

Bus Riders of Saskatoon - Meeting # 13 - June 14, 2015

Present: 10 plus 2 guests.

Facilitators: Tracey Mitchell and Cameron MacMillan.

Recorder: Samuel Ganton.

1. Introductions. Group Norms. Mission/Vision Statements.

2. Guest Presentation by City Councillor Darren Hill (Ward 1):

- Agrees the mission of Bus Riders of Saskatoon is important
- In a nutshell, transit sucks. The current system is not great.
- A major overhaul is upcoming, as part of the Growing Forward plan, and major funding decisions are in the works. The final proposal has not yet been presented to Council.
- Transit needs to be given the same funding consideration and emphasis as vehicular transport. Both active transportation and transit are now beginning to receive more consideration.
- Everybody benefits from transit, not just the riders.
- Councillor Hill's dream is to have a transit system that is viewed as a viable system of transportation.
- There is a stereotyped perception surrounding which groups of people use transit; we need to shift this perception, this narrative.

3. Questions and Discussion with Councillor Hill:

- *Question: From perspective as a city councillor - what improvements do you see as being able to be done early or easily?*
- Darren Hill (Answer): is more interested in hearing or being told what BRS members think needs to be done. Strategic changes in management have recently happened. Ward 1 constituents say that bus routes are not meeting their needs in terms of timing and connections.
- *Question: What is the best way for us to provide information and suggestions to Council?*
- Darren Hill (Answer): Optimism and positive suggestions are helpful. Charlie Clark & Mairin Loewen are likely the most knowledgeable councillors about transit. Councillor Hill has pushed for changing how roads are built. Suggests inviting councillors here to BRS meetings as quickly as possible, while the lockout is still fresh in their minds. Might want to consider a weekday evening specifically for meeting with councillors, as Sundays are difficult. Note that the opposing voices will be loud at budget discussions: it may be worthwhile approaching especially those who currently don't share our positions. Take a long term focus. We need to frame to Council how transit benefits the entire community, taking pressure off other infrastructural costs. The situation last fall, opening the school season without enough buses to serve, showed a lack of forethought and planning.
- *Question: It has been quite a process for us to ramp up our own knowledge around transit issues. Is there even enough specialized knowledge in the transit department?*
- Darren Hill (Answer): Some of that knowledge will come with the management changes. The right skill set and the right team are needed. It would be good to get the perspective of bus drivers, specifically, at our meetings. ATU perspective is related but distinct.

- *How should we approach lobbying the Province?*
- Darren Hill (Answer): Currently, there is revenue sharing of 1% of PST. The federal government is considering sharing 1% of GST. Gas tax percent is an option. Rural municipalities get more consideration in the PST disbursement formula. It should be a simple per-capita calculation with special consideration for the north Contact Jennifer Campeau, MLA and Minister of Central Services & STC as she would have knowledge of Public Transportation and the pressures it faces. Councillor Hill suggests working with the governing party. We would likely already have the support of the opposition.
- *Question: The city is not collecting the full value of its possible development levies, and there are restrictions on what can be included in levies. The City is currently asking for a change to allow emergency vehicles to be included. Could the city also ask for transit to be included?*
- Darren Hill (Answer): That's a good idea. It has become clear that growth doesn't pay for growth. One change that has happened is that neighbourhoods are now being planned with transit in mind. A review of the levies is currently being undertaken. An idea: a percentage tax on license registration, earmarked for public transportation and infrastructure. Bus lanes and other facilities for transit *are* transportation infrastructure.
- *Question: What influence could Council have on increasing transit use for daily commutes? Things like adjusted route design, agreements with employer companies, etc.?*
- Darren Hill (Answer): Council could influence new policies to support this. Here are several specific ideas:
 - i) A downtown core transit pass matching the cost of the U-Pass. This would relieve pressure on downtown parking.
 - ii) Enhancements on direct commuting routes.
 - iii) Firefighters and police riding the bus for free on the way to work. Having uniforms on the bus would help to change the perception around who rides. The difficulty is this would have to be negotiated as part of contracts.
 - iv) An easy online application for teachers to plan field trips for students on public transit, for free.
 - v) A pilot program to introduce U-Pass-type costs at the high school level. Schools could start charging for parking in their lots, which are currently paid for by the city, which receives no revenue. Free parking means there is not enough incentives for high school students to ride the bus.
 - vi) Elementary students living outside their district should get free bus passes.
 - vii) To sum up: the buses are moving anyway; let's get them as full as we can.
- *Question: Getting to and from the industrial areas, or Stonebridge, is much harder than getting downtown, especially late at night. What can be done about this? Also, will thought be given to building an LRT system?*
- Darren Hill (Answer): The current restructuring of the system, as part of the Growing Forward plan, is trying to address some of these issues [by moving toward a grid-based system, rather than a hub-and-spoke system]. Bus Rapid Transit can be considered a forerunner of Light Rail Transit (LRT). A combination of population size and user base must be present to make LRT viable: likely a population of 350,000+ people, plus an increased ridership percentage.

