

**Minutes for BRS-TRANSIT online meeting
Wednesday, 8 November 2023 @ 2:00-3:00pm**

ATTENDANCE:

- Saskatoon Transit (Transit):
 - Cory Shrigley, Customer Support & Engagement Manager
 - Amanda Lindgren, Engagement Consultant
 - Braden Cline, Johnson-Shoyama Intern
- Bus Riders of Saskatoon (BRS):
 - Robert Clipperton, Spokesperson and Steering Committee Member
 - Peter Gallén, Transit Co-ordinator and Steering Committee Member
 - James Wood, Steering Committee Member
 - Odin Swidzinski, Steering Committee Member
 - Curt McCoshen, Steering Committee Member (joined later)

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

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

OLD BUSINESS

- 1) Update on Bus Stop Signage/Notices:
 - a. Amanda noted that the pre-release Engagement Report on Bus Stop Signage/Notices will soon be provided for stakeholder review and comments.
- 2) Update on ICIP-funding for the BRT Project:
 - a. As requested by the Federal Government for approval of ICIP-funding, additional consultations with the indigenous community on the BRT project will begin soon.
- 3) Update on Confidentiality:
 - a. Cory noted that most Transit-information can be shared with BRS and wider distribution to the BRS's membership is desirable.
 - b. Case-by-case restrictions regarding more sensitive information can be discussed during the monthly meetings.
 - c. Amanda will provide the Confidentiality Agreement that the Engagement Team has developed for members of their focus groups.

NEW BUSINESS

- 4) Transit Director resigns:
 - a. After 4 months on the job, the City has “mutually parted ways” with Transit Director Jim Puffalt. The City's General Manager of Transportation & Construction, Terry Schmidt, is Acting Transit Director until a new permanent Transit Director is appointed – most likely very soon.
- 5) Potential Bus Shortage this winter:
 - a. Fleet size:

- i. As noted in the report to SPCoT in November, the available (fixed-route) fleet has shrunk from 140 buses in 2019, when the last new bus was acquired, to only 126 buses now in 2023. Further note that an additional 3 buses have clocked over one million kilometers, where normal retirement should occur around 800,000 kilometers, and additional buses are already over-age, so the situation is only getting worse.
 - ii. Two new 40-foot electric buses are expected to be delivered in 2024-Q1 and eight conventional 40-foot diesel buses are expected in 2024-Q4.
 - iii. Transit is currently awaiting approval by the Federal and Provincial governments for approval of the purchase of additional new buses. Approval has been promised 'any day now', but Transit noted that unless actual approval is received within the next few weeks, actual bus deliveries in 2025 will *not* be possible due to the long delivery times.
 - iv. The unfortunate fact remains that the available fleet will remain very tight for the foreseeable future until new buses can be acquired and put into service.
 - b. Book-out¹:
 - i. With recently implemented improved maintenance procedures, Transit has been able to get more buses on the road for daily service.
 - ii. Through service reductions or readjustments on various routes, Transit reduced the morning/afternoon peak book-outs from 102/96 buses in 2019 to a low of 79/84 buses in 2021.
 - iii. Although the ridership is now continuously increasing, Transit can currently achieve a book-out of only 84 buses for both the morning and afternoon peaks.
 - c. Information to Riders:
 - i. Transit now has better communications systems in place to issue consistent Messages over multiple platforms, such as apps, website & social media.
 - ii. If a potential shortage can be detected the previous evening, a Warning may go out. More up-to-date information and Alerts will then be issued closer to the actual disruption.
- 6) Systemic Service Issues:
 - a. Setting the scene:
 - i. In a service as complex as transit, there are numerous 'one-off' (occasional) instances where buses break down or arrive late and transfers are missed, etc.
 - ii. The discussion at this meeting was *not* concerned with such occasional instances. Instead this discussion focussed on a couple of intermittent but regularly occurring situations that should be deemed 'systemic':
 - 1. Systemic issues are for example those where a daily run is regularly arriving late because the schedule is too tight, or where buses are regularly overfull and leaving riders waiting too long for their ride.

¹ Definition of Book-out: "The total number of buses sent out for service within a specific period of time" (e.g., Transit has a book-out of 84 buses in the morning, which would be described as the "morning book-out").

