

Bus Rapid Transit Wayfinding, Branding, and Marketing Budget Adjustment

ISSUE

This report is to seek approval for a budget adjustment to Capital Project #2328 – Transit Implementation Plan for wayfinding, branding, and marketing development.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation recommend to City Council:
That Capital Project #2328 - Transit Implementation Plan be increased by \$500,000 in 2021 funded through the Bus Rapid Transit funding plan and decreasing the 2022 capital allocation to this project.

BACKGROUND

History

In 2016, City Council approved The Growth Plan to Half a Million (Growth Plan). The plan charts a course for long-term growth and revitalization that balances and promotes quality of life, sustainability, and economic development.

A key element of the Growth Plan is rethinking the way in which the City of Saskatoon (City) provides transportation options to existing and future residents. As Saskatoon grows to 500,000 people, it will require a variety of transportation options to ensure the safe and efficient movement of people and goods throughout the city. Given this objective, the Growth Plan includes a specific Transit Plan that aims to redefine public transit in Saskatoon. The proposed Transit Plan focuses primarily on building a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, and identifies changes needed to the current system to support high-frequency, direct service along the major corridors.

The BRT system is intended to form the backbone of the future transit system and is seen to be a catalyst for the corridor growth component of the Growth Plan. In order to have a successful BRT system, Saskatoon needs to reconfigure its transit system to support the BRT lines, and this means fundamental changes in how the transit system operates.

In November 2017, City Council approved a “preferred configuration and conceptual network” for the BRT system. The preferred configuration included “runningways” or dedicated lanes along select short road sections. At its meeting held on June 20, 2018, the Governance and Priorities Committee entertained public comment on the proposed BRT configuration. During that meeting, several questions were asked and the Administration committed to responding to the technical questions and conducting further stakeholder and public engagement prior to bringing a decision report forward to confirm the BRT and Downtown Active Transportation Networks.

During its October 15, 2018 meeting, the Governance and Priorities Committee received a report and a presentation from the Administration providing responses to the majority of technical questions raised in June, as well as a summary of the stakeholder/community engagement activities completed to date to support the Transit Plan/BRT Plan and the Downtown Active Transportation Network.

During its April 29, 2019 meeting, City Council endorsed the proposed network and location of 38.0 kilometres of BRT, which consists of 35.3 kilometres running in mixed traffic and 2.7 kilometres in dedicated transit-only lanes on 1st Avenue through Downtown and on College Drive, six bus-only queue jump locations along with 38 kilometres of fibre optic communication cable, 14 upgraded traffic signal controllers, and transit signal priority at 90 intersections.

Current Status

The BRT Project Team is completing detailed designs for most components of the network and system, including undertaking implementation planning. The implementation planning work on the BRT project includes:

- planning for signage and wayfinding for the BRT and local bus system so the user's experience on the system is seamless and information is clear and accessible;
- development of a comprehensive brand strategy for the BRT system, including naming, visual identity and imagery, marketing collateral, system maps and schedule design, and aesthetics of station components;
- planning of marketing strategies to educate and promote the BRT system; and
- analysis of industry best practices on similar brand initiatives and current ridership and market demographics to maximize the effectiveness of the BRT system.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Implementation planning work for the BRT has identified the value of completing wayfinding, branding, and marketing design work prior to the start of construction. Research of BRT systems in cities across North America has shown that early introduction and adoption of the BRT system brand identity was the preferred and more successful approach. In BRT systems where the brand identity was introduced closer to the date of BRT launch, the new system name was not adopted by the public, wayfinding was not consistent with the overall brand as it was already developed, and the new brand did not have opportunity to integrate into all marketing strategies, which ultimately confused the public and provided an inconsistent early experience with the BRT system.

Advancing funding into 2021 allows for industry expertise to be acquired to develop wayfinding, branding, and marketing plans and designs for the BRT system, which in turn reduces the risk of public confusion if language or brand changes mid-project. Early planning also allows the public to be informed prior to experiencing construction impacts and be well-educated on the new transit system prior to launch.

In other cities where BRT has been introduced, the development of wayfinding, branding, and marketing has taken between 18 months to two years to develop prior to construction of the system. The amount of time ranges, depending on the overall scope of the project. While the timelines for this project are anticipated to be much shorter, proceeding with this work as early as possible is recommended.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The work detailed in this report is estimated to be \$500,000 and would be funded from the available funding in the BRT Funding Plan. Capital Project #2328 - Transit Implementation Plan would be reduced by \$500,000 in 2022.

There are no 2021 mill rate implications as a result of this adjustment as the BRT Funding Plan had available funds for 2021.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no privacy, legal, social, policy, or environmental implications identified.

NEXT STEPS

Following the approval of the budget adjustment, a request for proposals for the design and planning of wayfinding, branding, and marketing of the BRT will be issued.

Report Approval

Written by: Rob Dudiak, Special Projects Manager, Technical Services
Reviewed by: Dan Willems, Director of Technical Services
James McDonald, Director of Saskatoon Transit
Approved by: Terry Schmidt, General Manager, Transportation and Construction