on the bus or denied boarding at the time of departure. Modo, which operates a car-share in Vancouver has one wheelchair accessible van which is available for just one person to rent. Currently, Skylynx offers to transport a (foldable) wheelchair in their luggage storage, but there is no lift into the bus. Epic Rides does not offer wheelchair accessible buses. Additionally, private transport busses that do allow wheelchairs are designed only to accommodate manual wheelchair users, which means that power chair users are not able to travel.

We have been as creative as possible to help find solutions for participants. This year, we rented a car, a U-Haul van, and a portable ramp so that we would be able to transport three new Canadians to Whistler for the first time. While this makeshift solution was workable, it put our participants, their expensive wheelchairs and our organization at undo risk.

Within Whistler, the bus system is fully wheelchair accessible. However, the infrequent weekend and evening bus schedule and the maximum loading of 2 wheelchairs per bus has been inconvenient for our group. Whistler's lone wheelchair accessible cab means that wheelchair accessible transportation is effectively unavailable to more than one person at a time, and inadequate for even small gatherings of

people who use mobility devices. Our participants have experienced several hour waits for a taxi, and have also been told that there were no wheelchair accessible cabs on the schedule for the day.

As a resort municipality, Whistler regularly attracts tens of thousands of tourists for annual week long festivals like Crankworx or Cornucopia, taking up most hotel, parking and restaurant bookings – while even one or two wheelchair users among those tourists overwhelms the scarce wheelchair accessible transportation available. This lack of transportation undermines the value of the rare and world class adaptive recreation offered in Whistler.

Other resort municipalities such as Banff have found transportation solutions to ensure that people who need mobility devices have inclusive access to our incredible natural heritage and recreational opportunities, and can be active participants in the tourism sector. Unfortunately, for the Sea to Sky Corridor, the lack of accessible transportation is a barrier not only to the participation by people with disabilities and their families, but also to the economic benefit their participation can bring to communities along the corridor. We hope that the Resort Municipality of Whistler will work with its transportation partners to find a solution to this long standing issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CBM', is positioned above the printed name.

Chris McBride, PhD
Executive Director