

Meeting minutes for the September 23rd, 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
 - o James Wood, Member
- Transit:
 - o Filip Majcherkiewicz, Transit Planning Manager
 - o Cory Shrigley, Customer Service & Engagement Manager
 - o Seth Akande, Johnson-Shoyama Executive Intern
 - o Taha Najam, Transit Planning Engineer
- City of Saskatoon:
 - o Rob Dudiak, BRT Project Manager

Regrets: Bob Eaton, Allison Gray, Lila Wagner

Administrative issues:

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

Old business:

- The planning manager and the new Johnson-Shoyama executive intern were introduced to BRS
- Vision for the route network
 - o The city is undertaking a comprehensive bus network redesign, and will be engaging in a “reset”
 - o Conventional bus service will continue to operate along major arteries once BRT has been rolled out
 - o Transit is developing a conceptual route plan for the conventional network, but they will make sure most people will still have access to a nearby bus stop
 - Some transit corridors may need “local routes” to serve stops that the BRT does not, but other transit corridors can be best covered with BRT alone
 - o A BRS member asked to have a meeting so that BRS may discuss suggestions and ideas about the design principles of the route network behind a revamped route map before consultations begin
 - The Planning Manager expresses an interest in having a separate meeting with BRS to discuss the design principles of the route network before a full route network map is made

- The date of the meeting between BRS and the Planning Manager will be facilitated with the Customer Service and Engagement Manager
- Is Transit still planning on having seven day service once BRT goes online?
 - The Planning Manager said that they are aiming for seven-day service on the BRT network, but it depends on the budget that is allocated to Transit
- Will the Blue Line be affected by the relocation of the Saskatchewan Polytechnic?
 - Transit said that the routing of the Blue Line will be unaffected by the relocation of Saskatchewan Polytechnic to the University of Saskatchewan campus as the routing has already been approved by City Council, and because the route is supposed to serve several neighbourhoods north of the current Saskatchewan Polytechnic
- Transit reported that the conventional route network's design will be reinitiated in 2025, and noted that while they will take all the previous iterations into account, there has been a long enough pause since 2020 that there is a need for a rethink: new design principles and good conversation with the public
- Are there any consultants brought in?
 - Transit has no immediate plans for hiring consultants for the project, and it will largely be an in-house project, but they may look into hiring consultants to help advise them as needed
 - A BRS member asked why Transit is doing an in-house approach rather than hiring consultants
 - Transit said in house experts who are responsible for the long-term success of the network are more likely to be held accountable than consultants who, although bringing in a lot of analytical firepower, pack up their bags at the end of their contract
- Who will be in charge of the redesign of the route network?
 - The Planning Manager and Planning team will be in charge of the redesign of the route network
- What are the plans for public engagement in the redesign of the route network?
 - Transit is working through building a timeline back from opening day, which would include dates on when key decisions are made, and include high-level design considerations
- A BRS member noted that BRS has been asking these questions because if it understands why Transit is taking a certain direction or making a certain decision, then if people have questions and comments about it,

BRS can explain to people why Transit made the decisions that it has made, and advocate for Transit riders if need be

- Fleet renewal vs. fleet enlargement:
 - Transit said that the current fleet size and the book-out rate for Saskatoon Transit does not align with industry standards, and that the numbers of buses that were presented at the SPCOT meeting by the Transit Director are accurate
 - Transit stated they need a larger fleet to maintain transit service, and the numbers of buses that they need will be adjusted as they flesh out the future redesigned conventional network and what type of frequency is envisaged for both it and the BRT system
 - As fleet age goes down to industry standards (from the current 15 years to 7.5 years), the fleet renewal strategy for Saskatoon Transit was 134 buses over a period of ten years, with a significant reduction in fleet age: not so much an expansion but a renewal of the fleet
 - The fleet renewal strategy will be updated next year, and they will discuss how it will look like after the new buses on order have arrived.
 - Transit said that three new buses will arrive this fall, and an additional twenty buses are on order to arrive in 2025
 - A BRS member raised concerns that bus delivery times are up to two years for electric buses and over one year for diesel buses, and expressed concerns about waiting until it is “too late” for the buses to arrive
 - Transit said eight buses have arrived or will arrive this year, and will push the arrival date of the new buses as much as they can in 2025
 - BRS insisted that procurement of buses to be delivered in 2026 needs to be accelerated, so that the ongoing shortage of buses can finally be eliminated after 4 years of service disruptions.
 - Transit agreed that the sooner they can tender new buses, the better
 - A BRS member asked why Transit could not tender for them now, and why is the paperwork not ready
 - The Planning Manager noted the issue of budget timing: Transit cannot tender something unless the budget has been approved by City Council
 - Another BRS member asked how well City Council understands what is required for Saskatoon Transit to be successful
 - City Council requested an industry scan on how well other transit agencies respond to full buses, and they are starting to get the picture because up until then, they assumed that you can move a bus from one part of the city to another part of the city, but they are full on almost all routes; they are starting to understand reliability better

