

Accessible Transit and Bus Stop Signage

ISSUE

This report provides a response to an inquiry from Ms. Melanie Christopherson regarding accessible transit signage and the automated stop announcements on fixed route transit. The correspondence from Ms. Christopherson is attached as Appendix 1.

BACKGROUND

The Standing Policy Committee on Transportation, at its meeting held on August 8, 2022 resolved, in part:

“That the letter be referred to the Administration for a report back to Committee on the viability of the suggestions in this letter.”

Current Status

Saskatoon Transit has implemented various accessibility features to its fixed route fleet as summarized below.

1. Accessible Fixed Route Fleet – In March 2019, Saskatoon Transit achieved a bus fleet where all buses are kneeling, equipped with front door ramps and designated space for persons in either wheelchairs and/or a mobility device.
2. Audible Stop Announcements –The fixed route fleet is equipped with audible stop announcements.

If audible announcements become inoperable, operators are trained to report and submit the defect to the maintenance staff. When audible announcements are inoperable, operators are trained to make verbal announcements. Saskatoon Transit will prepare and issue a Safety Talk communication to operators reminding them of the importance of reporting inoperable audible announcements to maintenance so the defect can be scheduled for repair and to make verbal announcements while the audible announcements are inoperable.

3. Accessible Bus Stops and Bus Stop Audit - Saskatoon Transit is working towards a goal of having all bus stops accessible. To assist in reaching this goal, a bus stop audit was completed in 2018 that included a site visit to each bus stop. The audit gathered data on accessibility at the approximately 1,365 bus stops in operation at that time, including presence of accessibility ramps, sidewalk connectivity, accessible signage, lighting, sidewalk condition and shelters. This inventory of data is used for identifying and prioritizing improvements needed to improve bus stop accessibility when funds are available through annual funding contributions or the planned Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project. Stations in the planned BRT project have been designed to include yellow tactile strips along the curb to identify the edge of the platform.

4. Accessible Stops and Transit App – In 2022, Saskatoon Transit collaborated with Transit app using Transit’s General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) software to turn on a feature within the app showing which bus stops are accessible. Accessible bus stops are those that include a platform for passengers to board buses, an accessible route leading to the platform and a meaningful way of identifying it as a bus stop which may include accessibility ramps, tactile walking surface indicators and concrete landing pads, providing an accessible connection to and from the bus.
5. Travel Training and Experience Transit – In 2016, Saskatoon Transit developed a travel training program called Experience Transit. This program provides training and supports to assist riders with and without accessibility challenges on how to access fixed routes services.

The Transportation department is currently installing Touchless Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS) in the downtown area and upgrading the existing APS pedestrian push buttons to touchless APS push buttons. This will improve accessibility for the deaf-blind community. Stage two of this project will include a pilot project, which is the installation of tactile and braille lettering on the pedestrian guide signs that are mounted on the APS infrastructure. This will be piloted at the intersection of Reindeer Road and Redberry Road. If the pilot project proves to be successful, implementation of braille and tactile lettering at all intersections with APS will be proposed to City Council during future budget cycle discussions.

Standards Regarding Accessibility for the Low-vision Community

There is currently no national best practice for use of tactile lettering or braille for signs in the public right-of-way. The Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Canada (MUTCDC) does not provide information regarding braille or tactile lettering on traffic control signage. The Canadian Standards Association (CSA) booklet CSA B651-18: Accessible Design for the Built Environment, along with the Transportation Association of Canada (TAC) booklet TAC: Guidelines for Understanding Use and Implementation of Accessible Pedestrian Signals, provide clear standards that may be followed for use of tactile lettering and braille. These booklets provide the necessary details regarding tactile/braille lettering, placement, dimensions, and contrast that could be used at transit stops.

City of Saskatoon’s Approach

When planning for accessibility, signs and symbols are an essential consideration during the design phase. Effective signage provides people with vision and hearing loss direction to a variety of services. The CoLATE principle focuses on five basic principles when it comes to safe and effective environmental design.

