

BUS SERVICE FOR YOUTH AFTER SCHOOL HOURS - APPROACH AND WORK PLAN

Recommendation

That the August 29, 2023, City Operations report CO01562 be received for information.

Requested Action		Information only	
ConnectEdmonton’s Guiding Principle		ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals	
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.		Climate Resilience	
City Plan Values	ACCESS		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	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">City Policy C539A - Transit Service Policy		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">CO01192 Ride Transit and Leisure Access Programs, Executive Committee, October 26, 2022CO01450 Transit Network Equity Analysis, Urban Planning Committee, November 22, 2022		

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the October 26, 2022 Executive Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

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“That Administration return to Committee with a report outlining an approach and work plan to establish a pilot program for providing bus service for youth after school hours to access recreation centres.”

Executive Summary

- Edmonton Transit Service (ETS) currently provides discounted fare products and travel training to students, and designs bus routes to transport junior and senior high school students to schools.
- ETS analyzed conventional transit routes to assess proximity to recreational centres and found that most recreation centres, including privately operated locations, are served by existing transit services. Most students have transit routes near their schools travelling directly to a recreation centre or to a nearby transit centre with one transfer to a recreation centre.
- Two options for establishing a pilot program are available for Council's consideration. The first option involves building more awareness and training about existing services without additional specialized charter resources and does not require additional funding. The second option creates a customized charter bus service to transport students from participating schools to recreation centres. This would be an enhanced service level and would compete with bus resources allocated for peak conventional service.

REPORT

City Council sets the direction for transit service as outlined with City Policy C539A - Transit Service Policy and allocates the capital and operating budgets. The associated Transit Service Standards Procedures outlines how factors for introducing new service are prioritized.

In September 2023, off-peak bus service hours will increase by 500 hours per week, which will bring the transit fleet to maximum capacity. Opportunities for increasing transit service are outlined in the August 29, 2023, City Operations report CO01337, Edmonton Transit Service in Newer Developing/Developed Communities.

Supporting youth to use public transit can encourage ridership behaviours that extend into adulthood, helping the City meet its transportation mode shift targets from private vehicles towards transit and active modes, as outlined in The City Plan. Youth, which are defined as persons 24 years and under, represent more than 40 per cent of fare revenue and are an important cohort of riders. ETS conducts an online monthly transit rider satisfaction survey with 250 riders per month. From January to June 2023, over 250 youth ages 15-24 participated in the monthly surveys. According to data from ETS monthly rider satisfaction surveys, youth riders are more likely to rely on transit as their primary transportation mode to travel to school, work and recreational activities. In addition to currently available discounted fare products and services for students, ETS is implementing several strategies to better support youth riders, including expanding school outreach programs and creating trip plan tools.

In late August and early September every year, ETS provides information booths and travel training at major post-secondary institutions as part of their week of welcome and orientation events, and also at various transit centres to help educate new riders so they feel more comfortable using transit. In May and June 2023, ETS expanded travel training outreach to two

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elementary schools as part of a pilot to help prepare Grade six students to take transit for the following school year. ETS also partnered with the Edmonton Public Library to deliver the “Next Stop Storytime with ETS” program to engage with young riders and their parents. ETS will further expand these programs in the 2023-2024 school year.

Administration completed a review of transit service to 59 major private and City-owned recreation facilities and found that most (56) recreation centres were served by conventional service (bus or LRT), with 29 of those served by frequent bus routes or LRT. A list of routes for each recreation facility are available online and in Attachment 1.

Proposed Work Plan

Administration has developed two options for a pilot to provide youth with after hours transportation support to access recreation service. The first option is to prioritize increasing service levels and awareness of existing services without charter services, and to increase travel training support to youth to access conventional transit service. The second option is to create a charter bus support plan. Each option has benefits and trade-offs.

