

Process for Introducing or Expanding Transit within New and Developing Neighbourhoods

ISSUE

What is the process for introducing or expanding transit within new and developing neighbourhoods, including the mechanism for funding established service levels and information provided to residents on the expectation for establishing services?

BACKGROUND

At the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation meeting held on January 13, 2020, the following motion was made by Councillor S. Gersher:

“That Administration report on the process for introducing or expanding transit within new and developing neighbourhoods. Information for inclusion includes the process of bringing service to a neighbourhood, the mechanism for funding established service levels and the information provided to residents on the expectation for establishing service.”

CURRENT STATUS

The three key factors for introducing or expanding transit within new and developing neighbourhoods are:

1. Monitoring Current Conditions and Key Metrics

The City’s guiding documents are the Official Community Plan (OCP) and the Strategic Plan. Additionally, Planning and Development provides Saskatoon Transit with the annual Growth Monitoring Report that provides information on the build-out status and growth of each new neighbourhood. Collectively these documents provide Saskatoon Transit with the information on current conditions and metrics to help monitor the readiness of a neighbourhood for expanding service. The conditions, indicators, and key metrics include:

- Complete infrastructure (including roads) in alignment with the Concept Plan;
- Planned and actual phasing/forecasting of land development for each sector;
- Population;
- Alignment with adjacent neighbourhoods/routes;
- Mixed land use; and
- Connectivity to the transit network and, potentially, the future BRT network.

With an appropriate internal road network and phasing of neighbourhood development that takes into account transit requirements for turning around buses, locations of stops, shelters and stations, Saskatoon Transit will have the required infrastructure, population density, and ridership numbers necessary to complete an evaluation for consideration to introduce new service. It also allows Saskatoon

Transit to strategically introduce variable service levels throughout a neighbourhood as it develops.

2. Alignment with Transit's Service Standards document

The current levels of service include three tiers.

Type of Service	Population (built-out)	Service Hours	Service Levels
Tier 1	25%+	AM & PM peak only M-F	1,560 hours
Tier 2	50% + (ridership & demand is increasing)	Non-stop AM to PM peak M-F	3,120 hours
Tier 3	90% + complete	Full Service 0600 – 0100 hours M - Sun	6,604 hours

Tier 1 is the introductory level of service to a new neighbourhood. This service is provided when there is a road network that will support the bus network and the neighbourhood has at least 25% of its projected population. Service hours are AM and PM peak only, Monday to Friday, 0700 - 1000 and 1500 - 1800 hours. This level of service is equivalent to 1,560 service hours annually.

Tier 2 is the level of service that can be introduced once a neighbourhood has approximately 50% of the projected population, and only if ridership is increasing beyond the capability of the existing service. Continuous service AM to PM Peak is Monday to Friday, 0700 – 1900 hours. This level of service is equivalent to 3,120 service hours annually.

Tier 3 is the level of service once a neighbourhood reaches appropriate ridership and is 90%+ developed and populated, or is exhibiting high ridership. If ridership is not increasing, Tier 3 service may be delayed until build-out reaches 100% or ridership levels have increased. Service is from 0600 to 0100 hours the next day, Monday to Sunday. This level of service is equivalent to 6,604 service hours annually.

Each change in service level includes an evaluation on how the current state will tie into existing service in neighbouring communities and its connectivity with High Frequency Corridors (HFC) and future BRT. These discussions may require additional community stakeholder engagement, but the scope of engagement will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

3. Mechanism for Funding Established Service Levels.

Six months prior to the budget cycle, Saskatoon Transit will review the annual Growth Monitoring Report. At that time, Saskatoon Transit will evaluate the updated information on build-out status, liaise with Planning and Development and couple that information with neighbourhood ridership and identify which neighbourhoods may require new, expanded or reduced service.

