

BUS NETWORK EXPANSION OPPORTUNITIES - TRANSIT FUNDING MODEL OPTIONS

RECOMMENDATION

That the March 23, 2022, City Operations report CO00803, be received for information.

Report Purpose

Information only.

This report informs Executive Committee of Administration's plans to expand the bus network and On Demand Transit service.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the April 19/21, 2021, City Council meeting, the following motion passed:

That Administration provide a report to Committee following a review of the implementation of the Bus Network Redesign, including:

b. high level strategy for more routes during the rollout where need and demand are indicated.

At the September 7, 2021, City Council meeting, the following motion passed:

That Administration provide a report identifying opportunities for bus network expansion, including but not limited to Bus Rapid Transit implementation within our existing bus network, through the remaining federal funding recently announced, to be presented alongside the mass transit study report coming in First Quarter 2022.

Executive Summary

- Edmonton Transit Service (ETS) implemented a new bus network in April 2021 following several years of extensive planning and public engagement, and continues to listen to rider feedback to inform further service adjustments and enhancements.
- While numerous no-cost and low cost adjustments and improvements have been made following the launch of the new network, several additional service enhancements have been identified as part of the 2022 Annual Transit Service Plan. These proposed changes are based on recent growth and public feedback.
- The activation of Valley Line Southeast in 2022 will replace the need for the existing precursor bus service, route 510X; and provide an opportunity for ETS to expand

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conventional bus service. However, tax-levy funding would be required to support the expanded conventional bus service, as the precursor bus service is currently funded on a one-time basis from the LRT reserve. Administration has planned numerous enhancements to the bus network, including bus rapid transit, in alignment with the Mass Transit Plan for a city of 1.25 million residents.

- ETS is further improving and refining the On Demand Transit service within the existing budget by carefully reviewing ridership data and reallocating service from areas that do not have strong demand.

REPORT

Thousands of Edmontonians rely on public transit to connect them to where they work, learn, play and live, and ETS remains focused on delivering a service that is convenient, reliable and safe. ETS provides travel options through a range of services, including LRT, Dedicated Accessible Transit Service (DATS), On Demand Transit, and conventional fixed-route bus service. With the furthest reach and highest ridership, the bus network continues to be an integral component of ETS. Public transit is an essential service in the everyday lives of Edmontonians, and expansion of the service is critical in order to meet the evolving needs of Edmontonians, as well as the goals and targets set in ConnectEdmonton and The City Plan.

In the past year, transit ridership has been progressively increasing and recently has recovered to 60 per cent of pre-pandemic levels. This trend towards ridership recovery is expected to continue throughout 2022 and 2023. To support ridership recovery, Administration is focused on internal levers including transit network improvements, improving the frequency of service, implementation of Smart Fare payment technology as well as safety and security measures to improve the transit rider experience.

The Bus Network Redesign was one of the key pillars identified in Edmonton's 10-year Transit Strategy as a lever to increase ridership. The revised network was developed within existing resource levels. Routes were reconfigured to be more direct with less overlap — this allows for more frequency at no additional cost. Additional service hours were reallocated to evenings and weekends to better meet diverse ridership needs. The revised network, alongside the refreshed Transit Service Policy, C539A, sets a solid foundation for future growth of the network, both in the short term and long term through the Mass Transit Network as outlined in The City Plan. The Urban Planning and Economy Report UPE00342 Mass Transit: Planning for 1.25 Million People, reviewed at the February 15, 2022, Urban Planning Committee meeting, identified the need to invest in the bus network in order to increase transit ridership, increase mode share and support The City Plan.

The City Plan and the Mass Transit Plan envisions a vibrant and prosperous city of two million people with half of future population growth occurring in established areas. The foundation of Edmonton as a future urbanized city is an evolved mass transit network which supports nodes and corridors. In turn, the nodes and corridors provide the necessary urban structure to direct future investment and manage ongoing change. Ultimately, these combine to support greater community equity, opportunity and connectedness. With attention towards The City Plan

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objectives, the bus network supports a convenient, reliable, safe and fast transit experience. As the city has just reached a population milestone of one million residents, improving transit service is a key component to support population growth to 1.25 million and beyond, providing more convenient links to support the proposed 15-minute districts as outlined in The City Plan. Additional planning work is continuing to implement the Mass Transit Network to support The City Plan. This will include information regarding service types and corridor level improvements.

