

**Minutes for BRS-TRANSIT online meeting
Monday, 29 May 2023 @ 1:30-2:30pm**

ATTENDANCE:

- Saskatoon Transit (Transit):
 - Cory Shrigley, Customer Support & Engagement Manager
 - Allison Gray, Marketing Consultant
 - Jason Turnbull, the City's Senior Financial Business Partner for Transit
- Bus Riders of Saskatoon (BRS):
 - Robert Clipperton, Spokesperson and Steering Committee Member
 - Peter Gallén, Transit Co-ordinator and Steering Committee Member
 - Sherry Tarasoff, Steering Committee Member
 - Lila Wagner, Steering Committee Member
 - James Wood, Steering Committee Member

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

- For this meeting: Allison led the discussion and Peter prepared the minutes.

OLD BUSINESS

- 1) Postponed to next meeting

NEW BUSINESS

Jason Turnbull, the City's Senior Financial Business Partner for Transit, was the featured guest at this meeting to discuss how potential transit service improvements might come before City Councillors.

- 1) Background
 - a. As an introduction to the discussion, BRS noted they are often asked by their membership to advocate for improvements.
 - b. BRS noted that over the years they have made specific suggestions for improvement to Transit, but to their ongoing frustration none of those have yet been submitted by Transit to Council for consideration.
 - c. BRS further noted that it would help Council deliberations if such propositions for improvement were costed, explained, and prioritized by Transit in advance, so Council could initiate action if discretionary funds became available.
 - d. BRS wondered how such potential service improvements do or might get to the budget table for consideration by Council.
- 2) Service improvements:
 - a. As examples of service improvements that would require ball-park costing before being presented to Council, BRS brought up the following:
 - i. How much annual fare revenue would Transit forfeit if children 12 and under would ride for free (i.e., raise the cut-off from 5 to 13 years of age)?
 - ii. How much annual fare revenue will Transit forfeit if transit passes for middle-school and high-school Students would cost the same as (say) Senior's passes?

- iii. How much would it cost to add one hour of Sunday service to all (40?) Transit routes? And more realistically, how much would it cost to add one hour of Sunday service only to the three high-frequency corridor routes (HFCs).

3) Transit's responses:

- a. As expected, Jason noted that he did not have cost estimates for the suggestions for service improvements that BRS brought up.
- b. Current fiscal situation:
 - i. As an introduction, Jason noted that Transit is still coming out of two years of COVID, which saw a huge loss of ridership (at its worst down to 5 million from 10 million annual trips).
 - ii. Although Transit has already seen steadily increasing ridership towards a new normal, Transit is still approx. 3 million dollars short of pre-COVID fare revenue.
 - iii. Jason also noted that transit fares have remained fixed for many years because Transit and the City have emphasized ridership over the monetary stream.
- c. Effect on the Mill Rate:
 - i. Jason noted that every 1% increase in the City's property tax mill rate raises approx. 2.8 million dollars for the city coffers.
- d. Transit's Operating Budget:
 - i. On a question from BRS, Jason noted that there is no fixed, formula-based ratio between Transit's self-generated income (mainly fare revenue) and the current City subsidy (mainly property tax revenue):
 1. Consequently, there would be no automatic reduction in the City subsidy if (for example) Transit lost revenue by introducing free transit for children 12 and under.
 2. However, there would of course still be a need for Transit to figure out how to deal with that loss in total income, which would likely mean the tax base would have to compensate for the revenue reduction.
- e. Budget Deliberations:
 - i. Jason noted that the City has just introduced a significant change to the procedures for the annual Budget deliberations.
 - ii. Beginning this year, each Budget Line will now first go to the appropriate Standing Policy Committee (SPC) for initial debate before being brought to the budget deliberations of the full City Council in November:
 1. Thus Jason suggested that the best place to introduce specific proposals for consideration is at these SPC-meetings.
 2. For example, the budget lines for Transit and for Transportation are expected to go to SPC-Transportation (SPCoT); probably in the next two or three months.
 - iii. Transit's submission to the budget deliberations will be based on:
 1. Line items required for Transit's asset management, and

2. Line items required to maintain and provide transit services in accordance with Transit's current Service Standards, as approved by City Council in 2021.
- 4) Staff changes at Transit:
 - a. The new Transit Director will start on June 12.
 - b. Marketing Consultant Allison Grey, who for several years has been the contact person between BRS and Transit, will resign effective June 16 to take up a position with Transit-App.

NEXT MEETING: Monday, 26 June 2023 @ 1:30am via Zoom