- Co – Colour and Contrast
- L – Lighting
- A – Audible cues
- T – Tactile cues
- E – Ergonomics

Saskatoon Transit bus stop signage was designed to be identifiable. The current sign is shaped like a blade, which in turn differentiates it from other signage. Saskatoon Transit has discussed the feasibility of implementing a reflective, bright tape to existing poles to help the visually impaired. The cost is \$290 per sign. At this time, Saskatoon Transit has approximately 1,400 regular signs and is planning for approximately 95 BRT signs to be installed at future BRT stations. Further design work of the wayfinding and signage for the BRT project is planned and will be shared with the Saskatoon Accessibility Advisory Committee (SAAC) for feedback and comments.

Approaches in Other Jurisdictions

The City of Regina completed an audit in 2016 that resulted in five accessible signs being installed at main hub locations. These signs included braille, raised lettering, an information plaque, and yellow poles making it an easier identifier for people who are visually impaired. This pilot received positive feedback and when funding became available in 2017, the City of Regina installed 59 more accessible signs at locations with the highest ridership.

The City of Winnipeg has made fixed route transit more accessible with the implementation of audible announcements, wheelchair securements on fixed route buses, and priority seating. They do not have any accessible signage in their current business plan.

The cities of Calgary and Edmonton have accessibility standards related to accessibility ramps, tactile walking surface indicators and concrete landing pads, but neither have implemented or reported specifically on accessible bus stop signage

OPTIONS

Three potential options addressing the viability of accessible bus stop signage for Saskatoon Transit are discussed below.

Option 1 – Status Quo

This option would have City Council receive the report as information with no further work planned for accessibility signage at transit stops.

Advantages:

- No financial implications.

Disadvantages

- Does not provide accessible signage at bus stops.

Option 2 – Yellow Sleeves/Tape on Existing and Future Bus Stops

This option provides the opportunity to retrofit existing signage. Saskatoon Transit has approximately 1,400 bus stops and is planning for an additional approximately 95 BRT stations. Once BRT is fully operational, it is estimated there will be approximately 1,200 bus stop signs city-wide. To make each pole more identifiable would require retrofitting with a colored sleeve, or reflective tape. Some current bus stop posts are round, while

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some are square, so there would be some inconsistency with how this option is applied. Cost of this option would be approximately \$348,000 of one-time funding.

Advantages:

- All Saskatoon Transit bus stop signs would have a colored sleeve or reflective tape.
- Easy to install.

Disadvantages:

- Only provides one option for accessible signage (Colour/contrast).
- Involves installation on all bus stop signs prior to testing and feedback from stakeholders.

Option 3 – Pilot Project at Select Number of Strategic Bus Stop Locations

This option enables Saskatoon Transit an opportunity to collaborate, explore and test potential accessible signage options with key stakeholders with the goal of identifying and reducing barriers for people with partial or full vision loss. This pilot project would include up to 50 Saskatoon Transit bus stop locations, some of which will be future BRT locations, to a maximum one-time budget of \$25,000. The locations and options to be explored and tested would be selected based on consultation with the SAAC, which has representation from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), and Bus Riders of Saskatoon (BRS). The pilot would be for a length of at least one year and then Administration would report back to the Standing Policy Committee of Transportation on the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Advantages:

- Opportunity to explore and test accessible signage options and applications at select sites and receive feedback from stakeholders before investing in all bus stop locations.
- The findings and recommendations of the pilot project would be used to establish policy and program direction for reporting to Council for consideration when the pilot project is complete.
- Costs to undertake the pilot project are less than Option 2.

Disadvantages:

- Will take a minimum of 18 months to complete the pilot project and report out to Council on findings and recommendations for future policy and program direction.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation recommend to City Council:
That Option 3 to be taken forward to the 2024/2025 Multi-Year Business Plan and Budget as a budget option for one-time funding of \$25,000 for City Council consideration.

RATIONALE

The following was considered in developing the recommendations:

- Currently, no accessibility signage exists at bus stops.
- Option 3 provides opportunity to pilot accessible signs at strategic existing bus stop locations, including future BRT locations.
- Option 3 places Saskatoon Transit on a path for future growth and planning for accessible bus stop signage based on the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the pilot project.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

If approved, Option 3 is will require approval of one-time funding of \$25,000 in the 2024/2025 Multi-Year Business Plan and Budget for the Saskatoon Transit accessible signage at bus stops pilot project.

NEXT STEPS

If Option 3 is approved in the 2024/2025 Multi-Year Business Plan and Budget, discussions with SAAC and BRS will commence followed by the development and implementation of the pilot project.

APPENDICES

1. Communication – Melanie Christopherson

Report Approval

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