Building on the foundation of the Transit Strategy and The City Plan, ETS has adapted service levels and routing to reflect new data and feedback from community members since the launch of the new transit network in April 2021. A comprehensive list of recent changes in response to public feedback is outlined in Attachment 1.

2022 Annual Transit Service Plan

The 2022 Annual Transit Service Plan (Attachment 2) highlights the initiatives and service changes underway for 2022. This document provides a status update of recent milestones and outlines the upcoming and proposed goals and anticipated deliverables during the upcoming year. The Annual Service Plan highlights the ambitious initiatives and service improvements that are underway, in line with the Transit Strategy. As a fully integrated public service, ETS serves a wide variety of riders from all areas of the city, and in doing so, is continually improving the nature of the service provided. With the newly implemented bus network, on demand service, ongoing safety and security improvements, LRT upgrades, and various technology advancements, ETS is enhancing the transit experience to continue to provide a convenient, reliable and safe transit journey.

Conventional Bus Service Improvements

Conventional bus service adjustments in 2022 work with current resources such as fleet and approved budget. While the adjustment in service hours may be limited, there are opportunities to better match service levels with community demand. Planned service changes in 2022 include refining schedules to match school calendars and changing seasonal travel patterns, including a new school special for Dr. Anne Anderson School from Allard, Cavanagh and Summerside neighborhoods. Route refinements, such as deviations to accommodate construction and the movement of timing points are included as well and further outlined in Attachment 2.

ETS is also planning public engagement for Blackburne, Blackmud Creek, MacEwan and Westview Village neighborhoods. This public engagement will focus on navigating the tradeoffs associated with some of the service improvements and route changes under consideration.

ETS is reviewing new timing and layover points throughout 2022 and relocating some timing points strategically to other locations where feasible to address recent concerns. In the new network, most routes are more direct with timing points along arterial roadways. This has resulted in some concerns from Edmontonians about buses blocking the curb lane on a busy roadway. As a result, several locations identified will be investigated for relocation to address recent concerns and mitigate operational impacts.

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Evaluating lower performing routes and reallocating those resources for higher performing routes is expected to begin in 2023, once the impacts of COVID-19 have further stabilized and there is sufficient data from the Bus Network Redesign implementation in April 2021.

On Demand Transit Service Improvements

ETS is also making improvements to On Demand Transit in Edmonton by using existing capacity in areas where the service is currently underused. New or improved on demand service is being added to the following areas in 2022:

- In the southeast: The Hills at Charlesworth community to Mill Woods Transit Centre (started February 2022)
- In the southwest: Glenridding Ravine community to Century Park and Leger Transit Centres in April 2022.
- In the north: North Chambery and North Elsinore communities to Eaux Claires Transit Centre, Klarvatten community to Eaux Claires Transit Centre, and Balwin community to Coliseum and Belvedere Transit Centres in April 2022.
- In the west: Stillwater and Uplands communities to Lewis Farms Transit Centre in April 2022.

ETS is also considering expansion of on demand service into the following areas, subject to further review and available capacity:

- In the southeast: Tamarack community
- In the southwest: Paisley community
- In the north: Edmonton Remand Centre (including the Northwest Police Campus and Edmonton Young Offender Centre), Albany community and portions of Canossa and Rapperswill communities, and Alberta Avenue and Parkdale communities
- In the west: Winterburn Industrial community

Lastly, ETS is reviewing weekend service hours for on demand seniors connections, to explore the feasibility of extending hours within the existing budget. This may include implementing changes on a trial basis, to measure demand and usage to inform future changes.

In Fall 2022, Administration will be presenting the evaluation of the service delivery model used for On Demand Transit, to inform the 2023-2026 budget deliberations and ongoing delivery of On Demand Transit service.

Future Expansion and Bus Rapid Transit Considerations

Administration is developing future transit service improvement plans for the upcoming 2023-2026 four-year budget deliberations. To expand conventional bus service to respond to growth, there is an opportunity related to the launch of Valley Line Southeast LRT service. Completion of currently planned and funded LRT lines and extensions provides the opportunity to replace bus routes that provide parallel service to a future LRT line. After the Valley Line opens

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between Downtown and Mill Woods, there is an opportunity to repurpose buses to support new growth for the next two to four years. This will allow service expansion into new areas, improve frequency along busy corridors such as major cross-town corridors or support the initial stage of Bus Rapid Transit Service along Terwillegar Drive to support the future Mass Transit Network. Should Council direct adding these conventional bus service hours, Administration would present these for Council's consideration as a part of the 2023-2026 budget process and discussion. Tax-levy funding would be required to support the expanded conventional bus service, as the precursor bus service is currently funded on a one-time basis from the LRT reserve

Potential bus network service improvements include:

- 82 Street - Providing Weekday evening, Saturday evening and Sunday service on Route 123.
- Chappelle - Providing late night service to Route 719.
- Rosenthal - Providing late evening and weekend service to Route 922.
- 132 Avenue - extending Route 106 to Northgate Transit Centre to address concerns with transferring at 97 Street.
- Additional service on Crosstown Routes 53, 54 and 56 to support build-out of the mass transit network.

