

# Edmonton Transit Service Data

## School Service (B. Esslinger)

### Recommendation

That the September 11, 2018 City Operations report CR\_6145 be received for information.

### Previous Council/Committee Action

At the June 12/13, 2018, City Council meeting, Councillor B. Esslinger made the following inquiry:

Can Administration provide a report to Committee on the following:

1. The number of school and specialized routes on Edmonton Transit.
2. The cost of these routes on the entire system.
3. How these routes are determined and how are they reviewed.

### Executive Summary

Providing shared transportation for students supports transit ridership and improves mobility for Edmontonians. Edmonton Transit Service currently provides a substantial component of school transportation, with 206 custom school routes providing approximately 50,000 hours of service annually. The total annual cost of this service is over \$5 million, which is funded through the same mechanisms as other transit service: fares and the assessment base. This investment can be considered in the context of the full Edmonton Transit System, which provides over 2 million hours of service annually, for a total cost of \$325 million in 2018.

The bus network redesign provides an opportunity to holistically review and redesign school service using a principle-based approach in order to design the most effective and efficient service.

### Report

#### Background

Edmonton Transit Service has provided school routes for over 30 years. Routes became formalized in the early 2000s with the implementation of new transit planning systems. Edmonton Transit Service provides school service through custom routes and additional service on all routes throughout the school year. The provision of school

transit service has increased significantly over time due to the growing population, fewer schools with a greater population per school, reduction in yellow bus service and the open boundary school system. The school transit service is designed primarily for junior high and high school students, with elementary students having access to yellow school buses provided by School Boards.

### **Number of school routes**

Edmonton Transit Service currently provides a total of 206 custom school routes as follows:

- 196 custom “school special” routes for junior and senior high schools, generally represented by Routes 600 through 999, with the exception of certain routes such as Route 747. These routes provide 48,248 service hours annually and require 45 buses.
- 10 custom routes serve post-secondary trips, which provide 2,086 service hours annually.

While all of these custom routes can be accessed by all customers, if not for the school demand this specific additional service would not be provided.

In addition to custom routes, Edmonton Transit Service adds seasonal service hours to regular routes beginning in September to accommodate increased demand for post-secondary, junior high and senior high school travel. This additional service is removed in May for post-secondary trips and in July for junior and senior high school trips.

The additional service offered from September to July represents 49,737 service hours annually while the additional service from September to April represents 27,803 service hours annually. While some of the reduction in service during the summer can be attributed to the school break, a significant portion can be attributed to commuters who reduce travel in these months due to vacation and increased use of active transportation.

### **Cost of school service**

The total annual cost of all custom school routes is \$5.1 million, and an additional \$7.9 million is expended on seasonal increases for regular routes, for a total of \$13 million. This represents approximately five percent of the annual operating budget for transit. School transit service is funded through a combination of assessment base and fare revenue. In addition to the operating requirement, the capital requirements for this service include a total of 45 buses.

### **Planning for school service**

Edmonton Transit Service considers developing a new school route when a new school opens or in order to respond to overloaded buses on regular routes located in proximity to a school. When buses are overloaded on an existing route, transit planners evaluate to determine the source of increased demand. If a substantial component of the overload/additional demand is generated by student riders, creation of a new school route is considered. However, new school routes have not been implemented since 2016, as transit service is being assessed and redesigned as part of the Transit Strategy and Network Redesign Projects. Although the current budget cycle did not have provisions for additional or new school services, it is anticipated that the network redesign will generate some efficiencies and identify potential opportunities for new service options..

City Policy C539 Transit Service Standards establishes a route performance standard for school trips, which requires all trips to meet 80 percent of seated capacity, or 30 passengers for an individual trip. When ridership falls below this threshold, the routes are reviewed for potential route change, consolidation or service reduction.

As a result of the open boundary system, there is great variation in the length and amount of service on custom school routes. As illustrated by Route 726 in Attachment 1, in some instances, school routes are quite long in order to connect students residing in one area of the city to a distant high school. This service design was largely based on the principle of providing direct service between neighbourhoods and schools without requiring transfers at transit stations.

The growth of the Light Rail Transit (LRT) network provides opportunities to reassess school routes and, in some cases, allows for savings through the elimination of routes. For example, the opening of Valley Line Southeast will allow for the elimination of most of the school routes serving Wagner High School, as this school will be located in close proximity to a new LRT station.

### **Transit Strategy and Bus Network Redesign**

In planning for school service, Administration considers the broader context of all services Edmonton Transit Service provides, by prioritizing school needs alongside other transit needs.

Following approval of the Transit Strategy in 2017, Administration is currently undertaking a comprehensive bus network redesign grounded in the strategy's guiding principles. As part of the bus network redesign, Administration is developing a new Transit Service Standards Policy for Council's consideration. This policy will outline the performance standards for all transit routes, including school routes, and will indicate how the guiding principles of the Transit Strategy inform prioritization of service.

The first draft of the bus network redesign was shared with the public for feedback in spring 2018. An essential first step was to receive public feedback and refine the regular route network. Since school bus routes supplement and create modifications to regular routes, the first draft did not include school routes. Administration is currently refining the regular route network based on recent public feedback, which will be followed by a redesign of school routes.

The bus network redesign may provide savings on custom school routes while still maintaining the same level of service for students, as increased service on major corridors may effectively serve a greater proportion of school trips. Conversely, the new routes may have reduced regular service near some schools, which may require new custom school routes to serve these destinations.

Similar to the overall redesign, the redesign of school routes will follow a principle-based approach in order to design the most effective and efficient service.

**Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management**

<b>Corporate Outcome(s): Edmontonians use public transit and active modes of transportation</b>			
<b>Outcome(s)</b>	<b>Measure(s)</b>	<b>Result(s)</b>	<b>Target(s)</b>
Transit ridership grows in proportion to population	Average boardings per trip on custom school routes	27.7 boardings per trip in 2017	30 boardings per trip in 2018/19 school year
Edmonton youth use public transit	Average sales of youth monthly passes	21,740 for 2017-2018 school year	22,000 for 2018/19 school year

**Attachment**

1. Example School Route - Route 726

**Others Reviewing this Report**

- M. Sturgeon, Acting Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement
- P. Ross, Acting Deputy City Manager, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development
- R. Smyth, Acting Deputy City Manager, Employee Services