

Transit Ridership Recovery and Growth

Motion on the Floor

Moved A. Paquette - M. Nickel (made at the November 6/7, 2018, City Council meeting):

That Administration conduct a feasibility study to identify strategies to achieve transit ridership recovery and growth. The study should consider a variety of investment scenarios to encourage transit use and recognize the importance of transit in building a great city, including:

1. Economic and environmental benefits and return on investment
2. Fare-related policies and practices, including implications and possible outcomes of subsidies ranging to zero fare
3. Improved safety and customer experience
4. Improved efficiency of service delivery, including best practices with regional transit services

The study should confirm the outcomes of public transit investment in medium-large cities, including economic mobility, productivity, sustainability, support for vulnerable populations, etc.

Due by: Third Quarter 2019

Recommendation

That Urban Planning Committee recommend to City Council:

That the March 5, 2019, City Operations report CR_6614, be received for information.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the November 6/7, 2018, City Council, the following motion was passed:

That the Motion on the Floor, as amended, be referred back to Administration to provide information on what would be required to complete this work, including terms of reference and costing, and return to Committee in January 2019.

Executive Summary

To encourage transit use and ridership recovery, the City is building upon Edmonton's Transit Strategy (approved by Council in 2017), and has several strategic initiatives underway to advance the work of the strategy and its five pillars. The Bus Network Redesign has been an intensive component of this work. In addition, the Transit Strategy is complemented by The City Plan (which includes a mass transit study).

The work requested through the motion is outlined in this report within the overall context of Administration's ongoing strategic work related to the Transit Strategy and The City Plan. In addition, Administration intends to conduct a feasibility study that will identify investment scenarios that encourage transit use, contribute to ridership recovery and growth, and recognize the importance of transit in building a great city.

Administration anticipates the study will be completed in November 2019 and a report to Council describing the outcomes will be presented. There are no external costs anticipated for completing this work; the work will be completed in-house using staff expertise.

The proposed study will be well aligned with existing strategic work, while also considering City Council's 2050 vision and goals.

This report describes how the current and long-term transit plans will integrate research and analysis from the study specific to the economic, sustainability, and social contributions of public transit investment in Edmonton.

Report

Transit Strategy Context

In July 2017, Council approved a new strategic direction for public transit, through the Transit Strategy, aimed at modernizing the transit system through five pillars:

1. Integrating transit with community design and planning (including new and existing transit centres and stations);
2. A balanced approach to operating funding and fare policy;
3. A market responsive approach to transit network design (which has translated to improving the customer experience and the Bus Network Redesign, involving extensive public engagement);
4. Improving the customer experience; and
5. Developing transit organizational capacity.

The Transit Strategy reflects the priorities of Edmontonians and guides system transformation toward supporting growth and municipal development across all sectors and communities. The Edmonton's Transit Strategy (Attachment 1) will be implemented over a 10-year period. More than 20,000 Edmontonians provided input into the Transit Strategy, as summarized in the What We Did (Attachment 2) and What We Heard (Attachment 3).

The Transit Strategy aims to move the system towards modernization and better reflects citizen priorities for a safe, fast and reliable service. It will encourage more people to choose transit by:

- Building transit-friendly neighbourhoods and places;
- Offering fare categories that are consistent, inclusive and easy to understand;
- Providing service that reflects the different preferences of inner and outer neighbourhoods;
- Elevating the importance of safety and security; and
- Keeping up with trends in technology and the environment.

Current Transit Strategy Actions Underway

In advancing the work of the Transit Strategy, the following initiatives are underway.

Bus Network Redesign:

As part of Pillar Three from the Transit Strategy, Council directed Administration to redesign the existing bus network. This proposed Bus Network Redesign will be structured around a Primary Transit Network consisting of a Light Rail Transit (LRT), precursor Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), a Frequent Transit Network, Rapid Bus and Crosstown routes. This new network sets the foundation for future transit growth in the Edmonton region by maximizing the efficiency of the network. Further, work on the bus network redesign, along with the initiative on regional transit described below, is consistent with the motion: "Improved efficiency of service delivery, including best practices with regional transit services"

Regional Transit Services:

On October 11, 2018, 13 municipalities signed a Memorandum of Understanding for a Regional Transit Services Commission. By working together, the region has the ability to create an integrated transit system that delivers:

- More convenient and extensive service across municipalities;
- A better customer experience through improved community connections; and
- Reduced barriers for municipalities to establish transit services in the region.

The Commission will initially focus on providing regional commuter service between all communities in the Edmonton Metropolitan Region. Next steps include creating the Commission and a plan to ensure a seamless hand-over of regional commuter service from participating municipalities.

Transit Fare Policy Updates:

Building on Pillar Two of the Transit Strategy, Administration has been working to revise the Transit Fare Policy to reflect the principles and actions in the Transit Strategy. This work is aligned with the motion: “Fare-related policies and practices, including implications and possible outcomes of subsidies ranging to zero fare”.

Proposed updates will be brought forward to Urban Planning Committee in March 2019. The March report is intended to achieve several outcomes including:

- Establishing a balanced approach to operating funding and fare policy;
- Providing a response to recommendation three of the City Auditor’s 2016 Edmonton Transit System Bus and Light Rail Transit Review; and,
- Preparing Edmontonians for the introduction of Smart Fare technology, which upon City Council approval, could include a variety of new transit fare options such as “pay as you go,” fare capping, and distance-based fares. The work will be complemented by the proposed economic work highlighted in the Approach for Undertaking the Ridership Recovery and Growth Study below.

