

BROCK'S BANTER: Meet Timothy

By Brock Weir

I met Timothy for the first time on Wednesday.

A resident of Stouffville, he was itching to get to Markham for a Social Benefits Tribunal Hearing. He has limited mobility in his arms and had to navigate the streets of York Region in his electric wheelchair ? no easy task given his chronic pain. Nevertheless, he persevered to get to his destination.

By 1.45 p.m., he was grappling with his chair, a set of instructions, and a few flimsy \$10 bills trying to make his way to a Customer Service office to purchase a transit card to cover his journey.

Knowing where to go and what to do, the trip got off to a rocky start, taking one wrong turn along the way. Getting lost was the easy part, but getting back was another story altogether.

Tim ? by now we were on a first name basis ? struggled to get his unwieldy chair turned around and back on track. If not for the help of a Good Samaritan watching the scene unfold, that task would have been next to impossible.

Five minutes from the start of his journey, he was now in the right line waiting for customer service. The line starts to move a good 15 minutes later, but to say it was moving at anything more than a snail's pace would be a gross exaggeration.

People were rather jovial, however, as they waited to get their foot ? or at least a wheel ? in the door, taking advantage of the sense of camaraderie that comes with all being in the same boat with nothing else to do but ride the current.

It takes a further five minutes to get remotely close to the Customer Service area and from our vantage point, it was still unclear exactly what the holdup was. That, however, but that soon becomes clear.

After a few sticky situations of moving a 20-deep lineup in synch to allow people to come out of the service area, people inside the door are within earshot. There are a few arguments unfolding with people looking to get to their respective destinations. If they needed to be somewhere by 3, the next bus was either too early or too late. Arguments did not seem to be getting people further ahead with the tough taskmasters behind the desk.

Tim, however, wasn't going to let that stop him.

?Sir, there is nothing available today,? said the Clerk. ?All the rides are booked.?

That wasn't going to wash with Tim.

After a few seconds of haggling, his request was turned over to a less surly clerk who was eventually persuaded to book Tim a ride at 3 p.m., somewhat in the range of when and where he needed to be.

?You should have called earlier!?' said the clerk as Tim made his exit. Had he had a hand free from holding his directions, money, new transit card, and navigating his chair, he would have made a note of that tip.

From there, his journey continued. His first stop was, if you can imagine, his first bus stop. People were already eagerly awaiting their ride and it was clear from the lineup it wasn't going to be a short stay. There was another false start when the bus arrived, but there was only room for two. Tim had to wait some more. Eventually his number came up and it was off to the second stop where more crowds and more waiting, well, awaited him.

Another bus stop later, he was on his own to make his way uphill through the cacophony and obstacles of rush hour traffic to get to his third transfer point. Successfully reaching that destination, Tim eagerly got off the bus with a sense of accomplishment knowing that he was going to make his tribunal hearing in far better time than he imagined battling his way through the customer service Colditz.

The elation was short-lived. After finally getting off the bus, the skies opened up. He had two choices. Get immediately back on the bus and miss his tribunal, or soldier on to the appointment and risk irreparably damaging his electric wheelchair in the rain.

This persistent guy chose the latter option and suffered the consequences.

That was the end of my journey as Timothy 3 in Wednesday's mobility maze. Following the scenarios handed out by Maze organizers to the letter, there was a sense of defeat on that last leg when that wet curveball was thrown my way. I can only imagine what people, who have to navigate these streets, and indeed life, from the confines of their chair, think when they are faced with these all-too-real situations.

While organizers of the Mobility Plus transportation service, as you can read on Page 27 this week, dispute the value of the Maze and what they claim are the ?untruths? presented at the Aurora Community Centre, from my perspective the value is clear.

Taking Mobility Plus out of the equation, the wait times and the struggles people using wheelchairs and other mobility devices cannot be denied. On a personal level, this reality was always at the back of my mind, but having experienced it first hand, however

briefly, I will forever have a refreshed appreciation for the determination and grit they exhibit simply going about their routine.