

ON DEMAND TRANSIT - SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

RECOMMENDATION

That the October 11, 2022, City Operations report CO01320, be received for information.

Requested Council Action	Information only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work as we achieve our strategic goals.	Urban Places		
City Plan Values	ACCESS.		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	A community of communities	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Mobility Network
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transit Service Policy C539A and Transit Service Standards Procedures 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CR_6788, Urban Planning Committee, November 19, 2019 CR_7812, Urban Planning Committee, February 25, 2020 IIS00416, Urban Planning Committee, February 15, 2022 and City Council, February 22, 2022 		

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the March 9/11, 2020, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

3. That the transition of the contracted services to a public service model be examined within 2 years of commencement of service, including 6 month reviews in alignment with the Bus Network Redesign reporting.

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Executive Summary

- On Demand Transit service was added to the ETS network in April 2021 as part of the Bus Network Redesign (BNR). During the Supplementary Operating Budget Adjustments in spring 2020, City Council approved one-time interim funding to provide On Demand Transit service for 24 months through a contracted service model. On Demand Transit service was intended to address transit needs in communities that did not meet service standards for conventional fixed route bus service, encourage transit ridership and connect Edmontonians to transit hubs.
- Should capital funding, construction and delivery proceed for the new transit garage facility, as outlined in the ETS Fleet Storage and Maintenance Facility Strategy, a direct public service delivery model for On Demand Transit could be accommodated in 2027 (earliest possible completion). Due to facility constraints and no ability to safely store and maintain vehicles, transitioning the delivery of On Demand Transit to a direct public service delivery model cannot be contemplated until a new transit garage facility is operational.
- On Demand Transit service use is growing system-wide and has contributed to transit ridership recovery.
- By reviewing efficiencies across the service, Administration has been able to bring On Demand Transit service to new neighbourhoods since its launch, within the existing budgeted service hours.

REPORT

On Demand Transit service was designed primarily to serve as a first kilometre / last kilometre solution, connecting neighbourhoods and seniors' residences that are not directly served by the conventional network. The scope of the service is intended to connect riders to transit hubs in areas that do not meet the service standards set out in Transit Service Policy - C539A for conventional bus service. On Demand Transit provides adaptable, cost effective access to transit by using smaller buses and flexible, demand responsive routing. On Demand Transit can act as "bridge service" in areas that have reduced ridership by providing transit service in communities that do not yet meet policy thresholds (e.g. population density, ridership, etc.) for conventional bus service.

On Demand Transit was designed with extensive input from City Council and Edmontonians and launched at the same time as the Bus Network Redesign in April 2021. On Demand Transit service is delivered through a third-party contract with an external supplier. This contract includes the operations and maintenance of vehicles as well as a technology solution for trip booking. On Demand Transit service was initially introduced to 37 neighbourhoods and 16 large seniors' residences. Following implementation, 14 additional neighbourhoods have been added to the service, in response to public feedback — which was achieved by re-allocating resources within the existing budget by optimizing resources and finding efficiencies in service delivery.

To book a trip, riders can phone the call centre, use the website, use an On Demand Transit service phone in a transit hub, book with an On Demand Transit service operator, or book through the Edmonton On Demand Transit app. On Demand Transit neighbourhood service operates from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. on weekdays, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturdays and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

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on Sundays and holidays, while seniors-oriented services operate from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. Both neighbourhood and seniors types of services operate seven days a week.

ETS has assessed detailed service performance for the On Demand Transit service for the months of September 2021 and May 2022. Ridership in September 2021 was selected as a starting point, as the service had been in operation for four months allowing passengers to start establishing travel habits. At this time, schools and workplaces were increasingly transitioning to a hybrid model after COVID-19 vaccines became available. May 2022 was selected because 11 neighbourhoods were added to On Demand Transit during the April 2022 service change, allowing for initial operational insights from the new communities being served.

Boardings by Neighbourhood Group

During September 2021, On Demand Transit saw approximately 21,000 trips across the system, increasing to 32,000 during May 2022. It is projected demand will increase to approximately 40,000 trips per month by the end of the year.

The same communities consistently had the highest monthly ridership in both September 2021 and May 2022:

- Avonmore-Kenilworth;
- Big Lake - Northwest Industrial;
- Cavanagh;
- Edgemont; and
- Westridge/Rio Terrace/Quesnell Heights.

