

## Meeting minutes for the November 18<sup>th</sup>, 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 Curt McCoshen, Member
  - o Lila Wagner, Member
  - o James Wood, Member
- Transit
  - o Cory Shrigley, Customer Service & Engagement Manager
  - o Seth Akande, Johnson-Shoyama Executive Intern

### Regrets:

### Administrative issues:

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

### Old business:

- Curt delivered the land acknowledgement
- No old business arising from previous minutes was reported

### New business:

- Year end updates
  - o Latest orders/deliveries
    - Transit reports that the five new diesel buses have arrived, with some of them have been deployed onto the network, while the three articulated buses have yet to arrive
    - Transit reports that an order for the twenty buses in 2025 has been tendered and awarded, and there is currently no timeline for when those buses are scheduled to arrive
      - No electric buses have been ordered for 2025 due to the withdrawal of funding from the Zero-Emissions Fund
  - o A BRS member asked about whether or not the articulated buses are diesel buses
    - The three sixty-foot articulated buses that have yet to arrive are diesel buses and are not electric buses
  - o Another BRS member asked which company manufactured the buses that have just arrived, and which company received the tender for new buses
    - Transit says that Nova manufactured the new buses that have entered service, and Nova received the tender from Transit to manufacture the twenty buses that are supposed to arrive in 2025

- Another BRS member commented about the signage on support staff because the signage says “Fire Support Staff” inside the buses, and suggested that it should be renamed to “Fire Department Support Staff” to avoid people assuming that Transit has “fired all the support staff”
  - Transit says that the program is branded that way because the support worker program is operated by the Saskatoon Fire Department
  - Transit says that they have a digital pass to get on the bus (Fire Community Support)
  - Transit says that the major stakeholders (City, Transit, Police, Fire) have met regularly to discuss the support officer program
  - Transit says that the branding of the program may change in the future, but no promises were given at the meeting
- A BRS member asked if the interior on buses will be going back to the old one, maintaining the layout as seen on the electric buses, or going for a third layout
  - Transit said that they have received feedback about the seats being slippery, and one Transit initiative is to analyze feedback in a better way and to hear more from customers who use Saskatoon Transit
  - Transit says there is still a small section where people can sit forward on the buses with the new interior layout, but they are smaller than what they were under the old interior layout
- The same BRS member asked for a map of Nova’s most common layouts so BRS can review them and provide feedback
  - Transit says that they will try to provide a list of layouts to BRS, but they do not make any promises as Transit may not have a say in the final decision
- Another BRS member says that the comments on the new layout are “all over the place” on the BRS Facebook page, and asks if there is a layout that accounts for all the concerns raised, such as grab poles so people of varying heights can grab them
  - Transit reports that the new layout benefits young parents with strollers or older people with a shopping cart as they would be able to sit on the sideways seats without blocking the aisle with strollers or mobility devices, which is an improvement on accessibility compared to the old layout with the forward-facing seats
  - Another BRS member suggests that they could look at a seat design that is not so slippery
- A BRS member asks if the reason Transit staff are not consulted in choosing a design is because there is so much “siloing” in municipal government, and also asks about the configurations
  - Transit says that in the past when Transit staff were consulted “cafeteria-style,” buses ended up with impractical designs, and

- Transit has since moved towards a standardized approach towards bus configurations (using manufacturer's recommendations and best practices)
- Transit says that they need reliable data from customers to communicate what customers want to the manufacturer
  - The same BRS member says they want the customer service and engagement manager to be involved in decision-making because they serve as a conduit between the ridership and Transit, and says that at some point, Transit needs to make a final decision as "statistics can only go so far"
    - Transit says that the salesmen and Nova can "configure the buses any way Transit wants," but it depends on Transit's budget constraints and what standardized layout they can pick from in order to reduce costs, as customized layouts are more expensive than a standard layout
  - Transit says that the sideways layout accommodates more people than the forward layout
  - Two concerns that the customer service and engagement manager have raised about the new layout are the number of places for people to hold on to and slippery seats
- A BRS member says that the Zero-Emissions Fund was discontinued, notes that Transit intended to purchase fifteen electric buses in 2025, and asks what the cause was of delaying or not ordering the electric buses
    - Access to the Zero-Emissions Fund was withdrawn by the provincial government because transit agencies in other provinces still have access to ZEF funding
    - Transit still intends to purchase fifteen buses, but these buses will be all diesel rather than electric
  - Another BRS member asks how many old buses will be removed from service when the new buses arrive?
    - Of the eight new buses that Transit purchased, two old buses were removed from service, and Transit is aiming for a one-to-five ratio of buses leaving service to buses entering service
    - Transit gave the example of bus 0808, which they wanted to keep in service, but because the frame costs \$10,000 to repair and the engine costs \$30,000 to repair, Transit decided that bus 0808 was not economically feasible to keep in service
  - A BRS member asks that if Transit loses funding for electric buses, which cost 1.5 times as much as diesel buses, would Transit buy 45 diesel buses with the money that they could have used to buy 30 electric buses?
    - Transit says that the ZEF funding covered the difference between the cost of a diesel bus and the cost of an electric bus, so they cannot buy more diesel buses