- iii. It was further noted that transit should be regarded an 'essential service':
 - 1. It was also noted that any Essential City Service needs to be Robust, Reliable and Predictable to its users and clients.
- b. School-starts in September:
 - i. It was agreed that school-starts in September are indeed a 'systemic' issue.
 - ii. The first day/week of school is typically chaotic both for Transit and for Riders:
 - 1. Ridership on the first day escalates enormously from the quieter summer months.
 - 2. Every year, Transit attempts to predict the locations and routes of the additional demand, but the actual ridership distribution proves to be largely unpredictable.
 - 3. As a result, overfull buses occur on many routes throughout the city, while Transit keeps redistributing the available buses to better meet the actual demand.
 - 4. Subsequent experience has been that the distribution of the ridership tends to even out over the next few days or weeks; although a lingering suspicion remains that ridership is also lost by having Riders revert to other modes of transportation to get to school and home on time.
 - iii. Example:
 - 1. Route #83, which runs on a 30-minute schedule between Centre Mall Terminal and Stonebridge past Walter Murray and Holy Cross high-schools:
 - a. Since enrolment in these two high-schools has gone up by 300 students since last year, an additional bus at school-open/close would indeed be required due to the long wait for the next bus.
 - b. However, due to the current shortage of buses, Transit is unable at this time to put an additional bus in service on this route.
 - c. Transit noted that they are only short of buses – Transit is *not* short of funds or operators to provide additional service.
 - iv. Remedies:
 - 1. The only permanent remedy is to purchase more buses, but delivery times are long, so this may take a few years in practise.
 - 2. In addition – for next year's school start in September – Transit has already begun more detailed consultations with school-board Superintendents to predict and obtain up-to-date school enrolments and with individual high-school Principals to potentially adjust their daily start-and-end-times of the school day.
- c. First Snow-fall in the Autumn:
 - i. It was agreed that the first snow-fall in the autumn is indeed a 'systemic' issue.
 - ii. The first snow-fall is typically chaotic throughout the city:
 - 1. The first snow-fall every year is another example of a 'systemic' issue.
 - 2. The situation on the streets:

- a. Motorists are poorly prepared for winter-driving conditions.
 - b. Numerous collisions occur every year.
 - c. Vehicles stuck in snow or moving slowly on icy roads get in the way of other traffic – including transit.
 - d. Transit service itself also seems to be unreliable on this day.
 3. Expectations: BRS suggested that Transit should become the preferred mode of transportation this day for most citizens – both regular transit riders, but also new riders that typically bike or commute by private vehicle.
 4. Remedies: BRS suggested that for transit to be a good option in practise, Transit would have to raise-the-bar substantially both regarding Capacity and service Reliability that they provide that day.
 - d. Transfer difficulties:
 - i. BRS informed Transit that a member had complained about transfer difficulties at the 'Jysk' bus stop from inbound Route #50/55 to inbound Route #8:
 1. The available transfer window is very tight, so smooth transfers sometimes occur but are often missed.
 2. The transfer is less problematic when Route 8 is running on a 10-minute schedule, but transfers are quite problematic on evenings, when Route #8 runs on 30-minute schedule, and on week-ends, when Route #8 runs on 60-minute schedule.
 3. Transit promised to investigate and look for remedies.
 - e. Late Arrivals:
 - i. BRS informed Transit that a member had complained about Route #9 "always being late":
 1. Transit noted that Route #9 crosses railway tracks and is subject twice daily to interruptions by trains, which indeed cause regular delays.
 2. Without detailed specifics for particular delays, Transit will *not* be able to determine if other reasons were present at the rider's trips.
- 7) Miscellaneous issues:
- a. Seat behind Operator:
 - i. The bench immediately behind the Operator is *not* standard, factory-installed seats; these seats were installed post-purchase many years ago by Transit.
 - ii. During Covid, these seats were cordoned off with a tape-barrier to provide additional protection for the Operator. Now they remain cordoned off to provide additional driver safety.
 - iii. SGI has expressed some concerns about the Rider safety in these seats.
 - iv. The question arises what should happen next. BRS suggested that:
 1. Either the bench should be opened up to Riders,
 2. Or the bench should be removed.
 3. If removed, the available space should be utilized appropriately perhaps by installing a basket for grocery bags when paying the fare.

