

Late Night Transit Service

(B. Henderson/D. Iveson)

Recommendation:

That the November 15, 2011, Transportation Services report 2011TS1410 be received for information.

Report Summary

This report provides information on questions raised about providing late night public transit service in Edmonton.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the August 23, 2011, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee meeting, Councillors B. Henderson and D. Iveson made the following inquiry:

As the City of Edmonton continues to grow, the need for public transit service in the late night hours also increases. This type of service benefits shift workers, the hospitality industry and others who need a reliable alternative to the automobile in order to go to work and get home safely. While it might not be practical or affordable to operate a full transit service 24 hours each day, there may be an opportunity for a basic service along major transit routes. Thus, I am requesting the Administration provide the following information:

1. What major bus routes would be recommended for late night transit service in order to meet the needs of citizens travelling to and from major City locations such as hospitals, hotels, hospitality sites, etc.?

2. Could buses operate along the current LRT route after the cessation of the regular LRT service at night, including using the LRT Stations as bus terminals and transfer points?
3. What would be a practical frequency of service for a basic late night transit service by buses along the major bus routes and the current LRT route?
4. What would be the cost of this service based on operations for 24 hours each day?
5. What other support or changes would be needed in order to implement the basic late night transit services?

Report

Existing Situation

Currently, Edmonton Transit System (ETS) does not operate buses or LRT during the late night hours. Buses begin operation between 5 a.m. and 6:30 a.m. on weekdays with mainline routes starting up to an hour earlier than neighbourhood routes. At night, buses operate until approximately 1 a.m. to 1:30 a.m. on most mainline and neighbourhood routes. In some of the newer communities, buses finish earlier in the evenings. On weekends, mainline routes begin around 5:30 a.m. with many neighbourhood routes starting between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. During the late night hours on weekends, mainline and some neighbourhood service routes operate as late as 1 a.m. on Saturday nights and midnight on Sunday nights, but service on many neighbourhood routes typically ends by 8 p.m. on weekends.

In recent years, many late night trips have been cancelled due to low passenger volumes (fewer than five

passengers on the last bus). Ridership levels have been observed to taper off significantly after 10 p.m.; hence, it was expected that service performance would be low on late night service.

The following concerns have been raised regarding the lack of late night public transit service or limitations on the existing late night routes:

- Lack of service for workers in outlying industrial, business and commercial areas, particularly between the hours of 11 p.m. and 1 a.m.
- Lack of service in the early morning hours to allow workers who have shift start times before 7 a.m. to use public transit (particularly for longer distance commutes in the early morning hours).
- Service into neighbourhoods does not operate late enough to travel home.
- Lack of a public transit option for hospitality industry workers and patrons to travel home after closing hours of licensed establishments.

Late Night Transit Service in Major Canadian Cities

The following provides a summary of late night public transit service in other major Canadian cities.

Calgary, Winnipeg and Halifax do not have a late night network and bus service ends at approximately 1 a.m.

OC Transpo (Ottawa) has two routes that provide late night service. The major destinations are Downtown, Ottawa International Airport and the VIA rail stations, with both routes traveling predominantly on the Transitway.

TTC (Toronto) currently operates the Blue Night Network which is a grid like network with 24 routes serving the main corridors and also following the subway lines. This network provides service to areas within a 15 minute walking distance to homes. Major trip generators include Pearson Airport, hospitals, entertainment district, post secondary institutions (except York University), and Downtown. Service operates at 30-minute frequency with the exception of Yonge Street route which operates at 15-minute frequency. End points are bus loops and subway stations, with some routes looping through residential neighbourhoods.

Société de transport de Montréal (STM) Night-time service has 23 lines connecting all passengers from Downtown to the suburbs on Montreal Island. Major destinations include the Airport, bus terminals, entertainment district and hospitals. The service frequency was improved from operating hourly to every 45 minutes in July.

Translink in the greater Vancouver area operates 12 buses on its NightBus network and connects passengers from Downtown to various suburbs such as Coquitlam, Burnaby, Richmond and North Vancouver. The buses also connect to transit exchanges, post-secondary institutions and Vancouver Airport. Three routes emulate the SkyTrain and Canada Lines.

Where late night transit service has been established in other major cities in Canada, it generally operates along a limited-core route network.

Edmonton Transit Late Night Service Options

Three late night service options were developed. All networks assumed a service frequency of 30 minutes; however, they varied in the level of coverage and convenience that would be available to late night transit users. All options provided coverage to LRT stations, with the exception of *Option 1* (Coliseum and South Campus are not served).

