

**Minutes for BRS-TRANSIT online meeting via Zoom  
Monday, 15 April 2024 @ 1:30-2:43pm**

**ATTENDANCE:**

- Saskatoon Transit (Transit):
  - Cory Shrigley, Customer Service & Engagement Manager
  - Braden Cline, Johnson-Shoyama Executive Intern
- Engagement Team:
  - Thomas Kinge, Engagement Consultant
- Bus Riders of Saskatoon (BRS):
  - Robert Clipperton, Spokesperson and Steering Committee Member
  - Peter Gallén, Transit Co-ordinator and Steering Committee Member
  - Odin Swidzinski, Steering Committee Member
  - Curt McCoshen, Steering Committee Member
  - Lila Wagner, Steering Committee Member
  - Dave Cunningham, Member

**ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES**

- For this online meeting, Robert led the discussion and Peter prepared the minutes.

**OLD BUSINESS**

- 1) Free Child Fare Project:
  - a. Thomas noted that the engagements have now closed and the engagement report is being written for presentation to the Governance & Priorities Committee (GPC) in June.
  - b. Thomas provided a glimpse of the statistics gathered from the engagement sessions. For example, 1,375 responses were obtained from the public survey, and 19 responses received from the targeted survey sent out to organizations.
  - c. Thomas requested a short written summary on BRS's position on the Free Child Fare initiative. Robert promised to provide it that same afternoon.
  - d. Observations:
    - i. Transit noted that the program will strike a balance between parent/child-riders *not* wanting barriers and operator safety.
    - ii. Some kind of ID-card may be required by children wanting to ride for free without adult accompaniment.
    - iii. Transit further noted that fare payments need to be normalized again.
    - iv. BRS emphasized that a clear and consistent enforcement policy needs to be in place for ALL riders.

**NEW BUSINESS**

- 2) Transit operations during Severe Winter Conditions:
  - a. Introduction:

- i. Since Operations Manager Brady Waldenberg was unable to attend the meeting, Cory acknowledged Brady's written notes for his presentation.
- b. *SNOW EVENTS* considered at this meeting:
  - i. November 2020: 34 cm of snow, which triggered the development of a Roadways Emergency Response Plan.
  - ii. 28 December 2022: First ever activation of the Roadways Emergency Response Plan.
  - iii. 8 January 2024: 15 cm of snow plus icy conditions. The Extreme Cold Weather Emergency Response Plan (ECWERP) was activated from January 9 – 14.
  - iv. 5 February 2024: Icy conditions after snow and freezing drizzle over the weekend. The City declared the third snow event of the season.
  - v. 26 February 2024: 18 cm of snow plus heavy drifting. The City declared the fourth snow event of the season.
  - vi. 2-4 March 2024: More than 25 cm and up to 40 cm of snow. Both the *Roadways Emergency Response Plan* and the *Emergency Operations Centre* were activated.
- c. General ADVICE TO RIDERS for snow/ice events:
  - i. Note: At the severe snow event in March 2024, Saskatoon Transit published a Public Service Announcement (PSA; TC24-4926), which for the first time provided a simple Guide to Riders regarding three snow event scenarios:
    - 1. Five (5) centimetres of snow: Expect delays. Service may be delayed in some areas of the city.
    - 2. Five (5) to fifteen (15) centimetres of snow: Expect delays and potential frequency disruptions. There will likely be delays on many routes, particularly during peak times, such as rush hour.
    - 3. Blizzard, Ice Storm, more than 15 centimetres of snow: Expect delays and frequency disruptions. There will be frequency reductions and direct route service from Downtown to major Terminals will go into effect.
    - 4. As conditions improve updates will be issued on Transit Twitter, Transit's website and the (third-party) Transit app.
  - ii. BRS suggested that this useful information – as well as other pertinent information and instructions regarding Transit services during severe as well as normal winter conditions – should be easily available on Transit's website.
- d. Prioritisation of snow-clearing efforts of STREETS and SIDEWALKS:
  - i. The snow/ice-clearing contracts for City sidewalks are managed through the City's *Municipal Engineering Services* (MES) department.
  - ii. The street network is managed by Roadways:
    - 1. The City has classified all streets into *Priorities 1, 2 & 3 (followed by 'local streets' & 'industrial areas' as well as 'cycling infrastructure' & 'pedestrian pathways')*.

