

## **Para Transpo Contract Awarded – by Chris Pomroy of the Social Action Committee**

I attended the Council Meeting on 27 February, at which the bids for Para Transpo service were discussed. Rose Leclair (the General Manager of Transportation, Utilities and Public Works for the City) made a very clear description of the process by which the bids were evaluated. Since the bids included both external and in-house proposals the evaluation had to be very objective, which it seemed to be, with the help of Partnering and Procurement Inc. and Ernst and Young. Full details of the discussion at the meeting can be found at:

<http://www.city.ottawa.on.ca/calendar/ottawa/citycouncil/ttc/2002/02-19/minutes1.htm> see item 3

Council discussed the issue at some length and there was some criticism of the selection process for not choosing the cheapest bid, which was the in-house one (OC Transpo and the Amalgamated Transport Union). The process, however, had selected the "best value for money" bid rather than the cheapest.

There was also much discussion about strike avoidance as the in-house bid had accepted binding arbitration for future contract negotiations. The external bidder, while agreeing to this method, could not of course speak for the union, and this was felt by some to be a danger. It was pointed out however, that all parties, including the union, had agreed to binding arbitration when the whole process started.

It could be argued that Council should have "bitten the bullet" before the process started and decreed that no external bids would be sought. They did not, however, and it appears that the external bid was superior to the in-house bid. The contract was thus awarded to First Bus, on the basis of the staff evaluation and it seems to me that this is a good choice.

City staff took some trouble to look into the record of First Bus, which is very good. They have been operating the Para service in Regina for some time, and I asked a friend in Regina, if he had any information. He said he knew someone who visited Regina from Ottawa, used the First Bus service, and felt it was better than the Ottawa service. Of course only time will tell, and we are all eagerly awaiting July when the 90 new buses will take to the streets.

It is of interest that the sedan service of Para Transpo was offered to the taxi industry, and the only company to bid was West-Way, which tried to set up an accessible taxi service some years ago. They got the contract but were only interested in the west side of the city. There were no bids from the taxi industry for the east side, and so the contract was given to First Bus. This is a sad reflection on Ottawa's taxi industry, but there are glimmers of hope as Blue Line is now under new ownership, and some councillors are looking closely at London taxicabs, which are inherently accessible.