Following collaboration with Planning and Development, Saskatoon Transit will request additional service hours, through the budget process, to introduce Tier 1 service into a

new neighbourhood or expand existing service in a neighbourhood to the next service level tier. If City Council approves the request, Saskatoon Transit plans for and introduces new or expanded service the following June, to coincide with Transit's summer signup, other route changes, and to allow for engagement activities to take place in the spring of the year in which the new service begins.

The general checklist for new or expanding service in a neighbourhood includes:

- Required infrastructure is in place (roads, sidewalks, etc.).
- Budget approval for the extra service hours has been received.
- A Communications Plan allowing for 4 to 6 months (approx.) of public engagement, information and education to be executed prior to the new service implementation.
- Tier 1 service will be implemented as basic service, if Tier 1 is already in place Tier 2 or 3 service will be implemented, as appropriate.
- Introduction of service would begin with the June Transit Operator Signup.

Working with the Communications and Public Engagement Department, Saskatoon Transit will identify key stakeholders and create opportunities for them to provide specific input on the service prior to the launch of any new neighbourhood service. Prior to the service launching, the public will receive information about the route, frequency, hours, bus stop locations, and connectivity to the overall transit network. Saskatoon Transit will monitor the changes for further opportunities to improve the overall service and adjust based on customer and operator feedback.

On-demand service is a relatively new option for Saskatoon Transit, allowing for vehicle routes and service levels to be determined by passenger demand, rather than set by a fixed route. Saskatoon Transit is exploring the opportunity to leverage on-demand services in the future as an introductory service for new neighbourhoods or to help fill gaps within existing areas.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

City Council adoption of the new Official Community Plan, Bylaw No. 9700 was made on June 29, 2020. The OCP came into effect in late 2020 with the approval from the Ministry of Government Relations. The latest revision of the OCP provides better guidance regarding service levels for Saskatoon Transit. Previously the OCP transit guidance concentrated around ensuring stops are located within 450 metres of single-family dwellings, 250 metres of multi-family residences, 150 metres of educational and seniors housing institutions and that a high percentage of routes run through the Downtown Transit Terminal.

The Growth Plan to Half a Million and the City's recently updated OCP have resulted in more questions about transit service planning, how new neighbourhood transit service is planned and what happens when or if the transit service has to be reconfigured to respond to budget requirements or to support increased transit ridership along growth corridors. In response to continued queries through the development of the Growth Plan and the future Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Transit Plan, Service Standards are in

the final stages of development and will be presented to the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation in a future report.

The Service Standards will be a comprehensive document containing all Transit levels of service and will support Saskatoon Transit in fulfilling the guidance for transit contained in the revised OCP. The Service Standards will also provide a consistent and effective approach for continuous improvement and ensures service is introduced in a timely and equitable manner. Service Standards are influenced by population growth, neighbourhood development and transit ridership statistics. The Service Standards are being developed in conjunction with Planning and Development and based on best practice within the Transit industry.

Service Standards are used by many transit systems as a framework for implementing, expanding, or reducing transit service. In Saskatoon these Service Standards will be used in conjunction with the City's OCP, Strategic Plan, sector or concept plan documents to ensure new neighbourhood transit service follows appropriate street routing, supports the neighbourhood and connects with existing service, which now includes High Frequency Corridors (HFC). Service Standards also take into account the future BRT network, and provide adequate space for stops, shelters, and stations to meet accessibility standards.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

All future expansions, for new or expanded service, will have financial implications and will require budget approval and will be presented at the appropriate Business Plan and Budget deliberations, whether for Tier 1, Tier 2 or Tier 3.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal, social or environmental implications identified.

NEXT STEPS

Saskatoon Transit will use the forthcoming Growth Monitoring Report to identify any service level changes with budget implications as part of the 2022/2023 budget cycle.

Saskatoon Transit will be bringing forward Service Standards to a future Standing Policy Committee on Transportation for review and approval consideration. The Service Standards will be a comprehensive document that contains all levels of service for Saskatoon Transit and will support and align with the revised OCP, Growth Plan, BRT and Transit Plan.

Report Approval

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