

Bus Riders of Saskatoon – Meeting #10 – March 8, 2015

Present: 18 plus one guest

Facilitators: Samuel and Cameron

Recorder: Robert

Introductions

Minutes from last meeting – unavailable

Guest: Mairin Loewen, Saskatoon City Councillor

Councillor Loewen was invited to share her view of public transit in Saskatoon.

- Councillor Loewen said that she has been on Council for about 4 years. One of her motivations for seeking a seat on Council was her irritation with the transit system. She was dependent on transit at the time: inconsistent service, scheduling issues, lack of information, lack of communication mechanisms through non-political channels to bring complaints forward.

- She is still not happy with progress to date. Much of what she had assumed about prioritization within the city structures turns out to have been true. It has been much more difficult to make changes than she thought it would be.

- The city now has a twitter feed and real time tracking. It has taken an very long time for these things to happen. Change has been really challenging.

- There has been positive movement: The place that transit has in city planning documents and strategic plan: BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) and Moving Forward – the City is further than it has ever been before..

- In some ways the system is successful. The U Pass system has been introduced. Routes have been redesigned because of this. Stonebridge to Clarence is often full before it leaves Stonebridge so demand has outpaced the system. In other parts of the city the right routes haven't been found and are floundering

- The challenge is to transition to a 'big city transit system' that meets peoples' expectations as to reliability, convenience, comfort. The fear is that people don't trust the system enough to try it based on past experiences.

- BRT – the actual set up is easy. The challenge will be to get people to trust the system enough to use it. Transit a low priority within City structure and a large segment of the population.

- The challenge is: Can we become a transit city?
- It is exciting that we are even at this place in our transportation future. Managing between today and a new system while building public trust and making the appropriate investments.
- Vision: A system that is reliable , easy to navigate, convenient, comfortable. We are in a good position to implement a new system that will embody these principles.
 - Good timing with Growing Forward – Shaping Saskatoon consultations underway.
- Mairin would like to hear our thoughts on how to implement the new system and the intervening years in between.

Questions & Comments

Q. Has there been any discussion with the province regarding funding expansion of our transit system?

A. Discussions are uni-directional . There have been attempts to lobby province. Saskatchewan is one of the only if not the only province who doesn't provide designated transit funding. They respond that they provide money to the cities and the cities can spend it as they wish. The cities do get a percentage of the PST. This amount generally grows as the city grows. Last year it was \$40 million or so. The challenge is that it isn't earmarked and therefore it falls into the context of the priorities of the City

Q. Is there a chance of a future lockout?

A. There is always a chance but I think it is unlikely. One can't predict how other people will act however. I would not support another lockout. It wasn't a successful approach.

Q. Growing forward and BRT: What do you see our role in pushing it forward?

A. The good news is that Council has had a moment of clarity around transit due to transit lockout feedback, individual stories, also operational issues with the fleet, mechanics etc. This showed council that nickel and diming the system isn't working. People are starting to get it that these shortages lead to problems with the system.

- Council has asked Transit to come back with what it is going to take to be able to operate the system properly in regards to fleet and staff. This will feed into the next budget cycle. Management has never brought this forward to Council.

- Bus Riders of Saskatoon has been effective in coming to Committee meetings. It is good to contact your Councillor – better not to use copy and paste letters. Continue to be engaged at the Committee level.

- Once a transit advisory body has been created it will be a sounding board for transit-related decisions.

- There is pressure around Growing Forward – money, zoning and planning changes – converting to higher density corridors – changing the character of a street – but residents on some of those streets will perhaps not be happy.

- Bus Riders of Saskatoon needs to help promote some of this change with the public.

Q. After the lockout there was a fare free period. Was there an increase in transit usage?

A. I am not sure. We have the card based systems now so there is a lot of data but that information doesn't seem to be used to make decisions about the system.

Q. Do we need to put pressure on the Province?

A. Yes, continue to do this.

Q. Does a free system actually work? Doesn't Council need the revenue?

A. Well, roads and sewers don't make money either. We don't have that conversation with these services. Other councilors will ask that question. There is some school of thought that low fares are better than free transit in terms of public buy in. There is likely not a lot of appetite for a free system. Savings will be in deferred expenditures on roads and overpasses.

Q. Fare increases : When they jack fares up across the board, it is hard on seniors. There should be percentage increases.

A. Yes. This [fare increases] always comes up in budget discussions and it looks like an easy way to fill [revenue] gaps. There have been cost recovery ratio discussions.

Comment on maintenance issues: In Toronto a fatal accident blamed on maintenance. This led to better maintenance. It should be looked at in this light when setting priorities.

Q. The downtown Bus Mall: What is the problem?

A. We could be doing the same thing we are doing in a format that is laid out differently. It could be done along two parallel streets. This is an Urban Dead Zone right now. It is really under utilized space. The problems have as much to do with the facilities provided for riders as with transit itself.

Q. Transit is very price sensitive. Affordability has to be part of the discussions. Most good public transit is highly subsidized. Price increases are hard on people and lead to reduced ridership.

A. Agreed.

Q. The plan is to move from hub and spoke to a grid system. There is a concern that when the Mayor wants to get rid of the Bus Mall that it isn't a decision that is transit based.

A. I don't think that replacing the bus mall will be a detriment to the transit system.

Q. Monthly we meet with Saskatoon Transit. What happens with the proposed transit advisory committee? What is the process? We would like the opportunity to make suggestions.

A. The Standing Committee on Transportation made request to Council. Management is to come back with a proposal for the composition and terms of reference. That hasn't come back to the Committee yet. When it does it will be a great opportunity for Bus Riders to give input.