2. Streets in each category are colour-coded on the *Priority Street Snow Grading Map*<sup>1</sup>, where the progress in snow-clearing can be followed.
  3. Note: Transit Management provides input to Roadways regarding these *Priority*-designations, but there are many conflicting needs that require compromises *not* always to Transit's liking.
- iii. After a severe blizzard in November 2020, City Administration was instructed to develop a *Roadways Emergency Response Plan* (RERP), which was approved by City Council in 2021:
1. When deemed necessary, City Administration can now declare a 'Snow Event', where pre-determined actions in a number of city departments – including Saskatoon Transit – go into effect in accordance with the *Roadways Emergency Response Plan*<sup>2</sup> (RERP); highlights shown below. Note: Transit Management provides input into RERP.
  2. In addition, the City's *Extreme Cold Weather Emergency Response Plan*<sup>3</sup> (ECWERP) can also be activated as required.
  3. In severe cases, the *Emergency Operations Centre* (EOC), which comprises a group of hands-on staff put together by the City's *Emergency Management Organization* (EMO), is also activated.
- iv. In accordance with current stipulations in the *Roadways Emergency Response Plan* (see Appendix-1 below), one of the priorities is to 'mobilize Saskatoon Transit to operate along key routes', while the City's snow-clearing efforts have been divided into 'four Phases':
1. Phase-1:
    - a. Timing: First 12-24 hours.
    - b. Action: Grading and plowing Priority-1 streets; access to emergency facilities; access to critical City services.
  2. Phase-2:
    - a. Timing: 36 hours.
    - b. Action: Grading major Saskatoon Transit routes including some Priority-2 streets.
  3. Phase-3:
    - a. Timing: 96 hours.
    - b. Action: Grading remaining Priority-2 and Priority-3 streets (including school zones).

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<sup>1</sup> *Priority Street Snow Grading Map*: <https://apps4.saskatoon.ca/app/aSnowProgram/>

<sup>2</sup> *Roadways Emergency Response Plan* website: <https://www.saskatoon.ca/moving-around/driving-roadways/winter-road-maintenance/roadways-emergency-response-plan>

<sup>3</sup> *Extreme Cold Weather Emergency Response Plan* website: <https://www.saskatoon.ca/services-residents/fire-emergency/emergency-management/extreme-cold-weather-emergency-response-plan>

4. Phase-4:
  - a. Timing: 10 days.
  - b. Action: Grading local streets (7 days) and industrial areas (3 days); clearing major pedestrian pathways and cycling infrastructure.
- e. Transit's own snow-clearing CONTRACTS:
  - i. Cory noted that major improvements to snow/ice-clearing contracts at transit Terminals and bus Stops have been implemented during the 2023/2024 snow season and others will be implemented for the next winter season. For example:
    1. Transit is revisiting its contracts for 2024/2025 that include shelters, snow clearing and maintenance.
    2. The Downtown Terminal has already been cleared more consistently this past winter due to a revised contract.
    3. Transit is also working on updating its contracts with the private Malls. Hopefully there can also be improvements to these service levels as well in the next season.
  - ii. Cory also noted that while snow-clearing of the street network belongs to other contracts, Transit would like the ability to initiate its own salting/sanding of particularly slippery hills (e.g., at Confederation Mall) and street intersections (e.g., Louise & 8<sup>th</sup> Street) that are known to pose difficulties for the buses.
- f. Effect on BUS ROUTES:
  - i. *Not* all bus routes are yet designated to Transit's preferences:
    1. Consequently, snow clearing of many bus routes – especially in the newer neighborhoods – remains poor. For example, transit service in the March 2024 storm to Rosewood was impeded longer than desired, while the needs of On-Demand to Brighton have *not* been addressed.
    2. Transit would like their High-Frequency routes to be Priority-1.
    3. Transit would like all neighborhood routes to be Priority-2 or 3.
  - ii. Turn-around-loops at route end-points:
    1. During some past snow events, road-clearing crews had *not* been instructed where and how to implement turn-around-loops for the buses at route end-points. In the latest snow events, such instructions have been issued with much better results.
    2. Since many transit Terminals are located at privately owned shopping Malls, negotiations regarding who is responsible for snow-clearing of the Terminals have been concluded with some, while others continue to be reviewed.
    3. Note: In severe snow events, certain Terminals need to be by-passed altogether due to access difficulties – that is until the snow has been cleared:
      - a. In these cases, BRS suggested that Transit might want to consider (well in advance) creating carefully designed 'Direct

Routes' (presumably on Priority-1 streets) with their own distinct route numbers, route maps, select stops, (perhaps multiple) turn-around-points, and even attempted frequencies.