Subject to details of the operational plan, the late night service would start 30 minutes after the last regular bus departing Downtown in the evening and end 30 minutes before the first regular bus starting in the morning.

Option 1: Spoke Network (Attachment 1) Annual Tax Levy: \$4,211,000 - FTEs: 41

Five bus routes would provide service from Downtown and Old Strathcona to outlying areas of the city. This network would serve the University area, all park and ride sites, most transit centres, hospitals and entertainment areas. Service would be provided via a spoke network with loops at the ends circulating in residential neighbourhoods and industrial areas in all quadrants of the city. One-way loops at the end of routes would provide additional coverage but may require back tracking, depending on rider destination. This network would limit transfers, yet would maintain some timed-transfers in Downtown, Old Strathcona.

Option 2: Transit Centre Base Network (Attachment 2) Annual Tax Levy: \$5,777,000 - FTEs: 52.5

This option would provide service via 11 routes based on a modified existing core network of nine routes, an additional loop connecting Whyte Avenue and

Downtown via Jasper Avenue and a route emulating the northeast portion of the LRT. This network would serve all park and ride sites, most transit centres, hospitals, and entertainment areas. While this network would provide more direct service, it would not travel through outlying residential communities.

Option 3: Combination Network (Attachment 3) Annual Tax Levy: \$7,654,000 FTEs: 70.5

This 12 route option is a combination of the Transit Centre Base Network and the Spoke Network. It provides service to Downtown, all major hospitals, transit centres, post secondary campuses and surrounding residences, industrial areas and entertainment areas. It also provides cross-town service to several areas. The proposed routes travel primarily on major arterials and through several neighbourhoods. This option also provides more coverage in residential and industrial areas, similar to the Spoke Network.

Network maps, detailed descriptions for each option are provided in Attachments 1, 2 and 3. A summary of costs for the options is provided in Attachment 4.

Service Support Issues

For all network options, some operations and logistic issues would arise.

Bus Maintenance

As no additional buses would be purchased for the provision of late night service, the average mileage of the bus fleet would increase, resulting in additional wear-and-tear throughout the 18-year life span of the vehicles. Inspection and maintenance programs

would be adjusted to accommodate the extra mileage.

- Several buses have to be available for late night “changeovers” in the event of mechanical breakdown or other service issues. These buses would not be available for morning peak-period service.
- There would be changes in the garage operations for fueling and servicing of late night service as fuel bays are currently blocked by buses waiting to go out on morning peak-period service.
- Additional cleaning staff would be needed to accommodate the short turn-around time between buses coming from late night service and going out for the morning peak-period service.

Security

There could be concerns about the safety and security of both the operators and passengers when traveling late at night. Operators could be traveling through communities with little traffic, closed stores and reduced opportunities for “safety in numbers of people.”

Operator Training

Training requirements for additional staff would require start-up funding in the order of \$390,000 and \$669,000, depending on the option selected.

Customer Information and Scheduling Systems

- Late night service would be treated as an entirely separate service in ETS messaging and have very distinctive branding and route numbers. A separate guide/pamphlet would contain all of the routes and their schedules.

There would be a one-time cost of \$27,000 for design and setup of printed materials. The customer information production cost would be \$30,000 annually.

Hospitality Industry Issues

Through Responsible Hospitality Edmonton, late night transportation was identified as a specific concern. At this time, a pilot late night public transit service is planned for the January to April 2012 period, with bus service to be provided from Whyte Avenue to the University and Southgate areas on Friday and Saturday nights. A survey was conducted as part of the stakeholder involvement process for this route, which indicated significant interest in late night public transit service.

Policy

Transit Service Standards (Policy C539) identifies recommended hours of operation, which does not cover late night service. A policy amendment is necessary if late night bus service is introduced.

Corporate Outcomes

This strategy supports Council goals:

- Shift Edmonton’s Transportation Mode – Transit and active transportation are preferred by citizens. Citizens choose public transit and transit ridership grows as the city population grows. Transit is affordable and accessible to citizens.
- Improve Edmonton’s Livability – Complete communities that are strong, inclusive and have accessible services. City services and programs are affordable and available to meet the needs of diverse individuals and groups.

Budget/Financial Implications

Implementing late night transit service in Edmonton would require an increase in the Operating Budget tax levy by a minimum of \$4.5 million annually.

Attachments

1. Option 1 - Spoke Network
2. Option 2 - Transit Centre Base Network
3. Option 3 - Combination Network
4. Option Comparison Cost Summary