

Bus Riders of Saskatoon
Meeting with City of Saskatoon Utility Services Department –
October 23, 2014

1:30pm – 2:30pm
301 – 24th Street West, Saskatoon

Bus Riders of Saskatoon Members: Marianne, Chief and Sarina

City of Saskatoon Representatives: Alysha, Harold and Bob

Minutes taken by: Sarina

1. Welcome by Alysha

2. Introduction and Background of Bus Riders of Saskatoon by Sarina

- Why and when the group formed
- Goals from the group:
 - Transit should be easy
 - More frequent service
 - Reliable connections
- Bus Riders of Saskatoon would like to remain a stakeholder to be consulted with. Our suggestion was to hold a position on an advisory committee.

Clarification from City on what “easy” means in terms of “transit should be easy”. Clarification being one should not have to think about taking transit. They know that once they come to a stop they will only have to wait up to 15 minutes for a bus, not an hour. That way one does not have to plan their evening around grocery shopping. In addition, easy means that connections and fluidity of the transit system are a priority.

3. Introduction of Issues Raised by Bus Riders of Saskatoon Members by Marianne

- Reaffirm the need for a public advisory committee for transit, and for Bus Riders of Saskatoon to have a spot
- Late buses – the inability to make a connection
- Better access to different places (e.g. Broadway, North Industrial)
- Taking seniors into account – easy access to hospitals (e.g. St. Paul’s)
- GPS installation on buses
- Funding and budget for transit
- Frequent service on Saturday and Sunday mornings
- More bus shelters – heated?
- Buses running later for those evenings (Thursday, Friday and Saturday) when people frequent drinking establishments. This provides an alternative to people who cannot/should not be driving.

4. Clarification from City Representatives

- The role of Bus Riders of Saskatoon
 - They are very much interested in listening to what riders have to say
 - Huge value in continuing these meetings with Bus Riders of Saskatoon
 - Comments need to be shared in order to help improve transit services

- Budget
 - Saskatoon is growing immensely. The 2005/2006 transit plan, meant for ten years, outgrew Saskatoon in 2010/2011
 - Transit is based on a 15 minute service for each route. That means that any service or route changes could only be at a minimum of 15 minute intervals (i.e. if a planner were to add “time” to a route they would have to add that in 15 minute increments)
 - 4 buses usually on that route (based on 15 minute service – this number could increase or decrease depending on frequency)
 - Capital cost approximately \$2 million (based on 15 minute service – this number could increase or decrease depending on frequency)
 - each added bus costs approximately \$450,000
 - Note: numbers are approximate, not absolute
 - It is tremendously cheaper to buy used/refurbished buses and fix them up rather than buy new
 - If all the buses purchased for the City were new, only half the routes would be able to run because the cost is so high
 - 2016 is the expected date for a new bus facility that can house the whole fleet indoors
 - Minimize the expense of organizing the current bus barn to be ready for the next day’s service
 - Business plans are put together annually
 - Brought to City Hall

- Challenges
 - Ridership versus demand for routes
 - E.g. 80 is full with students and it is hard to justify adding a bus to the evening with low ridership when that bus could go to provide backup for a route that is full
 - Saskatchewan gets no dedicated operational federal funding
 - Transit agencies can apply for capital grants from the Building Canada fund, but there is heavy competition for this
 - Provincial government does provide funding to cities in Saskatchewan, but none of that is specifically for Public Transit

- 60% City funds
 - 40% revenue from fares and other sources such as advertising revenue (benches, shelters, on bus)
 - All transit systems around the world do not make profit – they need to have access to funding
 - Transit systems are an investment to cities and people
 - Timing and Reliability
 - Driving in mixed traffic
 - Growing Forward tried to start discussions for dedicated bus lanes
 - Difficult to meet schedules when buses are stuck in traffic
 - Bridges are a concern as one side of the city is working well with little route disruption but the other side of the city causes a lot of delays
 - This is why routes get split (i.e. 70/80)
 - Transit is a slow moving beast
 - Change is slow
 - Changes can only be made annually (July 1). That is why sometimes it seems like ones feedback is not received
- Transit Committee
 - Disbanded in 1995 because it was no longer useful for Council. The Terms of Reference were not robust enough and became outdated (reference City archives)
 - It was previously an advisory committee to council
 - Currently looking to establish an administrative group (not advisory for council)
 - Based on examples in Calgary or Cycling Advisory Committee
 - Uses a citizen's/riders perspective
 - Requires an application and interview process
- Process for Planning Routes
 - Productivity Committee
 - Made up of Union and City administration
 - Meet regularly between November and March, and as needed in the months between
 - Concerns from riders and drivers are brought forward
 - Customer Services Manager and Marketing Manager also provides a customer perspective
 - July 1 is when Council allows for changes to routes
 - 3 month process usually for changing routes
 - Both groups drive proposed routes and provide feedback
 - This was the first year that new routes were shared with customers beforehand to ask for feedback
 - Transit planning program for routes: Trapeze