- b. BRS also suggested that through a simple Alert, such a pre-defined Route could be invoked (and subsequently withdrawn) precisely when required.
- g. MESSAGING to private vehicle Drivers & transit Riders:
  - i. In the March 2024 storm, the general messaging from the City (PSA TC24-4934) was: "Residents remain encouraged to stay home if possible, to leave space for City and contractor crews to do their work and assist emergency services."
    1. BRS noted that this message seemed to be directed mainly to 'drivers' (of private vehicles), since people 'walking or taking transit' would *not* 'be in the way of contractor crews doing their work'.
    2. Therefore, BRS suggested that the City (through Saskatoon Transit) may actually want to promote Transit to Drivers:
      - a. A snow event, where Drivers have difficulty using their own vehicles, would be an excellent opportunity for Transit to get new Riders. These new riders would become familiar with taking transit and thus become permanent customers.
      - b. BRS also suggested that an added incentive to all citizens to take transit in a severe snow event could be provided by offering free fares at (select) events, which would eliminate the need for potential new riders to obtain tickets and deal with fares. Information hand-outs in buses could also be provided on how to become repeat, paying, transit customers.
  - h. Specific impacts on TRANSIT from snow/ice events:
    - i. Information to Transit Staff:
      1. Since general Public Service Announcements (PSA) sometimes ask 'citizens to stay home' during a severe snow event, Transit needed to implement their own dedicated information channels and instructions to all their staff, so that everyone knew precisely when to make a serious effort to show up for work in person, when to work from home, and when to remain on stand-by.
    - ii. *Civic Operations Centre (COC)*:
      1. *No* transit services at all can run if Operators & Mechanics and other key staff cannot get to the 'bus barns' at the COC from early in the morning to late at night; or if the Buses cannot get from the COC to their routes.
      2. During some past storms, the COC and bus route #15 had *not* yet been assigned high enough status on the Priority-list, but it is now designated as a priority street.

- iii. *Customer Service Centre* at the Downtown Terminal:
  1. To make it possible for *Customer Service Centre* staff to work from home, each staff person has been equipped with their own laptop computer, which facilitates both voice and text communication from home with Transit's customers.
  2. Staff at the Downtown Terminal have experienced parking problems during snow events, which required a pre-defined resolution:
    - a. BRS suggested that as many Transit Staff as possible should be encouraged/induced to take transit, which would reduce the need for parking (both downtown and elsewhere).
- iv. Ridership:
  1. BRS wondered whether Transit had experienced an increase in ridership during (some) snow events? Cory noted that the statistics had *not* yet been analyzed, but acknowledged that some buses had been quite full.
  2. BRS encouraged Transit to become fully prepared to handle substantial increases in ridership due to snow events in the future.
- i. Operations Manager Brady Waldenberg's verbatim NOTES for the major *Snow Event* on March 2-4, 2024:
  - i. March 2-3 (Saturday/Sunday):
    - Transit routes experienced reduced service. However, we are happy to report that no routes had to be cut entirely.
    - Despite the ongoing impacts on Transit services, Transit was able to maintain full service for the afternoon with no delays exceeding 15 minutes.
    - Our operators communicated disruptions as they navigated accessible streets.
    - Sunday Service helped as it was reduced service.
    - For Monday service, we prepared for 15 extra operators.
  - ii. March 4 (Monday):
    - Impacts on routes varied due to lack of staff (many snowed in, however planning ahead and having 15 extra staff helped).
    - Although many AM routes were impacted, we were still able to maintain hourly service.
    - We had Supervisors working OT on Sunday (12–16-hour days for some).
    - Transit planned to schedule 20 extra operators (if needed) for Tuesday morning.
    - It helped that school was cancelled, and students were not relying on our school extra service.
  - iii. Accomplishments:
    - Service Warnings were posted the night before, by 8:30 p.m.
    - Service Alerts were prepared and out by 6:30 a.m. day of.

