

Meeting minutes for the October 21st, 2024 BRS-Transit Meeting at 1:30 pm

Attendance:

- BRS:
 - o Odin Swidzinski, BRS-Transit Coordinator
 - o Robert Clipperton, Member
 - o Peter Gallen, Member
 - o Terry Hoknes, Member
 - o Curtis McCoshen, Member
 - o James Wood, Member
- Transit:
 - o Cory Shrigley, Customer Service & Engagement Manager
 - o Seth Akinde, Johnson-Shoyama Executive Intern
- Access Transit:
 - o Brittany Hadley, Access Transit Manager

Regrets: Lila Wagner

Administrative issues:

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

Old business:

- The land acknowledgement was delivered by Curt
- The backlog in meeting minutes has been cleared; the June, July, August, and September minutes have been posted on the BRS website, and the Johnson-Shoyama Executive Intern will be playing a major role in reviewing and approving the minutes
- Transit recommends that there should be at least a two week notice for any requests to have special guests speak at BRS-Transit meetings, and recommends that an agenda be provided so that the guests know what questions are going to be asked

New business:

- Access Transit
 - o The Access Transit Manager introduced herself to BRS
 - o The Access Transit Manager said that Access Transit's current strengths are "their dedicated staff" while Access Transit's current challenge is "trying to operate a twenty-first century paratransit service"
 - The Access Transit Manager said that Access Transit is still recovering from the effects of COVID-19, and they are seeing record numbers of new applicants (60-70 applicants per month) to use it

- This has led to a higher increase of denial rates, and they are not always able to accommodate “subscription trips” (clients who have regular services that they need, so they receive a trip week after week as opposed to one-off trips)
- Access Transit has not increased the number of buses in their fleet, and the demand for Access Transit is only just starting to stabilize
- A BRS member asked if Transit would advocate for Access Transit in the upcoming budget so that it could operate reliably
 - The Access Transit Manager said that they did not always have consistent service, but they have now defined the amount of service that they can provide at 1325 service hours per week
 - Increasing buses and increasing staff is only the start; taking advantage of technologies would help ensure that Access Transit is using resources effectively, especially during the off-peak hours
- Another BRS member asked if the demand is permanent or temporary, and asked about Transit’s program to move people with disabilities onto conventional transit
 - The Access Transit Manager said that moving people onto conventional transit is a challenge, but they have restarted the “travel training” program and they do want to review applicants and current users to determine whether or not they still are eligible to use Access Transit
 - Access Transit tries to encourage people who have an alternate way of transporting themselves to use them rather than Access Transit, but if they qualify for the service, then people would not be stopped from using Access Transit
 - The Access Transit Manager said that the demand increase is permanent, as people are getting older and people have been neglecting their health during the COVID-19 pandemic; life has gotten expensive, and Access Transit is cheaper than taxis.
 - Groups with day programs and senior programs got rid of their shuttle buses in favour of using Access Transit during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Has Access Transit improved the booking system?
 - The Access Transit Manager said that it is in progress, and said that the call system that they use is shared with Service Saskatoon
 - A BRS member asked if there is a timeline for when the new booking system would be put in place
 - The Access Transit Manager said it could be put in place within the next month, but it depends on how everything lines up with the third-party contractors

- Will Access Transit reduce the booking period from three days to one day?
 - The Access Transit Manager said that the booking period will not be reduced to one day as of this time, as it would be a “major change” to their customers and to the system
- Capacity of Access Transit buses
 - The Access Transit Manager said that the capacity rate is hard to define, but the average capacity on an Access Transit bus is usually around 9 passengers but it depends on each individual bus and on the customer who is on the bus
 - A BRS member asked if the city is making people aware of the difficulty of having larger mobility devices on buses or of the queue times as the system is not infinite
 - When complaints are made, Access Transit tries to educate people about the *why* behind each decision, and Access Transit has a newsletter that goes out to every active customer on their service to inform them of any changes
 - Transit said that this question also affects regular transit service because it affects how Transit will design BRT shelters and allocate spaces on buses for wheelchairs and mobility scooters
 - Another BRS member asked if there is any signage inside the buses
 - The Access Transit Manager says that there are posters: currently, they have a poster to encourage people to not take many bags onto the buses, but the posters usually have a lot of “hot topics”
 - A BRS member asked if the newsletter is online:
 - The Access Transit Manager said it is online, and it is published twice a year: one in July and one just before the Christmas season
- Access Transit denial rate
 - The Access Transit Manager reported that average denial rate as of right now is around 8.4%, but with increased staffing, the denial rate went from 9% over the summer to a 5% in the fall, so the denial rate is trending downward
 - A BRS member asked what a reasonable denial rate should be for Access Transit?
 - The Access Transit Manager said it should be below 8%, and is putting together a report on the current state of Access Transit and what resources it needs to get down
 - The Access Transit Manager said that other paratransit operators have experienced similar spikes in denial rate