4. In any case, brackets should remain in place so that the benches could be re-installed, if warranted.
- v. Transit will report this information to its Operations Team for review.
- b. Service disruption PSAs from other city departments:
 - i. BRS used a recent Public Service Announcement (PSA) from a City department other than Transit that informed motorists about upcoming traffic detours as an example of inadequate information to transit riders.
 - ii. Quotes from the PSA (with my italics/underlining for emphasis):
 1. Broadway Avenue will be closed for service connections on November 2, starting at 7:00 a.m.
 - a. Detours will be in place guiding motorists around the work zone.
 - b. *Saskatoon Transit may be affected by these detours.*
 - iii. BRS noted that Motorists are singled out and assured of easy passage in this PSA, while the agency issuing the PSA seems *not* to have bothered finding out if any Bus-routes actually go down this stretch of road. That arduous task is left entirely to each transit Rider to figure out.
 - iv. At a minimum, BRS suggested that any potentially affected bus routes should at least be listed in the PSA, so that affected Riders might be forewarned, while more detailed subsequent information and Alerts are properly left for Transit.
- c. Shelter repairs:
 - i. BRS informed Transit that complaints have surfaced on their FB-page about broken glass panels on bus stop Shelters being unresolved for weeks.
 - ii. Transit noted that they have an agreement with one of their advertising firms, *Pattison Outdoor Advertising*, where:
 1. *Pattison* maintains some 400 Bus Stops outside the Downtown area that are equipped with Shelters. This includes:
 - a. Removing graffiti.
 - b. Sweeping up glass shards immediately, and replacing broken glass panels soon thereafter, while also taking 'before-and-after' photographs.
 - c. Keeping the Shelters clean of snow & debris and removing clothing and personal belongings.
 2. *Pattison* also provides the advertising in and on the buses.
 - iii. In general, Transit has been pleased with *Pattison's* timely response:
 1. Transit also noted that particular Shelters get vandalized time-and-time again, so when Riders keep seeing broken panels, these panels may already have been replaced several times.
 2. Improved reporting procedures by Transit Operators may be beneficial.
 - iv. As an aside, Transit's other advertising agency, *Creative Outdoors Advertising*, installs the Benches that are equipped with garbage & recycling receptacles:
 1. These Benches are typically installed at bus stops without Shelters.
 2. *Creative* handles the collection of the recyclables & garbage.

- d. Confusion regarding Feedback from Riders:
 - i. A participant at the meeting noted that he had reported a vandalized shelter using the feedback-button within *Transit*-app and had received no response:
 - 1. The meeting noted that Riders need to make clear distinctions regarding the appropriate target of their question or complaint: does the Rider's feedback concern *Saskatoon Transit*, or should it (less likely) be addressed to *Transit*-app (or even *TGo*-app²).
 - 2. Although they are distinct entities, it was noted that confusion may arise because both *Transit*-app and *Saskatoon Transit* are often called 'Transit' in common parlance.
 - 3. Feedback to *Saskatoon Transit* should always take place using the official Feedback-FORM³ available from Saskatoon Transit's website and social media. This is the place to ask questions about bus tickets (in the apps or otherwise), report problems with bus schedules or buses not showing up (in the apps or otherwise), and make complaints about vandalized shelters, lack of snow clearing at bus stops, etc.
 - 4. In contrast, feedback concerning *Transit*-app (or *TGo*-app) should always take place using the feedback-button within the respective app. This feedback, which never reaches *Saskatoon Transit*, should be restricted to technical/feature-related problems within the app itself.

NEXT MEETING: Monday, 11 December 2023 @ 1:30pm, probably via Zoom.

² Saskatoon Transit uses two different apps, *Transit*-app and *TGo*-app, for mobile ticketing and other functions useful to Riders; see: <https://transit.saskatoon.ca/fares-passes/mobile-ticketing>

³ Saskatoon Transit's Feedback-FORM: <https://transit.saskatoon.ca/customer-services/customer-feedback>