

Late Night Transit Service and Vehicle for Hire System Integration Options

Recommendation:

That the April 24, 2012, Transportation Services report 2012TS7918 be received for information.

Report Summary

This report provides a response to the suggestions submitted by Malmo Community League.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the November 15, 2011, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee meeting the following motion was passed:

1. That Administration provide a further report to Transportation and Infrastructure Committee with recommendations for a phased implementation of a late night transit service, including options for pilot projects with evaluation checkpoints, and options to start with less than comprehensive service.
2. That Administration provide a companion report on opportunities to holistically integrate Late Night transit with the Vehicle for Hire system.

Report

This report provides a response to the transit and vehicle for hire related suggestions made in the report, "A Holistic, Forward-looking, Cautious & Financially Responsible Approach to

Late-Night Transit" which was submitted by the Malmo Community League.

On February 9, 2012, representatives from Edmonton Transit Planning, Sustainable Development, and the Malmo Community League met to discuss the suggestions made in the report. Representatives from the Malmo Community League categorized the suggestions into the following categories:

1. Secured Taxi Stands
2. Circular Routing
3. Enforcement of Fares
4. LRT Maintenance Hours
5. Buses Assigned to Areas
6. A Phone Application to Locate Taxis
7. Taxis Utilizing Transit Zones

A summary of the discussions is detailed in this report.

Secured Taxi Stands

The Malmo Community League suggested that the City develop secured taxi stands. This would be not only for the safety of drivers but would allow for better organization of cab passengers, who may be intoxicated.

Administration Response

Secured taxi stands would require additional personnel at a significant cost. A source of funding for the additional resources would have to be identified, with possible sources being the City, brokers, or drivers through an additional fee to licensing. Taxi operators have the right to refuse passengers if they are too intoxicated or if they feel threatened.

Circular Routing

Malmö Community League suggested that night routes should not end at a hub, but should be circular. The concern was regarding safety, as dropping off passengers at a hub late at night poses a safety concern for local residents.

Administration Response

In the Transportation Services Report 2011TS1410 (Late Night Transit Service) to Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on November 15, 2011, options were presented for bus route networks that follow the mainline routes, ending at transit centres, as well as an option where the bus routes loop through neighbourhoods. There are tradeoffs for each option. With service via the mainline routes, buses would operate in corridors that normally experience higher transit usage. Taxis can provide service from the transit centres, with buses providing more direct service via routes familiar to passengers. Routes looping through neighbourhoods would provide better service to residents, but may require passengers to travel on a long one way loop or have a long walk to their homes. Regardless of the option, there is potential for similar safety concerns for local residents due to passengers walking from transit hubs or bus stops to their homes.

Enforcement of Fares

The Malmö Community League representatives stressed the importance of fare enforcement on buses and suggested the installation of turnstiles at LRT stations, as this would improve security on transit.

Administration Response

From the perspective of bus drivers, fare enforcement must be balanced with the security of the operator, passengers, and other citizens. In situations that could become confrontational, bus operators are trained to avoid situations that could lead to threats to their personal safety. It should also be noted that larger scale fare enforcement on buses by transit security officers during late night hours would be cost-prohibitive.

Transportation Services Report 2011TS8275 (Transit Security Best Practices and Operational Costs) from the October 18, 2011, Transportation Infrastructure Committee meeting, includes a detailed evaluation of installing turnstiles for LRT. The installation of a gated system requires a high cost for installation and operations and is typically preferred and more cost-beneficial in larger-sized municipal rail networks. It would be difficult to implement a gated system on a low floor, street-integrated LRT system, such as the planned Southeast/West LRT lines.

LRT Maintenance Hours

The Malmö Community League posed the suggestion of operating the LRT later on weekends and shortening the LRT maintenance period on weekend. Another suggestion was to shift the maintenance hours later on Friday and Saturday nights. This would allow the LRT to operate later on Friday and Saturday nights, but would also mean starting later on Saturday and Sunday mornings, as demand may be higher at 2 a.m. than at 5:30 a.m. on weekends.