- Access Transit defines the denial rate as total the number of trips denied divided by the number of trips accommodated
- Access Transit said that there are some technologies and software that could be optimised or used correctly to help improve service before they can effectively deal with other issues
- A BRS member asked if mobility is a right that society should provide to all in a political way
 - The Access Transit manager said that it will depend upon the ability of passengers to utilize the service. There are people with mobility devices that are too large for the Access Transit system, which inadvertently affects Access Transit's ability to carry those who need to use the service
 - Brittany also mentioned that while mobility is a right, buses come in different capacity sizes, which affects how many people can fit onto a bus. If there are many people on board with mobility devices too large for Access Transit, this affects Access Transit's ability to carry those who need to use the service. For example, services will continue to be provided for customers but awareness of the difficulty of having larger mobility devices on buses will help ensure more services are provided for other customers.
 - The Access Transit Manager said that without Access Transit, users would not be able to work, meet friends, attend doctor's appointments, or leave their own home
- Access Transit fleet renewal
 - The Access Transit Manager said that Access Transit is beginning to work on their fleet renewal plan
 - Access Transit only gets enough funding from the provincial government to buy two buses (provincial contribution of \$50,000 per bus)
 - A BRS member asked about the upcoming budget and how it will affect Access fleet renewal/expansion
 - The Access Transit Manager said that it will be in 2026
 - Access Transit receives their buses from Crestline
 - Timeline: they place an order in January, get funding approved, some of the work is done in the USA, and the rest is done here
 - Access Transit sends requests for proposals for what they need, negotiate the contract with their suppliers, and they usually get a quick turnaround to get things up and running
- A BRS member asked about having a formal town hall for people using Access Transit

- The Access Transit Manager said that Access Transit has received informal feedback from Access Transit users, and says that she will talk with the Customer Service and Engagement Manager about organising a formal town hall
 - Another member asked what Access Transit's priority will be for 2025?
 - The Access Transit Manager said their biggest priority is their booking and tracking software that they have been using since Access Transit first began
 - A BRS member asked if they are happy with the budget they currently have
 - The Access Transit Manager said that they will stick to budget, and they do not see any major issues
 - A BRS member asked when they can meet again once the Access Transit Manager has more information
 - The Access Transit Manager said that BRS should aim to meet with the Access Transit Manager in February or March 2025 as she would have more information by then
- Conventional bus deliveries:
 - Update on the new buses:
 - Transit said five 40' buses have arrived and are being commissioned with the necessary equipment before they can enter service to replace at least three buses that are nearing the end of their service life
 - A BRS member asked if Transit installed the Q-Max system on the buses. This system is used to keep wheelchairs in place
 - The Customer Service and Engagement Manager said the Q-Max system is definitely on the electric buses, and is probably on the new buses
 - Transit is still waiting for the three 60' articulated buses to arrive, and expects them later this fall or in the winter
- Bus overcrowding:
 - Prior to September, Transit expected 18% growth in high school ridership, and the number is accurate
 - Peak times have stayed the same (8-8:30 and 15:30-16:00) compared to last September, and Route 43 is still crowded
 - Customer complaints were reported on routes 16, 17, 26, 43, and 83 last year, whereas this year, complaints were reported on routes 16, 17, 26 and 43
 - The big change is that pass-ups are now being reported rather than being lumped into the "full bus" data, so they should be able to find out how often people are being passed up by full buses
 - A BRS member asked if customers have adjusted to the new bus schedules or if they have given up on using Transit

- Transit said that most customers may have adjusted to the new schedules, but they admit some have given up on using Transit
- Transit reported that the on-demand service in Aspen Ridge is seeing 5.6 rides an hour, and it expects that there will be calls for Transit to set up a fixed route to Aspen Ridge fairly soon
- A BRS member asked if they are tracking the numbers of children riding the bus
 - Transit does not have ridership numbers for children because children up to Grade 8 do not have bus passes
- A BRS member reported that they had received thirty service alerts for late buses while they were away for three days and asked if these alerts are due to scheduling problems
 - Transit said that thirty alerts is not unreasonable if a person is gone for a week, but a route consistently running fifteen minutes late should be considered a scheduling problem and should not have service alerts sent out for every time a bus is fifteen minutes late
- A BRS member asked how Transit should handle these delays, and suggested a summer schedule to accommodate roadworks:
 - Transit said that they have a “schedule offset” that could be used to offset the schedule by a set amount of time so that service alerts will not need to be issued if a bus runs late compared to the normal time, but they said that it is rarely used

Next meeting on Monday, November 18th, 2024 @ 1:30 pm on Zoom