- A BRS member asked about whether or not the incoming council would share the same understanding of Transit issues as the current council
 - There is a sense of optimism among Transit that the next City Council will understand Transit issues
- Will there be sufficient rolling stock to operate BRT alongside the conventional routes?
 - Transit said that 134 buses would not be sufficient to operate both systems, especially as Saskatoon Transit sees constant growth on the high school routes
 - Transit noted that the City's goal of increasing the share of bus rides vis-à-vis car commute from four percent of all trips to eight percent of all trips is a long-term goal, and it will take years after BRT begins to reach it
 - Transit said that the number of buses that they will need will be determined through detailed design and procurements, and through conversations with City Council and with the general public via engagement sessions to compare what kind of service Transit could have if they receive X new buses compared to if they do not.
- How many buses does Transit need to operate both systems?
 - They currently do not have the answer to this question, but as the process continues along, the Planning Manager will have an answer to that question in the future
- Has Transit placed a firm order on buses?
 - Not yet, and the Planning Manager said that Transit will need a purchase requisition before they can place an order.
- A BRS member asked if City Council is aware that the current bus numbers could be a hindrance to day-to-day operations?
 - The Planning Manager responded that Procurement may have the final say on the matter
- Current status of BRT Project:
 - The BRT Project Manager reported that the BRT system is fully funded, the name (Link) has been approved, and they can do a substantial amount of work that is more than just talking about the project
 - The BRT Project Manager said that fourteen stations are scheduled to be built this summer/fall in accordance with the map & info submitted to the Governance and Priorities Committee
 - The BRT Project Manager reported that three contracts were issued in an open market after June 28th for construction on the fourteen BRT stations, and the three contracts were done in a set way with supply partners: a standard contract depending on qualifications and pricing

- As far as what is involved, the concrete is the main component and is the first thing to be placed at a future BRT station
- Construction crews show up, dig up existing infrastructure and remove old concrete, they install the conduits, and then they place gravel, rebar, and then the concrete into the ground, and the curbside tactile markers will be placed as the concrete dries
- A BRS member mentioned a drainage channel at the pilot station into a storm sewer and asked whether or not it was in the final design of the BRT stations
 - The BRT Project Manager reported that the City was hesitant to include drainage channels into the designs of the BRT stops, and the BRT Project Manager stated that two stations were originally designed to include them with CIMA+, but these drainage channels were removed from the final design of two stations on 22nd Street, and instead will drain onto the street, with the stations to slope towards the street
 - The BRT Project Manager said that they took some of the parking lane out from the Ontario Avenue stop (near the police station) to add extra space for the BRT station, while adjusting the walk-up to the BRT station so it would be easier to access the police station from the bus stop, to avoid having a “drainage V,” and to avoid conflicts over who will clean the BRT station
- Stamps of art on the BRT stations:
 - Art consultant Leu Webb designed the concrete imprints, and tested them on some concrete
 - The imprints did not work well, which led to an internal discussion at Transit about what to replace the concrete imprints with while ensuring that there is still art on the concrete
 - Transit said that the best way to have the most visible stamp on the concrete without hindering construction of BRT stations would be to use a different method that will be installed after the fact for a multitude of reasons
 - Transit said that they will use a thermal plastic or something similar rather than paint
 - Transit said that the difference in materials could affect safety around the imprints, which will affect what type of stamp they will use
- Construction this year:

- Construction started last Monday on the Arlington/8th stop by Acadia Construction and on the 22nd/P stop by Suttner's Construction
 - Concrete is being poured at the Arlington/8th stop, but then the concrete needs to be cured to a high strength so barriers will remain in place for roughly a week although the contractor may already have left the site.
- What information is expected to go to the public about construction?
 - There is a newsletter that is updated at a regular frequency until service begins to document the construction of the BRT system
 - Each site will have their own notice as construction begins
 - Transit reports frequently to City Council on the progress of construction
- Is there any other construction connected to BRT this year?
 - The BRT Project Manager said there was no further construction connected to BRT this year, and cited the long wait time for transit signal materials
 - Transit is working on a tender for traffic signal materials
- Construction next year:
 - Broadway Bridge rehabilitation
 - Timing of BRT construction with rehabilitation of the Broadway Bridge
 - The Nutana BRT Advisory Group requested that the Broadway Bridge rehabilitation be tied with the construction of the BRT system.
 - Consequently, all four BRT stations on Broadway will be built during the rehabilitation of Broadway Bridge, but the construction of BRT infrastructure is only a small part of the overall rehabilitation project
 - A BRS member who attended a different consultation session on the Broadway Bridge Rehabilitation Project said that the barriers between the sidewalk and the road will be replaced which means that the bridge either can be closed for a year if you do the whole thing in one go, or over two years if you do half of the bridge
 - The decision has already been made to rehabilitate the bridge in one go from March to November next year
 - It is likely that route 8 will go down the Idylwyld Bridge during the course of the work
 - Finally, the BRT Project Manager reported that the reconstruction of the 4th Avenue and 19th Street intersection at the bottom of the bridge will also be tied with the Broadway Bridge rehabilitation project to leverage

economies of scale and provide more storage area for the bridge contractors.