Hours will also be invested in community routes to improve service for seniors. Most community routes only have midday service ending around 4 p.m. and many seniors have requested later service. In addition, operators of seniors facilities have noted that midday only service can be a barrier to recruitment and retention of employees who can have early morning or late night shifts. As a result, afternoon and early evening service (including weekends) is proposed for:

- Londonderry to Northgate on Route 128 - improved transportation for essential workers at St. Michael's Extended Care and Londonderry Village.
- Bonnie Doon and Holyrood area on Route 524 - this has been the community route with the highest ridership.
- Meadowlark and 156 Street on Route 924 - additional service span to provide coverage where service was removed for LRT construction.

The full list of potential bus network improvements is included in Attachment 3.

There are also opportunities to expand On Demand Transit if additional resources become available. These areas include:

- Reducing walk distances for areas that have a significant number of residences beyond 600 metre walking distance to the nearest stop and are operationally feasible to serve. Areas such as Albany, Canossa, Clover Bar, Westbrook Estates, Rhatigan Ridge, Laurier Heights, Oleskiw, Aldergrove, Maple, and Rapperswill, The Orchards at Ellerslie.
- Connecting more people to jobs by serving significant industrial areas such as Winterburn Industrial Area, Kinokamau Plains, and Edmonton Energy and Technology

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Park. Many of these areas lack sidewalks and transit stop infrastructure so coordination with capital profiles that fund active transportation connectivity is required.

Should Council direct the additional On Demand Transit service, Administration would perform further analysis and bring back this item for Council's discussion during the 2023-2026 budget process.

The proposed mass transit network to support 1.25 million people is anticipated to include bus-based mass transit including semi-exclusive, limited stop rapid and frequent routes. While semi-exclusive corridors will eventually be designed to include a dedicated transit running way, transit along some of the corridors can be enhanced in the interim through operational measures to provide a higher level of transit service. As outlined in the Urban Planning and Economy report UPE00491 Mobility Network Assessment presented at Urban Planning Committee on February 15, 2022, additional transit priority measures will be required to support the development of the corridor and evolution towards future bus rapid transit. These measures will work towards the creation of a convenient, reliable, safe and fast transit experience for Edmontonians while supporting the ongoing development of the nodes and corridors.

The establishment of transit signal priorities in the near term is a step in the evolution to bus rapid transit. Candidate corridors which have been identified for enhanced service levels/bus rapid transit to support the 1.25 million mass transit network include:

- Bus rapid transit on 97 Street from Northgate Transit Centre to Downtown, with the additional possibility of connecting Eaux Claires Transit Centre. This corridor was identified as a priority in the Mobility Network Assessment and there are already multiple rapid routes on the corridor. Service on the corridor can be upgraded as transit priority measures are constructed and ridership increases.
- Bus rapid transit along Gateway Boulevard/Calgary Trail. Capital Line LRT was overcapacity prior to the pandemic. As ridership recovers and the LRT is extended south, bus rapid transit is needed to provide additional capacity from south Edmonton. Service could begin operating in mixed traffic until dedicated transit lanes are built.
- Bus rapid transit From West Edmonton Mall connecting South Campus, University, Whyte Avenue and the Bonnie Doon Valley Line LRT Stop. Bus rapid transit is needed to connect west end transit users to the south end of the innovation corridor / University campuses and link to the Capital and Valley Line LRT.

To further accommodate bus network growth, Administration is also pursuing an interim storage facility, as discussed in the Integrated Infrastructure Services report IIS00416 ETS Fleet Storage and Maintenance Facility Project.