Option One - Provide Travel Training Support

This option would prioritize increasing service levels and awareness of existing services without specialized charter buses. Administration would create a student-focused travel training program to support students from participating schools to access recreation opportunities after school by using conventional transit service. The program would address the specific needs identified by the schools and would include activities such as developing customized trip plans, providing in-person support and identifying opportunities for transit use beyond recreation. Using feedback from the student training sessions and assessing ridership data, if warranted, Administration would look for opportunities to add trips to existing routes to help address any crowding issues as part of service schedule changes. One trade-off, compared to option two, is conventional routes may not be as direct as charter service. However, this option would come at a lower cost and could reach more youth, schools and recreation centres. In this option, Administration could also explore offering youth participants additional fare support to access transit. This could increase the number of participants and encourage more ridership.

Option Two - Charter Bus Support Plan

This option involves creating a customized charter bus service plan to transport students from participating schools to recreation centres. Charter bus service provides flexibility to respond to changes in travel demand and any schedule changes required by recreation service providers. In this scenario, ETS would focus on the most socially vulnerable areas, as identified in a social vulnerability index developed by Administration. A potential challenge with this option is the limited number of buses available in the afternoon peak period, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. This limitation means only a small number of buses would be available for the pilot. It is anticipated the service will be required for five days a week for up to 40 weeks. If implemented, it would consistently compete with peak conventional bus service, potentially limiting other transit service expansion opportunities. This option may also duplicate existing transit service, as most students

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have transit routes near their schools travelling directly to a recreation centre or to a nearby transit centre with one transfer to a recreation centre.

Budget/Financial Implications

Option one would require adding two temporary full-time equivalents to deliver enhanced travel training in the schools and would not require additional operating budget for the pilot period. Any additional transit service needs highlighted as a result of this program would be brought forward in the same manner as the opportunities highlighted in the August 31, 2023 City Operations report CO01337, Edmonton Transit Service In Newer Developing/Developed Communities.

Implementation of option two would be an enhanced level of service, without a corresponding funding source, and would therefore require a budget increase or reallocation of resources from existing areas. It would provide service from approximately 10 schools to the nearest recreation centre, contingent on fleet availability. It is anticipated the service will be required for regular school days and approximately 40 weeks, totalling approximately 4,300 hours per year. The one-time operating budget required to support this pilot program is approximately \$500,000 in direct operating costs.

Community Insight

Community engagement has not been conducted for this report. External organizations have shared their interest in having increased transit service and/or custom charter service which would increase accessibility for their recreation programs.

GBA+

When making transit network decisions, ETS considers community feedback, alignment with Policy C539A and resource availability. However, some equity-seeking groups may have difficulty in providing feedback, engaging or otherwise communicating their needs for a variety of reasons outside of their control. As a result, the transit needs of these equity seeking communities may not be fully captured when making transit network decisions.

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-suited to the travel patterns of Edmontonians who work outside the downtown core and have shifts that do not coincide with peak times.

Providing additional transit service during peak and off-peak time periods helps support activities for youth and other riders who rely on transit as their primary mode of transportation. Increasing frequency on busy routes and expanding service during off-peak time periods would provide broader benefits to those who have fewer mobility options, such as students with part-time jobs who require travel during evenings and weekends.

A preliminary review of Edmonton's transit network with an equity lens was presented to Urban Planning Committee in report CO01450 Transit Network Equity Analysis on November 22, 2022. Work is underway to further review the network in alignment with GBA+ principles. This work aims to identify equity-seeking populations who may not be receiving adequate transit service to

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meet their needs, remove barriers that would lead to improved transit service and continually work towards an equitable transit network that enables mobility for all Edmontonians. While areas of households with a lower income, areas with a higher level of Indigenous and senior populations were initially reviewed, ETS will conduct a more comprehensive review of equity-seeking groups in 2023 to determine where additional service improvements or policy changes would help reduce barriers and serve more riders.

Attachments

1. Bus Service for Recreation Facilities