

Saskatoon Transit Service Levels in Response to COVID-19

ISSUE

This report provides an update on adjustments that have been made to Saskatoon Transit services levels and safety protocols implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

BACKGROUND

Transit properties across Canada have been starkly impacted by COVID-19. Starting in mid-March, when the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Saskatchewan and subsequent actions were taken by the federal and provincial government to prevent the spread of the disease, Saskatoon Transit started experiencing a significant drop in ridership from typical historical numbers. Some of the major actions and responses that have impacted ridership and service levels include:

- March 12 – first case of COVID-19 reported in Saskatchewan;
- March 19 – Government direction to work and stay at home where possible;
- Week of March 16 – provincial government announces school closures for an indefinite period;
- March 23 – University of Saskatchewan suspends on-campus classes and activities;
- March 20 to 23 – provincial orders implementing physical distancing requirements reduces transit capacity significantly;
- March 26 – provincial orders closing non-essential services and limiting public gatherings to 10 people.

Saskatoon Transit maintained regular scheduled service until March 29, 2020. At that time, Saskatoon Transit implemented service changes similar to other Transit properties in eastern Canada who had been affected by COVID-19 impacts earlier than Saskatoon. Saturday service schedules were implemented on all days of the week.

CURRENT STATUS

Impacts to Staffing

In conjunction with the decrease in demand and the public health measures implemented to combat the spread of COVID-19, Saskatoon Transit has seen an impact to staff availability. Mandatory self-isolation requirements upon returning from international travel or as a requirement of the Saskatchewan Health Authority through contract tracing, advice from 811 for those experiencing symptoms to stay home, and care for children no longer in school or daycare has reduced the number of available staff. To date, Saskatoon Transit has not had any staff report a positive test for COVID-19.

Lastly, enhanced COVID-19 related service protocols, primarily additional cleaning regimes, has resulted in the need to redeploy staff. To keep buses safe and clean for the Operators and riding public, Saskatoon Transit has augmented the maintenance

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section with redeployed staff from within Saskatoon Transit and other Divisions with available capacity due to reduced service requirements associated with COVID-19 impacts.

Service Level Details

Modified service across the city has met the level of demand on High Frequency Corridors (HFC) and the regular frequency routes for riders who are dependent on transit for essential travel. Saskatoon Transit continually analyzes user demand and adjusts routing and bus usage as required to match needs. The emergency schedule implemented supports quick redistribution of staff and vehicles to allow for adequate coverage of both HFCs and regular frequency routes in real-time, as well as supporting physical distancing on busier routes.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The following tables illustrate the service level changes Saskatoon Transit has implemented in response to the COVID-19 restrictions. These adjustments have impacted all aspects of Transit service such as hours and frequency of service, passenger loading, bus capacity, cleaning protocols and customer interactions.

	Regular Service	COVID-19 Service
Bus Book Out	124	88

High Frequency Corridors (HFC)

Days	Times	Pre COVID	COVID
Mon-Fri	Peak*	10 min	No Peak Service
Mon-Fri	Day	15 min	15 min
Mon-Fri	Night	30 min	30 min
Saturday	Morning/Night	30 min	30 min
Saturday	Day	15 min	30 min
Sunday	All Day	30 min	30 min
Access Transit	Seven days/week using Transit resources and Taxi		
*Includes University and High School Extras			

All Other Routes

Days	Times	Pre COVID	COVID
Mon-Fri	Peak*	30 min	No Peak Service
Mon-Fri	Day	30 min	30 min
Mon-Fri	Night	60 min	60 min
Saturday	Morning/Night	60 min	60 min
Saturday	Day	30 min	30 min
Sunday	All Day	60 min	60 min
Access Transit	Six days/week using Transit resources and Stats and Sunday using Taxi		
*Includes University or High School Extras			

COVID-19 Protocol Adjustments

Bus Operations

Service Provided	Typical Service Level	COVID-19 Service Level
Full Bus	Full bus when a bus is at capacity, 39 seats plus 30 standing in a 40' bus or nine passengers on an Access bus	Full bus now at capacity when physical distancing parameters are reached, approximately 10 passengers on a 40' bus or two passengers on an Access bus
Passenger Loading	Load using front doors	Load using rear doors (Fixed Route only). Passengers requiring ramp loading continue to load using front doors.
Physical Distancing	All bus seats are available	Fixed route seats blocked off to ensure passengers are physically distancing and the front portion of the bus blocked off to maintain appropriate physical distance between the Operator and the passengers
Fare Collection	Regular fares apply	Fare suspension to accommodate rear door loading and physical distancing measures.

Maintenance

Service Provided	Typical Service Level	COVID-19 Service Level
Bus cleaning	Basic wipe down of touch points and floor mop daily. Full bus interior detail on a 3-month rotation	Regular daily cleaning with the addition of full disinfection, and hourly wiping of touch points at downtown terminal. Full bus interior detail on a 3-week rotation
Preventative and corrective bus maintenance	Focus on corrective and preventative maintenance to keep buses in service	With reduced bus book out, maintenance staff can focus on longer term repairs that typically wait until the summer months, with a reduction of overtime

Customer Service

Service Provided	Typical Service Level	COVID-19 Service Level
Process & respond to Customer inquiries	In person, by phone, email, Twitter	By phone, email, Twitter
Sell & administrate fares	In person	No fare sales during COVID-19 period
Provide trip planning, route & schedule information	In person, by phone, email, Twitter	By phone, email, Twitter
Process Lost & Found	In person, by phone, email	Lost and Found coordinated with Police

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

For information on the financial implications of the service changes above, please see the COVID-19 Financial Implications report from the Chief Financial Officer to be presented later in the agenda of this City Council Meeting.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal or environmental implications identified. With the elimination of fares, Saskatoon Transit is seeing an increase in non-essential trips. Public communications messaging continues to reinforce the importance of limiting transit travel to essential trips as bus capacity is significantly reduced with the implementation of physical distancing requirements.

NEXT STEPS

Saskatoon Transit will continue monitoring current demand and changes to public health measures to deliver a service during the COVID-19 pandemic that is best suited to meet customer needs and in accordance with provincial and federal government orders. Preparations for upcoming Operator work signups are ongoing and will be designed to accommodate future adjustments to pre-COVID-19 service levels as demand warrants and provincial and federal orders permit.

Report Approval

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