Budget/Financial

Should Council choose to implement the temporary Valley Line precursor conventional bus service hours into the network as new, permanent growth service hours would require an ongoing, annual budget increase of \$6.2M funded through tax levy. This would provide 69,600

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annual platform hours, including approximately 48 transit operator FTEs to operate these service hours. Currently, the precursor service hours are funded through the LRT Reserve on a one-time basis as the service currently provides residents of southeast Edmonton with connection to their destinations until the Valley Line Southeast LRT service begins. Funding from the LRT Reserve would not be available for funding ongoing conventional bus service as it does not fall within the scope of the reserve and is not intended to fund ongoing conventional bus service.

Service level enhancements for On Demand Transit can be further refined based on Council feedback.

Additional conventional bus service hours on priority routes, should Council decide to make service hours currently temporarily funded for Valley Line precursor bus service permanently reallocated to the network once LRT service commences, and service level enhancements for On Demand Transit can be brought back for Council's consideration as a part of the 2023-2026 budget deliberation process.

In addition to budget considerations, there are several funding programs available through the Government of Canada. In 2021, several transit-related national funding announcements were made, including:

Federal Zero Emissions Transit Fund

- \$2.75B over next five years to support bus fleet electrification and supporting infrastructure, including charging infrastructure and facility upgrades. Program's primary focus appears to be Zero Emissions Bus (ZEB) procurement

Federal Permanent Transit Fund

- Permanent measure of \$3B annually beginning in 2026/2027 to support public transit initiatives. Program currently in development; allocation method unknown.

Canada Community Building Fund (formerly federal Gas Tax Fund)

- Permanent measure currently at \$2.2B annually, allocated to municipalities on a per capita basis; funding grows incrementally with inflation (2% indexing) and population growth.

Local Government Fiscal Framework (LGFF)

- To replace MSI in 2024/25 when the program ends, the provincially legislated LGFF will provide annual funding based on a revenue sharing formula that will increase at half the rate of provincial revenues. In the first year, the City's allocation is estimated to be approximately \$150M, which is a significant decrease when compared to previous funding levels under MSI.

The federal government also announced in February 2022, operating relief funding for public transit revenue gaps related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding is contingent on provincial matched funding and provincial governments speeding up action to improve housing supply. Although transit ridership is at its highest level of recovery since the start of the pandemic, at 69

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per cent of normal, revenue pressures continue to impact the operating budget. Transit fare revenue related to ridership is a significant source of revenue for the City. Administration has not been advised of any forthcoming relief funding support through this federal announcement.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

As a relationship-based City, Administration listens and learns from the community in many ways: research, meetings with stakeholders (Edmontonians, businesses, organizations, etc), through partnerships, social media, public engagement, petitions, 311 inquiries and other forms of community conversation and connections. ETS welcomes public feedback as this helps provide guidance for setting priorities for future service enhancements. Community engagement is currently being planned for Westview Village and parts of Heritage Valley to help with decision making where trade-offs may be needed to make service improvements.

GBA+

The previous bus network had several areas of no service or peak only service; the current bus network is based on servicing more geographical areas city-wide, with more service options during evenings and weekends on most of the routes.

ETS is committed to making adjustments and improvements where feasible. Requests for service changes are balanced with the service delivery model of the new network in order to minimize negative impacts on other users. ETS has already made several changes to accommodate equity-seeking users, and will continue exploring more opportunities as this helps support ridership recovery. Most of the recent service improvements to support GBA+ are improved service on both community routes and on demand service. In addition, proposed service improvements on existing routes during the off-peak times align with the travel patterns of women and seniors.

The transit network has historically emphasized travel to and from central Edmonton (Downtown and post-secondary institutions) during peak commuting times. This service may not be well aligned to the travel patterns of Edmontonians who work outside the core and have shifts that do not coincide with peak times. Women tend to make more short distance trips during the midday and off-peak hours when there is less frequent transit service. Seniors who rely on community transit service, both conventional and on demand, have found it difficult to go out in the evenings as most service ends at 4 p.m. The proposed service improvements during off-peak time periods will make transit more accessible for these groups who have historically been underserved by transit. The deployment of an inner-city frequent network has resulted in improved service and shorter wait times during most time periods, which helps address concerns for transit users in equity seeking areas.

Administration is undertaking an equity analysis to review the network to identify further opportunities for improvement to support future service plans and further support Edmontonians with their mobility options. The analysis will identify key opportunities for further improvement to ensure our transit service planning processes embed equity considerations.

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Administration will evaluate how to better serve equity-seeking people and communities within our available transit service resources.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Bus Network Feedback Adjustments
2. 2021/2022 Annual Service Plan
3. Proposed Conventional Service Improvements by Ward