Administration Response

Many shift workers, particularly at hospitals and restaurants, rely on the early morning service on weekends. Shifting LRT schedules on weekends to finish later at night and start later in the morning would compromise service for these employees.

Critical tasks are performed during the weekend maintenance hours. Work requiring power shutdowns are usually scheduled for this period. This covers a wide range of activity including wire replacement, substation maintenance, advertising replacement, light replacement, catenary inspections, and cleaning activity. Track and tunnel drainage maintenance require longer shutdown periods to complete. Also seasonal tasks are completed during this time. During summer, maintenance employees work on track alignment and ballast renewal; in winter, snow removal. There are numerous construction activities that are performed during this period as well. Some examples include connectivity with the North LRT line, refurbishment of various systems and stations, and testing. Shortening the LRT maintenance window on weekends is not a viable option.

For the late night service options developed by Edmonton Transit, LRT service would be replaced by bus operations in order to maintain the opportunity for maintenance work.

Buses Assigned to Areas

The Malmo Community League representatives suggested the idea of having buses pickup at Whyte Avenue and be assigned to areas for drop off, instead of a specific route.

Administration Response

Providing customized transit service would pose the following operational challenges:

- The service only allows for pickups at a centralized location at specific times.
- The driver would assume the responsibility of developing the dropoff route. With more passengers aboard the bus, this task becomes more difficult.
- Trips could vary significantly in travel time, based on the number of passengers traveling on each individual trip, posing challenges to scheduling with both efficiency and reliability. Trips would have to be scheduled assuming a larger number of passengers to ensure the bus would be on-time for subsequent trips. If the number of passengers is low, there will be excessive time in the trip, and the buses could have lengthy layovers after dropping off passengers (inefficient use of resources).

Edmonton Transit has operated a similar concept to this in the form of Dial-A-Bus. Buses departed transit centres at fixed times and served larger areas at night where the demand was low. A number of operational issues were experienced, including difficulty maintaining reliable schedules that resulted in replacement of Dial-A-Bus operations with regular fixed-route, fixed-schedule service.

It should also be noted that this type of customized transit service may be considered to be in direct competition with the taxi industry and may result in decreased taxi service from areas like Whyte Avenue.

A Phone Application to Locate Taxis

The Malmo Community League suggested that a phone application be developed to provide the live location of taxis on a map. The GPS information exists and would be useful for passengers to find a ride.

Administration Response

Currently, customers within major cities across Canada, including Edmonton, can request the first available taxi service by dialling #TAXI using a cell phone. It should be noted that a phone application to locate taxis does not guarantee a ride. With transit routes ending at a transit centre, a passenger could request a pickup at specified times at the transit centre through #TAXI.

A search of iPhone applications reveals that there are various applications for locating a taxi available for the iPhone; however, whether they include Edmonton or are effective in Edmonton is not known. Currently, an application for locating taxis is being developed for San Francisco.

Taxis Utilize Transit Zones

The Malmo Community League suggested that taxis be permitted to utilize transit zones, as it would facilitate passenger access to cabs.

Administration Response

Currently, no vehicles are permitted to stop in transit zones at anytime, as per Traffic Bylaw 5590. This is necessary to ensure that transit zones remain available for buses utilization.

However, taxis are permitted to utilize the forward six metres of a bus stop

while in the process of loading or unloading passengers.

Conclusion

Many of the suggestions posed in “A Holistic, Forward-looking, Cautious & Financially Responsible Approach to Late-Night Transit” would require significant cost investments and some are beyond the mandates of the Transportation Services and Sustainable Development. Edmonton Transit makes the best effort to safely and efficiently provide service to customers with available resources.

Information regarding alternatives for a phased implementation for late night transit service is provided with Report 2012TS7813 Phased Implementation of Late Night Transit Service.

Attachments

1. A Holistic, Forward-looking, Cautious & Financially Responsible Approach to Late-Night Transit (Malmo Community League, November 2011)

Others Reviewing this Report

- R. G. Klassen, General Manager, Sustainable Development