Formal committees have more resources allocated to them. Currently the Cycling Committee doesn't report to anyone. The Environmental Committee has a clear pathway. An advisory committee that reports to the Standing Committee on Transportation would seem to be more effective. I would hope to have stake holder representatives involved as well. There was a transit committee previously and it died off and we don't know why.

Q. What is the problem with the Hub System?

A. No problem for buses that go downtown or to the University. But if you want to go elsewhere, it can be more difficult in making transfers. The system is not going to age well in a growing city.

Presentation: Brian and Shannon – Better Transit YXE

Background – Better Transit YXE has been working with Bus Riders to plan ten days for transit in April. The two groups have different roles and objectives but have common ground.

- Mission is to catalyze discussion about public transit in Saskatoon and encourage change.

- It began as an internship with a number of dedicated hours per week - will come to an end in April.

- Focus on community based knowledge – want to engage with regular riders – all have some insight to share

- Suggested resources on transit fundamentals:

 - Human Transit by Jarrett Walker

 - Straphanger by Taras Grescoe

- Ideas/Actions/Events

 - Guideline - light, quick and cheap – think about how can we change transit to advance change in this fashion – how can Bus Riders make fast improvements – e.g. handed out candy canes to brighten peoples' days

 - Actions should be Saskatoon based – as with all communities it is unique city with unique, systems, attitudes, riders, drivers

 - Fun instead of Frustration – transit can be fun

 - Mapping – planning a mapping fair - showing the dynamics of the transit system – the difference between a walkable and less walkable community

 - Transitmix software (<http://www.transitmix.net/>) – can overlay demographic maps onto the transit maps – Bus Riders could play around with this to make suggestions as to how could we use the money available now to improve transit

 - Place Making – making transit an interesting part of the day – how can we do interventions at bus stops – birthday party at a bus stop or on a bus, poetry at a bus stop,

 - Blog-o-sphere – bettertransit yxe.wordpress.com

 - Twitter – interact with people and groups

 - Ten Days for Transit:

 - encourage bus selfies

 - demonstrate new bus schedule technology

 - discuss future of system highlighting the role of transit

 - gather success stories

 - Thrive Saskatoon – conference of the Canadian Planners Institute / Saskatchewan Institute of Professional Planners Urban Transit – June 27 – 30, 2015

Future –

- Now that YXE is ending, what is the future of the initiative? Could this be a sub-committee of Bus Riders of Saskatoon? Brian and Shannon see us as their successor organization

- discussion of how this could work and how the Better Transit YXE brand could continue

- what has been happening with the blog is what Bus Riders has tried to have happening with our website

- rather than as an official subcommittee of Bus Riders someone could maybe take it on as a hobby – could be kept completely separate and not be integral part of Bus Riders

- BetterTransitYXE – Twitter could be taken on by the Online Committee

- Actions could be taken on by ad hoc and External Committee or ad hoc committees depending on the actions.

- It was agreed that how to continue Better Transit YXE should be discussed further at the April meeting

Regular Business

1. Tracey read aloud Mission, Vision and Group Norms

2. Upcoming activities and collaborations

- 2.1 Discussion of Facebook posts

- some comments have been deleted although no one on the Steering Committee has any knowledge of how these were deleted

- since the password for administration was fairly widely distributed at the first meeting, it was agreed that we will change the password which would be known to a small number of administrators

- Tracey, Sarina and Robert will serve as administrators until the next meeting

- A 'pinned post' will be put up to explain that Bus Riders has not authorized deletion of posts other than commercial advertising, that we will be limiting the

number of administrators, and that there will be a discussion at our next meeting on the formation of guidelines as to when posts should be deleted

2.2 BetterTransitYXE – further discussion of our role

- Twitter feed could be added to role of online committee
- Website - feeling that another site would be a duplication
 - the Online Committee will have further discussions on the Twitter and Website functions and bring forward recommendations at the April meeting

2.3 Ten Days for Transit - Cameron, Samuel, Tracey

- Bus Riders has met with Councillors Loewen and Clark, BetterTransitYXE and the USSU to plan this
- dates - April 14 to 24th???? (to be finalized)
- Actions:
 - try to get people to use transit 10 times in ten days
 - Bus Rider story tellers – thought leaders to try to increase conversation about why transit is important and what is working, what needs improvement and to present a vision for the future
 - will be encouraging lots of people to sign up and to take part
 - the Story Tellers will be asked to agree to be interviewed, write at least one blog post and be on social media
 - Idea of pairing the Story Tellers with someone else who rides the bus a lot.
- Other stuff: We will be trying to provide support to direct people to existing supports for riders – online tools, phone and go etc.
 - May include actually riding with someone at some point during the 10 day period and a couple of days before it starts
 - Tracey asked for and took names of some volunteers who would be willing to participate in this.
 - Production volunteers are being sought out. Need Bus Riders to submit videos – questions will be provided to guide the content. Written submissions may be a part of this.

- Ten Days for Transit will be its own animal with its own materials and own logo
- a collaborative effort rather than just a Bus Riders initiative
- small leaflets and cards available with our URL could be available.

2.4 Meeting with SaskatoonTransit

- Sarina, Robert, Sam for the March meeting
- Tracey will be available for the April meeting

2.5 Adopt a Stop

- the goal to create community ownership of the shelters
- looking for groups to be on board when they launch it
- would like a few members of Bus Riders to adopt several stops
- a few people present at the meeting would be interested in participating
- agreed that Serena will report back that Bus Riders was positive but have some questions as to how the program would operate

3.0 Next Meeting

- Sunday, April 12th
- Facilitator/Minutes – Sam, Robert, Cam
- No councilor to be invited to next meeting but will be to the May meeting