- Computer generated models (based on buses traveling 20 km/hr)
 - Partly generated by Planning Supervisor as well
 - e.g. the Planner builds the route and major time points while the program fills in the parts in between based on a set of predefined criteria
 - Bus Riders of Saskatoon recognizes that change is needed in a growing city and that some routes may look good on paper but will need to be adjusted upon execution. We recognize that routes may not be perfect when first rolled out.
- GPS
 - GPS's have already been installed on all buses
 - Used internally to troubleshoot and to dispatch more buses
 - Software upgrade needed
 - Currently uses 2008 version and now updated to 2013 version
 - Lots of testing needed still
 - 90% complete
 - January 2015 launch date for the website
 - hopefully a January 2015 launch for planning tools, such as Click & Go – but no date has been set yet
 - Current challenges for communicating with riders about changes:
 - 3 day process to bundle data for Google (in their preferable format)
 - 10 days for Google to update changes
 - New software will be searchable by such things as landmarks or bus numbers
 - New City website will have a separate Transit webpage with its own URL that is designed for transit users (i.e. searching for schedules)
- Heated Bus Shelters
 - Engineers currently working on retrofitting current shelters to be heated
 - They are working on a functional prototype before locations can be determined and reaching out to other cities to see what they have used
 - Currently opening the customer service centre downtown for shelter on cold evenings
- Confederation Mall Terminal
 - Bus shelters will be returned
 - Additional benches, time tables and other site furnishings will be added
 - Work was delayed this fall and will be completed in the spring

5. Discussion

- What are things Bus Riders of Saskatoon can do?
 - Put pressure on City Council to increase funding. They need to know the citizens of Saskatoon want increased funding for transit
 - i.e. Saskatoon residents put pressure to increase funding for roads and now there is a \$50 million investment for roads.
 - Better support for transit will alleviate pressure on roads and decreased the cost of repairs (i.e. less wear and tear)
 - Use personal emails to contact councilors NOT the general feedback form for contacting council. That email does not reach them directly.
 - Format: firstname.lastname@saskatoon.ca (i.e. don.atchison@saskatoon.ca)
 - Provide comments on city website: Civic Service Survey (on Communications Page)
 - City uses this for planning
 - Put pressure on provincial government to provide transit specific dollars
 - I believe contact the Department of Municipal Affairs
 - Put pressure on federal government to provide transit specific dollars
 - The Honourable Denis Lebel, Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs
 - Minister.Ministre@inf.gc.ca
 - If customers experience issues with service (i.e. a bus did not stop for you), contact Transit (Transportation & Utilities):
 - Go to “Contact Us” on City website, choose Transit from a dropdown list. The email goes directly to Transit office
 - Try to capture the following information:
 - Time of day/route (i.e. exact time)
 - 3 or 4 digit number on the bus
 - Direction of bus (east/west/north/south)
 - Route number
- Is Light Rapid Transit (LRT) possible to be implemented?
 - LRT's were looked at previously but for a City of 500,000 it is not sustainable or financially feasible
 - \$1.5 billion for only approximately 8.2 kms of LRT (i.e \$195M per km)
 - Purely construction cost. Does not include cost for additional rail cars to put on the line or operational costs.
 - Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is more feasible and the current routes can be used for future LRTs once Saskatoon is a City with a population of 1,000,000
 - Other factors are the potential for corridors development

- Is the City consulted when planning future neighbourhoods?
 - In the last two years, Transit has been invited to early discussions of neighbourhood planning
 - Challenge is working with developers as roads become smaller when projects become over budget
 - This is a neighbourhood specific challenge
 - Neighbourhood service is staged
 - First only service during peak times, then 7am-7pm service

- Can Circle Drive be used as a transit route?
 - It has been looked at
 - Until congestion can be alleviated at 42nd, buses would only add to congestion

- Specific Issues Discussed
 - Route changes along Broadway because it is less transit friendly because of frequently closures for community events and it is difficult to reroute buses down Dufferin Avenue or Main Street as they are not transit corridors.
 - Increasing communication between the City and riders is imperative

6. Meeting Summary

- Sarina to contact Alysha to set up monthly meetings between Bus Riders of Saskatoon and Utility Services Department

7. Meeting Adjournment