

**Minutes for BRS-USSU-Transit online meeting
Tuesday, 19 October 2021 @ 9:30-10:30am**

Location: Online meeting using Zoom

Present: Allison Gray, Cory Shrigley from Saskatoon Transit; Mandy Fehr (as an observer), Engagement Consultant, City of Saskatoon; and Robert Clipperton, Peter Gallén, Bob Eaton, James Wood, Sherry Tarasoff, Donna Molin, Lila Wagner from Bus Riders of Saskatoon (BRS).

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

- For this meeting: Allison was appointed chair and Peter will prepare the minutes.

USSU INITIATIVES

- 1) USSU was not present at this meeting.

TRANSIT INITIATIVES

- 2) Upcoming Access Transit Townhall Meeting:
 - a. Purpose:
 - i. The purpose of the Townhall is to give Transit and Access Transit officials feedback on the service, present problems, and find out what can be expected in the near and longer terms.
 - ii. The event will be widely publicized to Access Transit users and interested parties.
 - b. Arrangements:
 - i. It was agreed that the online Town Hall meeting will take place on Thursday, November 18 @ 7:30-9:00pm using Zoom. Link to be provided by BRS to registered participants.
 - ii. The event will be hosted by Bob Eaton of BRS and coordinated with Tracey Davis of Access Transit and Allison Gray of Saskatoon Transit.
- 3) Service Standards:
 - a. An updated version of Saskatoon Transit's Service Standards document is going to City Council in November. This document revises a previous version that consisted of independently developed and separately published sections. The new, more coherent version pays particular attention to the definitions and consistency of terminology used in the document.
 - b. BRS noted that they are looking forward to Transit's latest update to their Service Standards document and that they support Transit's efforts to provide comprehensive, clear service standards in writing for everyone to see.
 - c. BRS also pointed out that the ultimate goal of the Service Standards is of course to provide excellent, predictable public transit service in practise for the riding public.

- 4) On-demand micro-transit:
 - a. Background:
 - i. Transit noted that on-demand transit is a hot topic among transit properties across Canada and that Saskatoon Transit has participated in seminars organized by the Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) on this topic.
 - ii. There is consensus among transit properties that on-demand is a great addition to conventional fixed-route transit, but it is also clear that there are challenges in figuring out how to make on-demand truly successful.
 - b. Transit described the current operation of Saskatoon's on-demand service:
 - i. Two buses at a time (out of four dedicated to the service over two shifts) continue to run weekdays from 6:30am to 6:00pm covering the entire city.
 - ii. On-demand is the only transit service (Level 1) provided to the two emerging neighbourhoods of Brighton and Kensington. A budget request for additional funds has been made to expand the on-demand service to Aspen Ridge as well.
 - iii. Transit noted that ridership has increased since the early days and reaches 42 rides per day on the two buses.
 - iv. Capacity is now often maxing out during peak time near the end of daily service.
 - v. To deal with what is considered less than optimal use of the on-demand service, Transit is in the process of implementing service limitations using Pantonium's GRAIN¹-feature.
 - vi. BRS urged Transit to work closely with their experienced on-demand Operators to tap into their insight from daily use of the service and interaction with riders.
 - c. Transit described the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the next phase of the on-demand service:
 - i. The current contract with Pantonium for the Pilot Project is coming to an end after providing an extension to ensure continuity until the successful bidder of the RFP gets up and running in the new year.
 - ii. In essence, on-demand is a tool in the form of IT-software that provides a specialized form of transit service using regular transit vehicles and staff.
 - iii. On-demand will be purchased for a fixed duration as Software-as-a-Service.
 - iv. Five staff members at Transit (from Management, Access Transit, Operators, Customer Service) have spent considerable time developing the new RFP based on the latest developments of the rapidly evolving technology plus what they have heard at CUTA and learned from the Pilot Project in Saskatoon.
 - v. The deadline for the RFP has been extended to the end of November to provide more time for the vendors to prepare their submissions.
 - vi. Transition to the new on-demand implementation is expected to take place in January 2022.

¹ Short video from Pantonium on their GRAIN-feature: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cx78uz2Az2s>

- d. Observations regarding user feedback:
 - i. Based on a flurry of posts on their Facebook-page, BRS noted that Riders find the service important, but they also observe that the current implementation suffers from significant problems. Some of these issues are discussed below.
 - ii. One Rider described how out of his three return trips to Brighton, where on-demand is expected to provide Level 1 regular service, two of the trips required him to take a taxi or getting a ride from a Transit Supervisor for one of the legs.
 - 1. BRS noted that since on-demand is the only transit service available to Brighton (and certain other emerging neighbourhoods), this portion of the on-demand service must work in all cases. Unreasonable delays and 'no pick-ups' cannot not be tolerated.
 - iii. Although pointing out the following problem over a year ago at the pre-Pilot, there still seems to be occasions where a Rider waits for the on-demand bus on one side of the street, while the bus is travelling on the other side of the street expecting a pick-up there.
 - 1. According to Transit, the information provided by the User-app and the Operator-app are not the cause of the problem.
 - 2. However, since the root cause of these discrepancies remain unclear, there is as yet no remedy to this recurring frustration for Riders and Operators alike.
 - iv. So-called 'no-shows' are a recurring frustration for both Operators and Riders:
 - 1. 'No-show' is the colloquial term assigned to the situation where a Rider abandons his/her on-demand trip without cancelling the booking in the User-app. In addition, 'no-show, is also the official designation when the Operator cancels a trip when a passenger is *not* encountered (picked up) 'within expected time limits' at the stop displayed in the Operator-app.
 - a. When experiencing a no-show at a designated pick-up place, the Operator must manually delete the trip form the system before proceeding.
 - b. BRS noted that the 'designated time window' (15 minutes before and after the scheduled pick-up time) may stretch unreasonably for riders already waiting at the designated stop as the on-demand system constantly readjusts itself.
 - 2. For Riders on the bus, no-shows unnecessarily prolong their trip.
 - 3. For Operators, no-shows puts stresses on the system as the bus drives around the city in vain, thus also serving the real customers less well.
 - v. Riders complain that Operators seem to be cancelling legitimate trips:
 - 1. In some cases, Riders mention that they were at the designated bus stop within the acceptable time-window, but while standing there, they notice that their booking is deleted from the system.

2. In other cases, Riders mention that they were waiting for the on-demand bus on one side of the street, while the bus was actually travelling on the other side of the street. Might this be a potential reason for some of the situations currently assigned as 'no-shows'?
 - vi. In conclusion, BRS suggested that Transit might want to recruit select Riders as regular providers of informed feedback on the on-demand service.
- 5) Topics for the November meeting:
- a. Online demo of Transit's current Dashboard and a description of its planned improvement within the Research Junction project with the University.

NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, 30 November 2021 @ 9:30am via Zoom (note time-of-day)