- Transit initiatives
  - Safety of frontline employees
    - Transit says that there is an internal initiative to improve workplace safety within the Transit Department with seven goals and seventeen action plans, with many of these initiatives that will be carried into the coming year
    - In 2025, Transit will be engaging in “culture transformation” with fifteen initiatives that will be worked upon, including:
      - A focus on preventative maintenance (e.g. air conditioner and heater checks) with the ATU
      - A new incentive to hire more mechanics and utility staff
      - Implementing better incident report mechanisms to ensure resources are used efficiently
      - Improving customer service processes to ensure people can receive better customer service and to ensure Transit has better data
    - A BRS member comments that BRS is set to meet again in late November with Mollenbeck and Knock on their suggestion after a short meeting with both of them to discuss the FSOs
    - Another BRS member asks if the ATU President has been involved in the regular meetings about the FSOs
      - Transit says the ATU president was not at the regular meetings between City, Transit, the Fire Department and the Police Department, but the fire chief met with Transit operators, and discussed safety concerns and the FSOs with them
      - That BRS member suggests having the ATU President be involved in these meetings as operators are far more likely to listen to them than to management, which could lead to a better company culture
  - Transit says that the network redesign will include three phases of engagement:
    - The first phase of redesign will take place in 2025, and will involve discussions between Transit and Bus Riders of Saskatoon on high-level planning principles so that the general public can understand what the network should be redesigned
      - Transit will be hearing more about the redesign of the network and issues like gaps in the network; future number of buses and stops; ratio of forty-foot buses to sixty-foot buses; transit hubs and how many buses can fit in a hub; additional hours per route; extended service, and budget proposals for the project

- The second phase of redesign will be deciding the locations of bus stops and bringing the design to the public so the public can have an opportunity to consult
  - Transit says that staffing is critical for this portion of the network redesign
- The third phase of redesign is revealing the final design and issuing one final call to the public to see if they missed anything
- The timeline of the conventional network redesign is supposed to line up with the opening of Link in 2027 or 2028 so that the new route network can be unveiled and implemented alongside Link
- Municipal budget
  - Transit will provide a preliminary proposal that will give council a heads-up on what they plan in the coming budget cycle, but they are unsure when they have to present a formal proposal to the city
- A BRS member asks if they have an engagement manager appointed so they can be involved with Filip, and asks if the terminals refer to the final system in 2028 or if the terminals are an interim gap-filler until Transit decides otherwise?
  - Transit says that HDR placed BRT stations and termini with the idea that buses will go around the block, but it did not problem-solve how the conventional bus network would interact with the BRT stations, especially in and around Lawson Heights and Confederation Mall where it is assumed that the BRT station can just stick to the street, but did not describe how many buses will converge at the same time
    - If a BRT station cannot accommodate all these buses that converge at a given stop, then the existing termini would function as an accessory to the BRT station
    - Transit says that the hubs would function as a miniaturized version of the current downtown terminal
  - Transit says they currently have an engagement manager looking at the timeline for the project, but they will need to hire a consultant or a firm to handle the engagement process, or have a manager oversee Phase 2 or Phase 3 of the network redesign
  - The same BRS member asks who currently serves as the engagement manager
    - Transit says that Karen Grant is the current engagement manager
  - Another BRS member says that people should be able to understand why the route network is changing
    - Phase 1 will be where Filip and BRS will take a value proposition approach to determine “what people want” and

“what Transit is willing to pay for” regarding frequency v. coverage or stop placements

- Safety on buses
  - Transit reported an incident at the downtown terminal in mid-November, and has received reports altercations on buses between people who know each other
    - Transit is developing a process so that operators may report such incidents
  - Children on buses
    - The only issue Transit has reported is that some Grade 8 students who are taller than other children have been accused of being a high school student, and Transit says that Grade 8 students should tell the operator that they are in Grade 8 and ask for a ride
    - Transit reports that the class pass program is still in use, and the language has been updated in order for teachers to help plan a trip involving a class in order to prevent conflicts between classrooms and other Transit users
    - A BRS member asks if Transit has communicated the plans to teachers so that they can determine when they can travel
      - Transit says that they have not yet communicated these plans with teachers
    - Another BRS member points out that if a bus is mostly full, a class could risk not being able to get on at their scheduled time, and asks if there is a way to ensure that they will be able to get on buses
      - Transit says that this scenario is why they limit class pass booking times to between 9:30 am and 2:30 pm as buses should not be full during this time
  - Other safety issues
    - Other than altercations between people who know each other, Transit has not heard about other safety incidents on their buses
- Free transit
  - A BRS member asks if Transit is aware of free transit experiments like in Orangeville, Ontario, and points out that a free transit program in Saskatoon could lead to improvements in the downtown business district
    - Transit says that they have two people are studying the free transit initiatives and they will bring more information in the next meeting
- Accessible transit
  - A BRS member says that Access Transit is relying on the city’s phone network, which has led to issues with limited numbers of people able to book a service or report issues, and asks if Transit is also facing the same issues as Access Transit

- Transit says that the vendor is Five9, which handles revenue, Saskatoon Transit, Access Transit, and Service Saskatoon through the same system
- Transit says that the problem is with the trunk line, with blame being traded between the provider and Shaw
- The city is looking for another vendor as they are “not happy with the service” provided by Five9
- The same BRS member asks if they will deal with the wait times when they rebid the contract, and suggests that Transit have their own call system
  - Transit says that they will look into having their own call system, but no promises were given

Next meeting on Monday, December 9th @ 1:30 pm on Zoom.