Also of note, ridership doubled in the community of Keswick during this same time period. Meanwhile, On Demand Transit service locations tailored to seniors' residences have increased during this time, but continue to experience lower monthly ridership when compared to the general On Demand Transit serving neighbourhoods. These services provided 516 monthly trips during September 2021, increasing to 665 during May 2022. Monthly totals are illustrated in Attachment 1.

Average Wait Times

A key benefit that On Demand Transit provides to riders is a decrease in wait time to access service when compared to previous conventional bus service. Wait time for On Demand Transit service ranged between five to 14 minutes, with an average wait time of seven minutes in September 2021. The average wait time increased to 10 minutes in May 2022, mainly due to ridership growth and response in communities seen in Keswick. Comparatively, conventional service wait times ranged from 10 to 30 minutes on most routes during most time periods. Average wait times by neighbourhood are illustrated in Attachment 1.

Public Service Delivery Model

To consider a public service delivery model, Administration has identified facility, fleet maintenance, workforce and budget considerations. There are currently 57 buses in the On Demand Transit Service fleet owned by the third-party contractor. They are responsible for customer support, performance reporting, service planning, operations, vehicle maintenance and

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storage. A separate third-party contractor is responsible for the technology solution for trip booking. ETS provides oversight by defining service design requirements and performing contract management. On Demand Transit Service delivered by a third-party allows for swift implementation of the service without the required infrastructure, assets and resources.

In order to deliver the service itself, Administration would need to procure vehicles through capital investment. To safely operate, maintain and store the On Demand Transit fleet, additional transit garage facility capacity would also be required. As discussed at the February 15, 2022, Urban Planning Committee meeting, Integrated Infrastructure Services report IIS00416 - ETS Fleet Storage and Maintenance Facility Project, ETS garages are operating at full capacity and do not currently have the ability to accommodate that level of growth.

On February 22, 2022, City Council approved an ETS Fleet Storage and Maintenance Facility Strategy, which will guide the renewal and development of existing and future ETS fleet storage and maintenance facilities to address the growth needs of the fleet over the next 20 years. The first priority of the strategy is to acquire land, develop, and deliver a new transit garage facility during the 2023-2036 budget cycle, with operations starting in 2027. The new garage will create capacity and allow for the electrification of the fleet, and provide fleet flexibility and efficiency across the facility and bus network. Additional infrastructure is needed to ensure buses can be maintained and supported through the growth of the fleet. As such, Administration does not recommend expanding the transit fleet or bringing the On Demand Transit fleet in-house until fleet storage and maintenance capacity can be expanded through the Strategy.

Administration is bringing forward a capital profile for discussion during the 2023-2026 budget deliberations to proceed to the planning and design stage of the new transit garage, as outlined in the Strategy. Administration is exploring federal funding opportunities to help fund a portion of the cost of the transit garage. The new facility is planned to accommodate growth in conventional transit service hours for the ETS bus network, as well as potentially bringing On Demand Transit service in-house to a public service delivery model.

In addition to facility-related needs, transitioning to a public service delivery model would require a workforce plan, including identifying the types of staff positions needed to directly deliver the service, as well as resources required throughout Administration to onboard and support new positions on an ongoing basis.

From a budget perspective, there would be both capital and operating costs associated with transitioning to a public service delivery model. Capital budget items relate to procuring vehicles and securing operations and maintenance facility capacity. Operating budget items relate to adding FTEs for staff positions, additional technology and shared service support, as well as operations and maintenance costs for service delivery.

Next Steps

Further optimization of On Demand Transit service zones and vehicle allocation will likely result in a trade-off between an increase in passenger wait times and increased operating efficiency. For example, further expansion of On Demand Transit into other neighbourhoods, within existing resources, may result in less down time for On Demand Transit buses, but the increased ridership demands may stretch resources resulting in increased wait times for riders. All service

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zones are experiencing average wait times within On Demand Transit service standards and below 30 minutes (pre-bus network redesign conventional service frequency).

There may be opportunities to optimize existing On Demand Transit service vehicles for seniors' residences to also complete trips in nearby On Demand Transit neighbourhood zones during periods of low demand.

