

Bus Rapid Transit Branding, Wayfinding and Marketing Development

ISSUE

The City of Saskatoon will soon be implementing a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system. Research on BRT systems in cities across North America shows that early introduction and adoption of a BRT system brand identity is the preferred and successful approach. This report seeks approval for the Saskatoon Transit Bus Rapid Transit brand name and visual identity.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Governance and Priorities Committee recommend to City Council approval of the Bus Rapid Transit brand name, *Link*, and its visual identity.

BACKGROUND

In 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. This Growth Plan set in motion a strategy for the BRT project. A major component of this strategy is the BRT branding, marketing and wayfinding development.

At its Regular Business Meeting held on April 26, 2021, City Council approved the Bus Rapid Transit Wayfinding, Branding and Marketing Budget Adjustment [report](#).

Subsequently, Administration issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) in May 2021 for the BRT wayfinding, branding and marketing development. The work was awarded to Entro in September 2021, a global branding, wayfinding, and environmental design firm that specializes in naming and branding of transit properties.

CURRENT STATUS

Administration worked with Entro to develop a pathway to the brand development for the new BRT project. A comprehensive eight-step process was developed to guide the way forward to identify a brand name and visual identity, the application and use of wayfinding signage, the development of a communications and marketing plan, and ultimately the brand launch before and during construction. The eight-step process developed is as follows:

1. Discovery and Landscape Analysis (Brand and Site Audit)
2. Stakeholder Research (Visioning and Analysis)
3. Naming
4. Brand Development and Validation
5. Visual Language and Guidelines
6. Wayfinding
7. Communications and Marketing Plan
8. Brand Launch and Construction

The work for the brand and visual identity is specific to the new bus rapid transit service (red, green and blue lines). The Saskatoon Transit brand will apply as the master brand for both BRT and all the other transit routes and services, including Access Transit.

More details on each step of the process, along with the stakeholders that were engaged throughout the process, can be found in Appendix 1.

After working through this process and completing a brand and site audit, stakeholder research, name generation and naming validation, Administration is recommending **Link** as the brand name.

The name **Link** meets many of the naming qualities and BRT specific evaluation criteria identified early in the process.

Naming Criteria	
Naming Qualities	BRT Specific Criteria
Meaningful	Makes sense in the transit context.
Distinctive	Applies itself easily to wayfinding and signage specifications
Future-Oriented	If possible, have ties to Saskatoon and the region
Positive	Does not duplicate another local business name
Descriptive	Sounds, looks, and works well with the overall Saskatoon Transit brand name

Through naming validation workshops and discussions, the name **Link** was associated with words such as connectivity, welcoming, accessible, reliable, modern, and clear/straightforward.

- Participants identified with this name more frequently and could more easily see the associations with transit.
- Words and images that were chosen connected closely with **Link**.
- The name brings Saskatoon's system to the perceived caliber of other cities fitting within the overall plan for growth.
- Ease of understanding achieved through similar naming in other transit systems.
- It is straightforward while having opportunities for community connection.

The name **Link** is being recommended as it embodies concepts of connection, speed and network. The name is also timeless and easy to understand.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Link will be at the heart of a system that is growing to enable simple, seamless, reliable, and friendly travel. The brand should echo these qualities.



The blue and orange colours incorporated into the brand image/logo are associated with Saskatoon Transit. The arm and leg of the 'k' wraps around its stem, offering a welcoming embrace. The rounded ends not only create a friendly aesthetic but reflects the stunning natural landscape of Saskatoon. More details on the visual look and feel of the **Link** brand can be found in Appendix 2.

While this new bus rapid transit service will fall under the master brand of Saskatoon Transit, the BRT (red, green and blue lines) has its own visual identity to reflect the unique service while complementing the master brand.



The Administration's approach aligns with the leading practices on this topic. Several North American cities have implemented rapid transit systems (e.g., Mississauga - MiWay, Region of Waterloo - Ion, City of Brampton - ZUM, City of Calgary - Max). Research has found that timing of the brand identity matters to project success and public support. This is largely because strong wayfinding, branding, and marketing plans and designs for the BRT system reduces the risk of public confusion if language or brand changes mid-project (e.g., is it called BRT or is it called **Link**). Early implementation of communications and marketing materials 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 cities that have implemented a BRT, wayfinding, branding, and marketing has generally taken between 18 months to two years to develop prior to construction of the system.

Alternatively, in communities where the brand identity was introduced closer to the date of BRT launch, several challenges emerged:

- 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.

IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial, legal, social, or environmental implications. Full implementation of the brand may require further financial resources; however, the details of implementation are still being developed and full scoping is underway. Any additional funding requirements will be brought forward to City Council for consideration prior to implementation.

NEXT STEPS

If the recommendation is approved by City Council, work on the **Link** brand, marketing and wayfinding signage will continue over the coming months as follows:

- Administration will refine the communications and marketing plan aimed to increase awareness of the new **Link** brand name within the community.
- Communications will be focused on informing the public prior to experiencing significant construction impacts and provide education on the new future transit service.
- Administration will work towards completing a registered trademark for the **Link** brand.
- Administration is considering naming conventions for the rapid transit lines (routes) currently identified as the red, green, and blue lines.
- Entro was commissioned to conduct a comprehensive audit of Saskatoon Transit's existing signage system. The examination is aimed to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement within the current signage program. A subsequent report will outline findings, showcases several case studies and best practices, and present recommendations for enhancement.

APPENDICES

1. Saskatoon Transit – Bus Rapid Transit: The Journey to Developing the BRT Brand
2. Visual Look and Feel of Link Saskatoon Transit BRT

Report Approval

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