

2016 Transit Service Reallocation Plan

Recommendation:

That the April 13, 2016, City Operations report CR_3449, be received for information.

Report Summary

This report provides an update on the Edmonton Transit System's approach to address capacity and service needs by reallocating approximately 50,000 service hours per year from underperforming routes. By improving services on higher-use corridors and routes, the Edmonton Transit System expects to not only offset but attract more ridership than the existing underperforming services. As a result, the reallocation is expected to contribute towards the goal of 105 rides per capita by 2018.

Report

Background

The approved 2016-2018 Operating Budget does not provide funding for additional service hours. Therefore, the Edmonton Transit System has committed to addressing service issues and growth requirements through the reallocation of service from routes that do not meet the performance standards set in Policy C539.

The February 19, 2016, City Auditor's report, "Edmonton Transit System Bus and Light Rail Transit Review", states: "Our analysis shows that from 2012 to 2015 on-time performance has declined and the Edmonton Transit System has not been able to achieve the performance standards set out in Policy C539." The Edmonton Transit System is committed to improving the reliability of the existing service before expanding to new services. Reallocating service hours will improve on-time performance and address overcrowding with more frequent service.

System Performance Review

The Edmonton Transit System conducts an annual System Performance Review using passenger boarding and alighting data collected over the previous six months. The guidelines for this review are established by City Policy C539 Transit Service Standards (Attachment 1), which identifies:

- Parameters for the level of service that should be provided
- Route performance measures used to identify potentially under-performing and over-performing services
- Guidelines for new service implementation, walking distances to transit service and time periods of operation

Findings of the System Performance Review are used to develop the Edmonton Transit System Annual Plan which includes the following categories:

- Schedule Adherence (to address on-time performance)
- More Frequent Service (to address overcrowding)
- Reduced Travel Time (expanded express service and crosstown service)
- Expanded Service Hours (new peak/off-peak service to developing neighborhoods)
- Late Night and Owl Service

Based on the resources available, major service changes are typically implemented in September of each year.

In 2015, three Edmonton Transit System Annual Plans were developed to coincide with the City's new three year operating budget cycle. The plans identified growth needs and service improvements of approximately 390,000 service hours (an 18 per cent increase over the existing 2,200,000 annual service hours) over the next three years.

Given the present budget constraints, some service improvements identified in the plans could be addressed through the reallocation of 50,000 service hours per year from under-performing routes.

Service Reallocation

Policy C539 Transit Service Standards sets the following route performance standards for minimum ridership thresholds:

- Weekday peak periods: 30 passenger boardings per hour
- Weekday peak periods (Industrial routes): 20 passenger boardings per hour
- Weekday off-peak periods: 15 passenger boardings per hour
- Saturday/Sunday: 15 passenger boardings per hour
- Late Night and Owl: 15 passenger boardings per hour
- Community Bus Routes (seniors): 10 passenger boardings per hour.

These standards flag potentially under-utilized service. The Edmonton Transit System then completes a 'route-by-route' and 'trip-by-trip' review of passenger boardings in order to verify routes that do not meet minimum performance standards. Approximately 175,000 annual service hours (about eight per cent of regular services) currently fall below the minimum ridership thresholds.

For the 2016 reallocation plan, the Edmonton Transit System targeted services that fall below 15 passenger boardings per hour equating to 110,000 annual service hours. In comparison, the system-wide average is 41 passenger boardings per hour.

This initial screening of under-performing service was followed up by a detailed feasibility analysis, taking into account several additional factors such as:

- Operational feasibility of cancellation (impacts of cancellations on the schedules of other routes)
- Established service versus newly implemented service (new services need time to develop a ridership base)
- Community Bus (seniors) routes serve a more vulnerable population and provide service at a lower cost than the Disabled Adult Transit Service

The results of this analysis (Attachment 2) identified 44,000 annual service hours for reallocation, or about two per cent of total Edmonton Transit System service. Reallocation of these hours would result in the partial or full cancellation of under-utilized services well below the City's Transit Service Standards. These hours attract an average of 8 passenger boardings per hour. Ridership would need to increase by 50 to 100 percent in order to reach the minimum performance requirements.

The tax levy subsidy per passenger (Net of direct operating cost minus revenue) on these trips is on average \$9.50 per boarding (compared to a system wide average subsidy of \$1.30 per boarding).

Impact of Service Reductions

These service cancellations would affect:

- 900 weekday passengers (4,500 weekly total)
- 1,400 Saturday passengers
- 1,100 Sunday passengers

In 2014, the Edmonton Transit System had approximately 306,000 weekday passenger boardings, 127,000 Saturday boardings, and 91,000 Sunday boardings.

Some of the reallocation measures would reduce but not completely eliminate trips provided in various time periods. Others would affect an entire time period. The geographic impact of the routes identified for service cancellations by time period is illustrated in Attachment 3.