- Fleet and Maintenance did a great job with maintaining the fleet.
  - Ongoing meetings with EMO, ensuring everyone was working collaboratively.
  - Roadways cleared the snow quite fast and Transit somewhat rode their coat tails. The more roads they cleared, the more accessible routes became.”
- 2) Brief discussion of narrow streets in new neighbourhoods that are poorly suited for transit:
- a. BRS brought up the issue of very narrow streets in Aspen Ridge & Brighton:
    - i. Transit noted that many streets have no place to store snow.
    - ii. Transit also noted that the On-Demand buses had difficulty turning corners due to too small turning radiuses.
  - b. BRS wondered why Transit had approved such narrow streets in the first place when requested to provide input on the original street design:
    - i. Transit noted that they do have an opportunity to see neighborhood designs pre-construction but don't have control over final design.
  - c. BRS suggested that Transit needs to take a more active role within City Administration in preventing these kinds of design blunders affecting transit from being perpetuated:
    - i. BRS emphasized that *not* just the transit suitability of streets within a future neighbourhood but also the transit connectivity to existing neighbourhoods plus future connectivity towards the next outward ring of new neighbourhoods around the city need to be addressed early on in the planning and approval of new neighbourhoods.
- 3) Other Issues:
- a. Concerns regarding an incident:
    - i. BRS informed Transit about a Detour Notice posted with less than 24 hours advance notice. As a result, a transit Rider who encountered the unexpected notice at their regular bus stop and was thus forced to walk towards the next stop was *not* picked up by the passing bus despite waving frantically from the sidewalk.
    - ii. Besides the disappointing transit service for this particular rider, BRS expressed concern that this occurred despite Transit having its *Safe Bus* initiative, where any citizen should be able to flag down a bus for emergency assistance.
    - iii. Transit noted that stopping the bus between stops is left to the discretion of the Operators. Transit stated that an Operator can stop midway between stops on a street; however, they would only do so when it is safe. There are times when it is *not* safe to stop the bus when a person is flagging a bus in an emergency.
  - b. Continuing problems with Transit's *Open Data* feed:
    - i. Transit noted that their IT-team continues to be baffled by the errors their *Open Data* feed creates in Transit-app. Efforts continue to rectify the problem.

**NEXT MEETING:** Monday, 13 May 2024 @ 1:30pm (online by Zoom).

Appendix-1: Summary of the *Roadways Emergency Response Plan*

Appendix 1

# Roadways Emergency Response Plan

*Summary of the City of Saskatoon's approved Roadways plan for responding to a major snowstorm.*

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of the emergency response plan is to guide the Roadways team through a phased approach in a major snowstorm to ensure public safety and restore mobility on Saskatoon streets and sidewalks.

**RESPONSE PLAN**

**The Roadways Emergency Response plan will be activated immediately when:**

1. Snow accumulation is greater than 25 cm and/or combination of snow, freezing rain and wind; and
2. Mobility is reduced to the point that light vehicles cannot travel on city streets; mobility across the city is severely impacted, and the regular winter maintenance level of service applicable to typical winter snow events cannot be met.

**PRIORITIES**

1. Reduce risk of serious collisions on high-speed and high-traffic streets and bridges.
2. Provide critical services and access to emergency facilities and City services.
3. Mobilize Saskatoon Transit to operate along key routes.
4. Restore mobility on lower traffic streets.
5. Restore parking availability and improvement of sight line

**TIMELINE**

Phase	Timing*	Action
1	<i>First 12-24 Hours</i>	Grading and plowing Priority 1 streets, access to emergency facilities, access to critical City services
2	<i>36 hours</i>	Grading major Saskatoon Transit routes including some Priority 2 streets
3	<i>96 hours</i>	Grading remaining Priority 2, and Priority 3 streets (includes school zones)
4	<i>10 days</i>	Grading local streets (7 days) and industrial areas (3 days); clearing major pedestrian pathways and cycling infrastructure
5	<i>8 weeks</i>	Removing stored snow for parking availability and improvement of sight lines city-wide

\*From end of snowfall.

**Priority 1** streets are freeways, major arterials and bridges.

**Priority 2** streets are arterials with double-lanes, like Clarence Ave, McKercher Dr and Millar Ave; and Saskatoon Transit routes.

**Priority 3** streets are collector streets, remainder of Business Improvement District streets and school zones. These streets take you through your neighbourhood, like Louise Ave, Howell Ave and Main St.

saskatoon.ca/snow