As ridership in specific areas grows, there will be a need to deploy additional resources and vehicles to keep pace with increasing demand. Furthermore, when On Demand Transit ridership in a given neighbourhood meets or exceeds ridership thresholds for conventional bus service, as outlined in Policy C539A, that neighbourhood's transit service could potentially be transitioned to conventional bus service. This transition would result in surplus On Demand Transit hours, which could then be allocated to other neighbourhoods to improve performance, or simply reduced to realize cost savings.

In the future, other opportunities that can be explored include how On Demand Transit service aligns with paratransit service and how service standards for On Demand Transit service align with conventional transit service standards.

Budget/Financial Implications

In Spring 2020, Council approved \$10.3 million in operating funding annually for two years for On Demand Transit as part of the Bus Network Redesign. An unfunded service package to continue providing On Demand Transit service will be brought forward for consideration during the 2023-2026 budget process.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

On Demand Transit rider feedback was collected through the trip booking app and ETS' monthly customer satisfaction survey. Riders who book a trip through the app can rate their trip out of a score of 5 and provide written comments about their experience. The average customer satisfaction rating is 4.8 out of 5. Comments provided through the app have focused on operator conduct (e.g. driving, interactions, compliments), requests for additional stop locations within On Demand Transit zones, wait times and accuracy of the estimated time of arrival feature within the booking app.

From September 2021 to June 2022, 106 respondents in ETS' monthly customer satisfaction survey indicated they used On Demand Transit. Non-work trips, particularly visiting friends and family, were identified as the top trip purpose by 25 per cent of respondents followed by shopping (19 per cent) and work trips (18 per cent). The highest selected primary reason for using transit among On Demand Transit riders is affordability (21 per cent) followed by being the only means of transportation (12 per cent) and comfort (12 per cent). Overall satisfaction with the On Demand Transit service is documented at 80 per cent, which is comparable with transit riders on all ETS services. The highest rated service categories are adequate shelters at transfer locations (85 per cent), ability to find information to complete a trip (83 per cent) and travel time (83 per cent). Service categories that received the lowest customer satisfaction among On Demand

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Transit riders were availability of benches and shelters (75 per cent), transfer time to other ETS services (76 per cent) and vehicle cleanliness (77 per cent).

While most passengers expressed satisfaction with On Demand Transit Service, ETS has received concerns that seniors and younger Edmontonians have been facing barriers accessing and booking trips if they do not have a cellphone. In response, phones were installed in the Transit Centres that serve On Demand Transit in order to provide a direct line to the On Demand call centre. Administration has also heard concerns about On Demand Transit service locations and requests for On Demand Transit service to nearby amenities outside of transit hubs, which is beyond the intended scope of the service design. For On Demand Transit serving seniors' residences, Administration has received requests for expanded hours of operation, in alignment with the On Demand Transit neighbourhood hours of operation.

GBA+

Application of a GBA+ was used to shape how On Demand Transit was designed and delivered. Administration found that accessibility, safety and comfort were key to attracting riders to the service. As such, the City ensured safety standards and fleet specifications met or exceeded conventional transit standards. For example, the vehicles are accessible and are designed to ensure safety seats for children could be used (a first in Canada), phones are installed at key transit locations for those without access to mobile devices and the contractor provides comprehensive orientation and training for all On Demand Transit operators.

Through the Bus Network Redesign planning process, additional engagement was conducted for On Demand Transit with targeted workshops in affected neighbourhoods. Respondents could also provide their mode choice, age, gender, work status and geography via an online survey. Indigenous people, people of colour, persons with disabilities, as well as the intersectionality of these identity factors were considered in the design of On Demand Transit.

Compared to the previous conventional transit service prior to the Bus Network Redesign that operated every 30 to 60 minutes with, at times, a more limited span of service (e.g. no evening or weekend service), On Demand Transit provides a significant increase in the access to transit service, which is particularly beneficial for women. Women are more likely to take public transit during off-peak periods (e.g. middays, evenings), take more localised trips, trip chain (conduct several tasks resulting in multiple stops during a trip) and complete more frequent trips. With the expanded service span, reduced wait times and localised service design, On Demand Transit Service better meets the needs of women when compared to the previously provided conventional transit service in lower ridership areas. Operational changes have been made such as adding a stop as a response to safety concerns.

ATTACHMENT

1. On Demand Data Analysis