Transit Safety and Customer Experience:

In October 2018, Council approved a comprehensive plan to improve safety and security within public transit. As part of the plan, Administration has enhanced physical security presence at 25 transit centres and stations, increased on-street Transit Inspector presence to respond to service issues, implemented continuous training for Transit Operators and ensured all buses are being fully equipped with security cameras. Retractable bus shields will be introduced throughout the ETS fleet and work is underway to develop transit facility design guidelines that will address accessibility, safety, and security.

Overall, these projects and initiatives contribute to an improved customer experience (a priority also outlined in pillar four of the Transit Strategy) and are consistent with the motion: “Improved safety and customer experience.” As such, strategy work also contemplates ways of supporting transit oriented development, wherein transit stations can be the base of commercial and community enterprise to help create activity, which enhances the overall customer experience and supports safety.

Alignment with The City Plan:

Designed to take Edmonton from a population of one-to-two million, The City Plan will be guided by the four goals of Council’s Vision 2050: Healthy City, Urban Places, Climate Resilience and Economic Prosperity and will detail how the city builds, grows and moves. The City Plan will fulfill the City’s statutory requirements to produce a transportation plan. With consideration to the already approved Transit Strategy and anticipated population growth, Administration is preparing a mass transit study as part of The City Plan, which has a primary objective to provide a policy framework to guide the future development and expansion of the mass transit network. Administration presented an update on proposed “City Moves” to Urban Planning Committee on

February 12, 2019 through Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development report CR_6408.

Beyond its statutory requirements, the City Plan offers an opportunity for Edmontonians to state priorities for the type of transit system that would fit Edmonton, and region, at a population level of two-million. While the Transit Strategy focuses on improving and transitioning the system from its current state, the City Plan opens up a broader context and invites visioning about “the importance of transit in building a great city”.

Approach for Undertaking the Ridership Recovery and Growth Study

In response to the motion’s broad call for Administration to “conduct a feasibility study to identify strategies to achieve transit ridership recovery and growth”, Administration will undertake a new economic impact study to address this request. This is well aligned with City Council’s direction that Administration provide additional focus to the challenge of ridership recovery and growth. The November 2018 motion asks further that Administration further consider a variety of investment scenarios (including the potential of a zero fare strategy) to encourage transit use and recognize the importance of transit in building a great city.

This interim update shows how Administration intends to confirm the outcomes of public transit investment in medium-large cities, including employment mobility, productivity, sustainability, support for vulnerable populations, etc. The work undertaken through this study will address areas that can support the implementation of the Transit Strategy and help guide the future direction of transit.

Administration will undertake a study to include the following components:

- A review of the strategic approach taken with transit to-date;
- Economic, social and environmental benefits of public transit (note: this will include a review of existing reports and academic research, and a specific economic impact analysis conducted for public transit in Edmonton);
- An implementation update on the Transit Strategy pillars and research and analysis related to transit fare policies - including zero fare scenarios, safety, and customer experience; and,
- How the next phase of strategic work related to public transit, the Transit Strategy and City Plan can work together.

Administration will also incorporate input from the Regional Transit Services Commission project and prepare an overall report summarizing findings and recommendations for moving forward.

Administration plans to complete the study and report back to Council describing the outcomes in November 2019. There are no external costs anticipated for completing this work; the work will be completed in-house using staff expertise.

Outcomes of this study can help inform the creation of a long-term vision for transit investment and growth in Edmonton, supporting The City Plan vision for mobility as well as future phases of the transit strategy implementation.

Public Engagement

There have been multiple public engagement initiatives in the past five years related to the work referenced in this report. In the first phase of Transit Strategy public engagement, people were engaged through engagement events, including workshops, outreach from the ETS Street Team, and outreach on transit buses. In the second phase of Transit Strategy public engagement, ideas were collected from a variety of forums, including the project launch held at the Art Gallery of Alberta, City Hall School, visits to neighbourhoods and special events by the *What Moves You?* engagement bus and street team, workshops, and an on-line survey. The engagement bus also operated on regular transit routes throughout Edmonton and gathered ideas while passengers had a free ride.

For the Transit Fare Policy review, the City held 12 focus groups or workshops with citizens and stakeholder organizations, and nearly 3,900 Edmontonians provided input in the summer of 2018 by completing an online survey.

As part of the bus network redesign, over 11,000 Edmontonians participated in in-person and online public engagement during spring engagement (April 12 to June 14, 2018) and fall engagement (October 25 to December 9, 2018) sessions. This resulted in over 19,000 hours spent by the public providing feedback, including through 7,800 surveys completed.

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome(s): Edmontonians Use Public Transit and Active Modes Of Transportation			
Outcome(s)	Measure(s)	Result(s)	Target(s)
Edmontonians use public transit and active modes of transportation.	Ridership per capita	91.6 (2017)	TBD, based on outcomes of the study

Attachments

1. Edmonton's Transit Strategy
2. Edmonton's Transit Strategy - What We Did Report
3. Edmonton's Transit Strategy - What We Heard Report

Others Reviewing this Report

- T. Burge, Chief Financial Officer and Deputy City Manager, Financial and Corporate Services
- S. McCabe, Deputy City Manager, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development
- C. Owen, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement