

Meeting minutes for the June 17th, 2024 BRS-Transit Meeting at 1:30 pm

Attendance:

- BRS:
 - o Odin Swidzinski, Transit Coordinator
 - o Robert Clipperton, Member
 - o Peter Gallen, Member
 - o Curt McCoshen, Member
- Transit:
 - o Cory Shrigley, Customer Service & Engagement Manager
 - o Braden Cline, Johnson-Shoyama Executive Intern

Regrets: Lila Wagner

Administrative issues:

For this meeting, Curt chaired the meeting and Odin prepared the minutes.

Old business:

- College Drive construction:
 - o Delays continue on College Drive, doesn't seem to be any effort by the city to provide a queue-jump lane for buses
 - o A BRS member has written up a proposal for a pilot project for a queue-jump lane - to be sent to Transit so it can be sent to Terry Schmidt, General Manager, Construction and Transportation
 - Transit says that queue jumps are a good idea in theory, but in practice, it would be a lot of work: expresses doubts that it is viable because of logistics and pushback
 - Moving target because the detours change every two weeks, so it is unclear if Transit can make a case that it can help them
 - Is there an appetite for this scheme?
 - Transit says that it is not a critical item: some buses are delayed but they normally get back on schedule: not a lot of complaints from customers
 - Traffic volumes will increase in September so that would become critical
 - Agreement to ship the request off to Transit, who would send it to Terry Schmidt
 - Phasing of construction, keeping track of the project is likely the responsibility of Rob Dudiak who oversees the project
 - How does the email go forward?
 - Meeting agenda for Rob Dudiak could go well, and the suggestion of a queue-jump lane could be brought forward to

him – this would lose two whole months (nothing in summer) however

- Two conversations needed:
 - Long-term strategy with Rob Dudiak
 - Another with Terry Schmidt
- ETA for a response by Transit: this week

New business:

- Safety on buses
 - Transit has some speaking notes from the press conference on June 13th
 - Fare evasion
 - Transit says that fare evasion comes from two different demographics
 - Most fare evasion comes from people who legitimately can't pay
 - Policy dates back to COVID and extreme weather policies to let people on regardless of their ability to pay
 - Some of the fare evasion stems from people causing problems
 - In mornings, most high schoolers pay with a legitimate pass, but in the afternoon, they don't pay
 - Not all fare evaders on buses cause problems but they get lumped together with those that cause problems
 - Are there people who cause problems on a day-to-day basis that can be excluded from the bus for a period of time?
 - In the news release, Transit says that they are developing a process to ban a problem customer from Transit
 - Administration is developing policies to counter these problems, including banning problem customers from civic facilities including buses
 - Does Transit have a good idea as to how many people cause problems?
 - Transit says between 10-100 people cause problems on buses, with the actual number closer to the lower end of that scale
 - Front-line employee safety:
 - ATU has expressed concerns that management is not taking safety on buses seriously, but Transit says that it is making efforts to prioritize safety of front-line employees
 - Cameras are in place, more supervisors and commissionaires are present, and six community support officers will soon be in place
 - Initiative to install cameras at the downtown and Confederation terminals

- Transit has a document on this that is being circulating internally to let the drivers know that they care about workplace safety
- Issue larger than Transit, it affects the whole community
- Cameras, staff and coordination:
 - Types of incidents:
 - Mild incidents: people shout and verbally abuse the driver
 - Moderate incidents: Spitting
 - Severe incidents: Knives et cetera
 - Better reporting to police, CSOs run by fire department, Transit's internal policies and videos
 - Is there a staff member in charge of handling these things so that everyone in Transit/the city gets the information that they need?
 - Are they identifying individuals?
 - Transit has some staff that does this: 30% of their time is spent watching video
 - Demand will continue, might become a full-time job
 - Are the videos being monitored by people or by artificial intelligence?
 - Transit says it's currently monitored by people, but they are open to having AI monitor them at some point down the line
 - Transit to streamline communication with police and data collection
 - Transit receiving more requests by police for video footage
 - Transit to seek more efficiencies in data collection
- Customer safety marketing campaigning
 - "See something, say something" campaign and reducing barriers for customer safety
 - Transit notes that there is de-escalation training for frontline workers, but suggests that BRS should highlight these points on the customer-side
 - Think about de-escalation, or see something say something, more conversation needed about that
 - Information campaign about how people should behave in public spaces announced at the press conference
 - Stopping knife attacks and swarming attacks, how to stop highest priority first then tackle things like people putting up feet on seats

- Transit response is that this is not isolated to being a transit problem but systemic issues are across the city, not only on transit buses.
- Broken windows theory? Look after the small things and then the big things won't happen.
- Customer Conduct policy to be rolled out in September
 - Will be applicable to all civic services, not just Transit
 - Transit says that the banning policy can be put in place once expectations about customer conduct are set
 - A BRS member notes that people are usually well behaved, and they do not suddenly go from lipping off to swarming/knives
- A BRS member raises the difference between "comfort v. scared" on buses
 - Fights tend to be impulsive behavior
 - Some incidents when someone got off the bus
 - People are not used to the quantity of people who use the bus, and Saskatonians are not used to crowded buses
- Transit is communicating with various agencies to help deal with these issues
- Transit notes that having "more eyes on the street," like a street fair downtown, makes things safer compared to when downtown is completely deserted (e.g. downtown terminal at 9 pm)
- Mechanisms for operators and the general public to report incidents
- Norms of Transit: in cities like Toronto, Barcelona or Naples, you are shoulder-to-shoulder on their public transit systems
 - Buses in Saskatoon are not full by these standards, especially high school routes
 - How do we change the messaging about etiquette on crowded buses so that people are not left behind when they don't have to be?
- Are all of the people who do the knifings/swarmings known to the police?
 - Transit says police have requested video for these incidents and are active in identifying perpetrators
 - Sometimes, the footage is for incidents that took place on the bus, sometimes it is not
- Room for immediate action?
 - Supervisors and managers were on the buses in June

- Transit reports that when supervisors are riding the buses, it goes a long way with everybody in improving perceptions of safety
 - Doesn't eliminate fare evasion, but drivers appreciate the presence of supervisors and managers
- How many buses are assigned to On-Demand routes? Do they have a major impact on the rest of the system?
 - For the last year and a half, there were only two buses on the On-Demand services
 - Eliminating On-Demand will not improve Sunday service
 - Transit needs 3 or 4 buses to increase frequency from 40 to 30 minutes on the 40s, but they currently don't have that
 - Transit reports that there are 30 buses on Sunday across the entire system
 - 30 minute service on more critical/high-demand routes
- Bus capacity issues
 - Administration is preparing a report on how other cities handle overcapacity/policy
 - Mayor asked if Transit has a way to monitor bus route capacity
 - Transit to work on that report
 - Bus ratio has not changed from last year:
 - An increase from 84 buses to 85 or 86 buses at peak hours
 - Buses will still be crowded in September
 - Electric buses are here, not on the road because they are setting up infrastructure like charging stations and fare boxes
 - Will begin service in July, not assigned to a specific route, but will be scattered
 - Ten diesel buses are scheduled to arrive this year

Next meeting will be on July 22nd @ 1:30 pm on Zoom