

Bus Rapid Transit – Project Update July 2024

ISSUE

Project funding totalling \$250 million for all elements of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project applied for through the Investing in Canada's Infrastructure Program (ICIP) has been approved as of June 28, 2024, with a total of \$183,325,000 contributed by other orders of government. The project can now proceed to the detailed design, procurement, and construction phases. This report provides information on the current project status, planned construction schedule and expected service launch date.

BACKGROUND

In April 2016, City Council approved "[The Growth Plan to Half a Million](#)" (Growth Plan). The Growth 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 provide 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 Transit Plan focuses on building a BRT system and identifies changes needed to the current system to support high-frequency, direct service along the major corridors.

In November 2017, City Council approved a report entitled "[Bus Rapid Transit Preferred Configuration](#)" 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 received public comments on the proposed BRT configuration in the report entitled "[BRT-AAA Next Steps and Implementation](#)."

During its October 15, 2018 meeting, the Governance and Priorities Committee received a report entitled "[Transit Plan and Downtown All Ages and Abilities Cycling Network Update – Response to Plan for Growth Summit](#)."

During its April 29, 2019 meeting, City Council endorsed the "[Bus Rapid Transit Route Network and Configuration](#)," which identified the BRT routes and BRT station locations.

In August 2020, City Council approved the "[Bus Rapid Transit Pilot Station Budget Adjustment](#)" for the construction of a BRT pilot station.

During its September 7, 2021 meeting, the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation received a report from the Administration entitled "[Bus Rapid Transit Timeline Extension](#)" to re-schedule the BRT system launch to June 2026.

City Council, at its Regular Business Meeting held on September 26, 2022, received the report entitled "[Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program Application Intake](#)" and resolved that the Administration be directed to submit proposed projects to the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) for the BRT and East Leisure Centre Projects.

CURRENT STATUS

As of June 28, 2024, ICIP funding has been approved for all elements of the BRT project, including the Red, Blue and Green BRT lines, Intelligent Transportation Systems and Transit Signal Priority, Supporting Transportation Infrastructure, and Fleet Renewal. Appendix 1 includes a plan illustrating the approved Red, Green, and Blue lines routes and BRT stations locations.

A total of \$2,768,000 of base annual funding has been built in previous years. Future phase-ins of \$510,000 in 2025, \$545,000 in 2026 and \$637,000 in 2027 are required to fully finance the City's portion funding plan, and the preliminary 2025 budget does include that year's required phase-in. The Administration will include the 2026 and 2027 phase-ins in those years respectively.

CIMA+, an engineering consulting firm, has been retained to complete detailed designs and assist in the tendering and management of construction contracts.

Construction of the BRT pilot station and associated engagement with external and internal stakeholders has been completed. Performance of the BRT pilot station components and materials have been tracked and assessed. The information collected is being incorporated into the requirements for the procurement of the BRT station above-ground components (shelter, lighting, information display boards, etc.).

Testing of transit signal priority (TSP) systems has been underway since January 2024 at a series of intersections on the BRT lines. Results from this testing will help to inform the procurement, implementation and operations of TSP along the BRT routes.

Functional design of the College Drive dedicated transit lanes and corridor has been completed and functional design of the dedicated transit lanes and corridor on 1st Avenue is nearing completion. A road safety audit of the College Drive functional design is underway. Detailed design work is scheduled to be completed for both College Drive and 1st Avenue in 2025.

Consultations have taken place with the University of Saskatchewan in the development of the functional designs for College Drive and will continue in the detailed design phase. Consultations will also take place with the Downtown BID and downtown businesses in the design of the corridor on 1st Avenue.

Transit system planning and redesign has progressed through five iterations from 2017 to 2020. The transit system planning and design work will be re-initiated in 2025. As the transit system planning and design work progresses, Administration will bring

forward a report on the operational financial impacts for consideration in the 2026-2027 Multi-Year Business Planning and Budget process.

Construction is anticipated to begin in summer 2024 with work to take place at 14 BRT stations in the 2024 construction season. The work includes concrete platform construction, concrete bus stopping pads in the lane adjacent to the platform, installation of utility conduit under the platform, and construction of short sections of concrete sidewalk at some locations. Locations and details of the planned work in the 2024 construction season is included in Appendix 2.

Construction of the BRT stations concrete platform construction, concrete bus stopping pads in the lane adjacent to the platform, installation of utility conduit under the platform, and construction of short sections of concrete sidewalk at some locations will continue with 30 stations in 2025, 30 stations in 2026 and 14 stations in 2027. The above-ground components (shelter, lighting, information display boards, etc.) of the stations will be constructed starting in 2026 and continue until the spring of 2028.

Design of the fiber optic cable network will begin in 2024, installation of fiber optic cables are scheduled to begin in 2026.

Engagement activities on streetscaping design elements, public art components, placement of the above-ground components at specific locations where the typical placements may conflict with adjacent uses and some routes in the transit system redesign are anticipated to take place from 2024 until the BRT service begins.