Removing low performing routes in entire time periods will result in significant negative reaction from customers who use the service. The communities identified below will experience significant impacts as a result of this service reallocation and will have no public transit option during the affected time periods, resulting in difficulty getting to employment or to social/recreational opportunities.

Routes with Significant Impacts

89

No evening/weekend service to Tamarack & south Wild Rose

169

No evening, Saturday morning or Sunday morning service to Canossa, Chamberry and Elsinore

302

No late night or Sunday morning service to Evergreen and Alberta Hospital

303

No midday service to Mistatim Industrial south of 137 Avenue

306

No off-peak service in Maple Ridge and Southeast Industrial

307

Community Bus (seniors) Route. No PM peak service or Sunday service to Grace Garden Court and Gateway Manor

316

Reduced service in Big Lake to hourly frequency (peaks only)

380

No service to Quarry Ridge

Additional Service Reallocation Measures

As part of the System Performance Review, the Edmonton Transit System also identified another 6,000 annual service hours for reallocation by adjusting frequencies based on the actual level of ridership (for example, cancelling some peak trips on routes with declining ridership). When added to the 44,000 annual service hours from underutilized service, the Edmonton Transit System will have a total of 50,000 annual service hours available for service improvements.

Service Improvements

The 50,000 annual service hours made available through this plan will be reallocated primarily to address on-time performance and reliability issues, as well as provide more frequent service on overcrowded routes (Attachment 4).

The Edmonton Transit System has already implemented schedule adherence improvements on Routes 8, 9, 12, 125 and 130. These improvements were implemented in December 2015 and February 2016, and are part of the 2016 service reallocation plan. The initial data and feedback are showing reliability has significantly improved on these routes.

Implementation Alternatives

As described in the 2016-18 Operating Budget, the Edmonton Transit System is planning to reallocate 50,000 service hours in September 2016 to grow ridership per capita and help achieve corporate targets. This would have the greatest impact on addressing on-time performance and overload issues. Conversely, this option would have the greatest impact on affected passengers. Alternatives to fully implementing the reallocation plan in 2016 include:

- Stage the Service Reallocation Plan over three years (20,000 hours in September 2016, 20,000 hours in September 2017, and 10,000 hours in September 2018). This would spread out the impact on affected passengers over a three year period but would delay the implementation of service improvements.
- Defer the Service Reallocation Plan until after the Transit Strategy has been completed. The Edmonton Transit System would continue the usual practice of reallocating up to 10,000 service hours per year. This would limit the ability to address on-time performance and overload issues.

Policy

The Way We Move, Edmonton's Transportation Master Plan:

- Transportation Mode Shift: Public transportation and active transportation are the preferred choice for more people making it possible for the transportation system to move more people more efficiently in fewer vehicles.

Policy C539 Transit Service Standards

Corporate Outcomes

The Transit Service Reallocation Plan addresses service issues identified in the Edmonton Transit System Annual Plan as well as in the February 19, 2016, City Auditor's report through the implementation of service efficiencies. It supports the corporate outcomes of "Edmontonians use public transit and active modes of transportation" and "The City of Edmonton has a resilient financial position".

Corporate Targets:

- Transit ridership (Rides per capita) target: 105 rides per capita by 2018 (was 101 in 2015)
- Journey to work mode (sum of the per cent of survey respondents who select "auto passenger," "transit," "walk," "cycle" or "other" as commute to work mode) target: 25.9 per cent by 2018 (was 24.3 per cent in 2014)

Public Consultation

In addition to meeting with Riverdale residents about their specific concerns, the Edmonton Transit System presented the Service Reallocation approach to the Edmonton Transit System Advisory Board at the February 29, 2016, board meeting.

The Riverdale community was scheduled to speak at the March 29, 2016, Edmonton Transit System Advisory Board meeting.

Extensive public engagement and consultation is currently underway for the Transit Strategy. While not directly connected to the service reallocation approach, the Transit Strategy public engagement process is giving Edmonton residents the opportunity to identify preferences and priorities. Using the Transit Strategy results, the Edmonton Transit System will develop subsequent and specific service delivery strategies.

A comprehensive communications plan will be rolled out to ensure that citizens affected by the service reallocation are aware of the changes well in advance of implementation.

Budget/Financial Implications

This service reallocation approach does not have budget implications for 2016. The approach will result in a more effective usage of existing resources.

Attachments

1. Policy C539 - Transit Service Standards
2. Proposed Service Reductions
3. Service Reductions - Weekday AM Peak
4. Service Improvements - Schedule Adherence to Improve Travel Time Reliability

Others Reviewing this Report

- T. Burge, Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer, and General Manager, Financial and Corporate Services
- R. G. Klassen, General Manager, Sustainable Development