4. Guest Presentation by Hayley Carlson, Saskatchewan Environmental Society (SES):

- Hayley is coordinating the Climate Friendly Zone campaign.
- This campaign is separate from SES lobbying for policy changes: The Climate Friendly Zone (CFZ) is a campaign for the general public.
- The idea for the campaign came out of conversations with a former provincial minister of the environment, who said that there was "no public will" for climate friendly policies - "that's your job as an NGO."
- Supporting the campaign involves signing a personal commitment statement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and to support climate friendly policies. Special decals are given out for people to display their support. A map will be created showing where people have put up decals.
- Individual action: if people understand the issues, they take ownership over being part of the solution. The campaign lists examples of personal actions people can take.
- Having an effective and reliable transit system is one of the key goals for Saskatoon.
- Strategies for talking to people who may be antagonistic, or who feel hypocritical because they work in the energy industry: frame the discussion around energy efficiency, or job creation, etc.
- Sarina suggests sharing your personal story, and how you are affected: people don't shut down when they hear that. "Normalizing the discussion." Making it visible.
- Framing things in optimistic terms: telling stories with solutions embedded in them.
- Idea: BRS may be able to have more impact by not talking directly about environmental issues, but instead in terms of action, ridership, etc.
- The idea of networking at different events: showing our presence, and meeting different groups.
- Stephan: the issue of older buses having higher emissions.

5. Review of Minutes from Previous Meeting: Robert.

6. Committee Updates:

1. External: recommendations on the proposed Transit Advisory Committee still haven't gone forward to council. The external committee has not had time to come up with a list of positions we would like to see on this committee. Could be brought up informally with transit. Mandy will create a suggested list. The external committee is open for new members.
2. Internal: Tracey to make checklist for meeting facilitators before next meeting. Tracey reiterated that there is an open call for people to make suggestions for actions for the group.
3. Online: Call for new members to be involved, since some will be leaving. Suggestion to invite Brian Hoessler to be part of the Online Committee.

7. Finances:

- The account with Affinity Credit Union is now open.
- Robert, Sarina, and Tracey are signing authorities.
- Robert offers to serve as treasurer. Motion passes to accept Robert as treasurer.
- Tracey to contact 10 Days for Transit group about processing their donations.

8. We Are Cities Roundtable:

- Sarina reports: "A small but mighty group."
- Samuel is writing a blog post.
Mandy is harvesting data, which will be interpreted and compiled by We Are Cities.

- The discussion focused on strengths and challenges for Saskatoon. Results to be shared at next meeting.
- Mikki Mappin shared a post on Facebook with BRS, regarding the idea of making transit free - an active comment discussion was generated.

9. Better Transit YXE:

- A re-direct post to BRS should be made on the Better Transit wordpress page.
- Online Committee to contact Brian Hoessler about access to the Twitter account.
- We should approach others like Hillary Nelson ("The Other Hillary").

10. Active Transportation Stakeholder Advisory Committee:

- All-day workshop on Saturday June 20.

11. Meeting with Saskatoon Transit:

- What is the process for prioritizing placement of new bus stops? Concern over benches supplied by advertisers: they may be placed in lucrative locations, not where needed by riders.
- Some riders have noticed a pervasive odour in certain buses. Off-gassing in new vehicles?
- Missing recycling unit at Market Mall - clarify replacement/supply process.
- Update on settlement of the ATU contract?
- Sarina asks how we can disseminate this meeting information better - we seem to be encountering repeated questions. Quick summaries, as Marianne has done, are useful.
- Is there are a 'ceiling' we reach with these meetings, after which we are no longer getting new information?
- Cameron to review minutes from previous CoS meetings, find common themes, and put together a list.

12. City of Saskatoon Budget 2016 Public Information Meeting: June 15, 2015

- This is the beginning of the public consultation for 2016 budget.
- A request to speak has been submitted. Tracey will present.
- Even though it's an election year, council is still smarting from the bungling of last fall, so they might want to make some changes and improvements.
- We will take the approach to endorse specific items already in the recommendations, e.g. "Vehicle-specific selective taxes (User Pay Tax)."
- Although we are neutral in relation to either ATU or council, we can express concern that a contract settlement has not yet been reached: this is a concern for riders, to avoid future crises.

13. Transit Fleet Renewal Strategy:

- Report concludes that it has cost more in the long run to refurbish old buses.
- Council hasn't been setting objectives for how long replacement should take - they do it piecemeal.
- It has cost just as much to refurbish the old buses as it would to purchase new ones continually.
- Usually the question asked is "what is the cheapest thing we can do right now?"
- Stephan will try to arrange to be present at the Council meeting on June 22.
- A point to make: our group started because of the school route service disruption crisis, not the lockout. We could face a similar crisis again later, if replacement is not properly addressed.

14. Website Calendar Entries:

- City Council and Standing Policy Committee on Transportations are a good idea to add to the BRS website calendar.
- Stephan to add these events.
- Other important or relevant events (e.g. Growing Forward consultations) should be added as well, as they come up.

15. Guests for Upcoming Meetings:

- Other Councillors to be contacted for next meetings.
- Robert's idea: an evening "Meet with the councillor" session.

16. Facilitators for next Meeting:

- Samuel and Tracey will facilitate in July.
- There will be a checklist for facilitators to use.
- Cameron to review/update email invite list.