ICIP funding of \$60 million was announced in November 2023 for fleet renewal to support the BRT system. Contract execution is in the final stages for the initial purchase of 20 diesel buses (10 – 40-foot and 10 – 60-foot buses) under the ICIP program totalling \$23.8 million with anticipated delivery dates starting in June 2025.

The remaining \$36.2 million in ICIP Fleet Renewal funding is currently approved for the purchase of 10 – 60-foot buses and 25 – 40-foot zero emissions buses. With the inflationary increases seen in bus purchases since the ICIP funding application was submitted and need for charging infrastructure at Civic Operations Centre to support the zero emissions buses, the \$36.2 million of remaining budget will not be sufficient to purchase all of the buses approved in the ICIP Fleet Renewal element. Along with an upcoming report to the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation (SPCT) on the Saskatoon Transit Zero Emissions Transition Plan, the Administration will also be providing a recommendation on the type (diesel and/or zero emissions) and number of buses to be purchased with the remaining \$36.2 million approved under the ICIP Fleet Renewal element of the BRT project. Any changes to the current approved bus purchase plan approved by Committee and Council under ICIP will also require subsequent approval from ICIP.

With funding through the planning stream of the Zero Emissions Transit Fund (ZETF), the Canadian Urban Transit Research and Innovation Consortium (CUTRIC) is in the

final stages of completing the Saskatoon Transit Zero Emissions Transition Plan report. This planning project is 80% funded by the Government of Canada and 20% by the City. This study consisted of five phases and includes the following:

1. Phase 1 – Requirement gathering related to asset cycles, retirement plans and fleet mix requirements as well as existing site assessment.
2. Phase 2 – Advanced feasibility and optimization study including charger optimization, schedule analysis, electrical system capacity and facility modification assessment.
3. Phase 3 – Fleet development concept including total cost of ownership of assets, maintenance needs and assessments, facility modification needs assessment, optimal charging schedule assessment and real estate considerations around installing on route chargers.
4. Phase 4 – Fleet concept, benefits and risk evaluation. Included analysis of community benefits, economic cost savings, environmental analysis and service delivery.
5. Phase 5 – Implementation plan and recommendations.

The report is anticipated to be completed in the summer of 2024. When the report is completed, the Administration will report to the SPCT on the findings, conclusions and recommendations in the report.

The City has submitted an application to the ZETF under the capital stream for funding to purchase battery electric buses and supporting charging infrastructure at the Civic Operations Centre. If approved, the Government of Canada would provide 50% of the funding and the City would contribute 50% of the funding. Delivery dates of the battery electric buses is anticipated to be 18 to 24 months after the contract is executed, with another three months required for procurement. City portion of costs is included under the Major Capital Prioritization Funding Plan.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Following the funding announcement on June 28, 2024, updates to the project schedule were completed, including allowance for:

- projections of when the required bus fleet to operate the new transit service are anticipated to be delivered and in service;
- completion of the transit system planning and design work;
- updates to designs to address changes within the community that have taken place since the designs were originally produced; and
- the required length of construction periods due to limitations on the number of locations where construction can take place in any given construction season. Construction timing and locations must be sequenced properly to minimize impacts on businesses, traffic and transit services, and best leverage available contracting capacity.

As a result, the Administration is planning for the system to launch in 2028. This launch date is necessary to complete construction of the BRT system infrastructure, complete

the transit system planning and design, and receive delivery of the required buses to operate the new Transit service. A launch date and completion of the BRT project in 2028 will still be within the funding timelines under ICIP.

As the project proceeds and costs are better known as contracts are executed and construction progresses for the various elements of the project, scope adjustments may be required on elements of the Supporting Transportation Infrastructure component (planned work on feeder routes to the BRT lines) to stay within approved project budgets, or additional funding requests may be submitted to meet the original project scope. The regular reporting by Administration to City Council as the project progresses will address any scope adjustments that may be required to stay within the approved budget, or budget increase requests to maintain the original scope.

IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial, communications, policy, privacy, or CPTED implications or considerations at this time. These will be considered in other future reports as required.

NEXT STEPS

The Administration is proceeding in July 2024 with tendering contracts for locations planned for construction in 2024. Regular construction communications updates to businesses, transit riders, stakeholders and the community on the BRT project will be ongoing. Engagement activities will continue through the construction period.

Administration will provide regular reporting to City Council on the BRT project status including work completed to date and the schedule for remaining work to complete the project.

APPENDICES

1. Approved BRT Routes and Station Locations Map April 2019
2. 2024 Planned Construction

Report Approval

Written by: Rob Dudiak, Special Projects Manager

Reviewed by: Dan Willems, Director of Technical Services
Michael Moellenbeck, Director of Saskatoon Transit

Approved by: Terry Schmidt, General Manager, Transportation and Construction