

Investigation of Service Disruptions in Saskatoon Transit

ISSUE

The Independent Office of the City Auditor is providing a detailed report on the investigation of service disruptions in Saskatoon Transit during the winter of 2021-2022.

BACKGROUND

During the winter of 2021-2022, the City of Saskatoon Transit services experienced significant disruptions. The primary reasons for the disruptions communicated to the public were extreme weather conditions, global parts shortage, and the age of the bus fleet. In April 2022, the City Council asked the Independent Office of the City Auditor to investigate the service disruptions. The City Council approved the Terms of Reference on June 27, 2022.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The objective of the investigation was to conduct a root cause analysis of service disruptions during winter 2021-2022 and provide cost-effective and practical recommendations to avoid future disruptions in Saskatoon Transit.

The areas of focus for the investigation included sourcing of parts, preventative maintenance and repairs, communication and reporting and the age of the bus fleet and resources. As part of the investigation, the investigation team met with the Transit Administration, transit and other department staff and stakeholders including the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) 615 and Bus Riders of Saskatoon. In addition, the investigation team conducted a detailed review of documents and records to conclude the reasons for the service disruption.

Based on the investigation, we concluded that multifaceted factors resulted in service disruptions. The main reasons for the service disruptions include ineffective operations of stores in Transit, ineffective governance processes and an ineffective preventative maintenance program. These disruptions were due to internal factors and can be avoided in the future if proper actions are undertaken, as indicated in this report.

Ineffective Stores operations in Transit was the first main reason that resulted in delays in providing parts required for buses. We noted inadequate staffing levels at Stores, ineffective inventory management, non-utilization of new processes in the system and inadequate support provided to Stores staff in effectively using the new system.

Ineffective Governance process was the second main reason for service disruptions. These include inadequate management of transit issues, lack of stakeholder engagement, lack of performance indicators for bus repairs, lack of data-driven decision making and ineffective communication processes.

An ineffective preventative maintenance program was the third main reason for the disruption of Transit services. During the last two years, 60% of the buses did not receive timely preventative maintenance, which resulted in more work during winter 2021-2022 when a breakdown occurred or increased the likelihood of breakdowns.

Key recommendations arising from the investigation include:

- Strengthening the Stores Operations within Transit, which includes developing and implementing policies and procedures, streamlining inventory management issues, and continuing and enhancing support to the Stores staff in using the new Fusion system.
- Improving the governance processes by increasing management presence, identifying trends of actual service levels, implementing measures to increase spare buses, implementing accountability frameworks, building strong stakeholder relationships, obtaining accurate and timely data for informed decision-making, improving supervisor-to-staff ratio, and expediting the recruitment for Director of Transit.
- Improving the preventative maintenance program by tracking and monitoring the preventative maintenance against the maintenance schedule, identifying non-conformance, and implementing actions to ensure conformance to the schedule.
- Improving the communication and reporting of Transit issues by:
 - carefully analyzing the information before providing it publicly to ensure accuracy and involving the City's Leadership early in the process for advice; and
 - implementing formal communication timelines for reporting service disruptions to the public and ensuring that adequate lead time is provided to riders to allow for alternative travel plans.
- Conducting a workplace culture audit at Transit and implementing strategies to improve the workplace culture at Transit.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications for implementing recommendations will be incorporated by the Administration into future business plans and budget submissions, as required.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There is no privacy, legal, social, or environmental implications.

NEXT STEPS

The Independent Office of the City Auditor will obtain regular status updates from Administration on the implementation of the recommendations and will conduct a follow-up to assess whether these recommendations are effectively implemented. A follow-up audit report will be provided in Quarter 3, 2023.

APPENDICES

1. Investigation of Service Disruptions in Saskatoon Transit

REPORT APPROVAL

Written and

Approved by: Sohail Saleem, City Auditor

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