- Auxiliary BRT projects:
 - The BRT Project Manager said that they are in the midst of doing other procurements that are less visible to the community like route design; fibre-optic cables, and depending on the results, they may be able to do fibre-optic cable installation in the next year
 - The BRT Project Manager said that many of next year's plans include works at different locations throughout the city to install new traffic lights at intersections
 - The BRT Project Manager reported that design work will continue for different locations as each location gets their own individual designs, but there will be updates before they go up for tender so that each stop can be tailored to its location and learn from previous BRT stations
 - How will the shelters at the BRT stations be installed?
 - If there's an existing stop, any infrastructure that's there has been removed to build the base will be put back for the next while, as it will not be until Spring 2026 when the new shelters get installed at the stops
 - As the new shelters get commissioned, Transit said that they will be available for use even before Link comes into force as an overnight switchover would not work well
 - Transit said that forty-three more locations will begin construction in 2025, including the bus stops on Broadway Avenue, so 57 or 58 will have concrete pads finished by the end of next year
 - They added that next year's construction list will be like this year's where it goes through many renditions before the list of new stations is finalised
- Contractors and designs:
 - Transit said that CIMA+ received a contract to oversee the construction of the BRT network
 - The contract is officially a single-year contract, but it can be renewed so that Transit can have a partner who is actually willing to participate in the project rather than risk having them be less willing to work on the project to Transit's expectations
 - In a practical sense, CIMA+ generates a bunch of drawings, they issue full construction drawings, they have a field person, quality assurance person and a surveyor, and a person of record
 - Ahead of any construction, a person goes out, scopes out locations and gives instructions on where to build it and how deep to dig, and contractors who are responsible for the work do quality-testing themselves based on standards issued by Transit

- CIMA+ does quality assurance testing and quality control results and frequencies with an eye to ensure that things are on the up and up and meet standards
- After construction is completed, CIMA+ also generates as-built drawings, which may differ from the pre-construction drawings, so that the City's geographic information system will reflect for posterity what was actually built.
- Transit reported that CIMA+'s performance has been good so far, and both Acadia Construction and Suttner's Construction have also done well so far
- Transit is overseeing contracts on behalf of the city but CIMA+ is doing the bulk of the work
- Plans for the stations on College Drive are likely to end up public in the new year, while stations on 1st Avenue will be delayed as more design work is done through 2025
- Improvements to 8th Street around the Acadia Street BRT Stations:
 - Transit said that there are no plans for major improvements to 8th Street as part of the BRT project, but they have said there will be some changes as part of the project
 - They negotiated an agreement to change the access to 3414 8th Street East as the property owners had separate plans for the building, so they collaborated so that when the Acadia BRT station is completed, people can still access the businesses on that property
 - Transit is starting the tendering process on constructing a sidewalk on the south side of 8th Street between Acadia Drive and Moss Avenue
 - Plans for dedicated sidewalk access was removed from this year's plans as they currently do not have approval from Centre Mall, but they are close to an agreement with Centre Mall to allow for a safe pathway
 - The existing separate turning lane into the mall (between McDonalds and Burger King) from eastbound traffic on 8th Street will be removed and a conventional right-turn lane will be installed at that location
 - A BRS member asked if functional drawings of this and other station locations are accessible to the general public
 - Transit said that the tendering drawings that go out to contractors are available on a website accessible by the public (<https://www.saskatoon.ca/business-development/development-regulation/specifications-standards/drawings>)
 - Costs:
 - Transit reported that cost of the contracts came in slightly below what they expected based on current prices

- There is a set dollar figure that cannot be exceeded, and if it goes overbudget, Transit will make cuts to a given station or a piece of infrastructure until the cost goes in at or under budget
- Issues regarding Safety on Transit:
 - A BRS member said that they were waiting for information to be provided to city council about some of these measures so that BRS could mention them to the general public
 - Transit said that most of the policies that were mentioned in the August meeting are internal campaigns for Transit staff, but some of them, like the Customer Conduct Policy will be public facing
 - Transit said that the fire support officers have their own bus passes so Transit can see which routes they are on in order to prove that they are riding the buses
 - Transit has been raising expectations for the fire support officers, as Transit sees them as a way to enhance security on buses
 - Transit pointed out that the fire support officers have two sources of funding: the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and Transit, with two separate mandates for BIDs and for Transit, which *can* lead to conflict as to what mandate should take priority
 - A BRS member suggested having an anonymous way to contact people about issues on the buses
 - Transit said that they will try and provide the list of safety measures to BRS, but they do not make any promises

Next meeting will be on Monday, October 21st, at 1:30 pm.