

Link Operating Phase-In**Project Description**

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 Bus Rapid Transit (Link) system and a local bus network to support it. The current transit system is focused on service coverage. The Administration has identified changes required to support high-frequency, direct service along the major corridors alongside a redesigned local bus network.

The Link Capital project is being built by using funding approved under the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) program along with the City of Saskatoon's contributions. As the final designs are completed, the operating costs associated with this project and associated local bus network are being finalized. Due to the fact this project has significant impacts on improved capacity and reliability of the public transit system, Administration is recommending a three-year operating phase-in approach beginning with the 2026 and 2027 Multi-Year Business Plan and Budget to fully operationalize the Link system in 2028.

2026 and 2027 Preliminary Budget Requests

Within the 2026 and 2027 preliminary budget request Administration is recommending \$3.5 million be added in 2026 and \$3.5 million be added in 2027. As the Link service will not be operational until 2028, phase-in funds will be used in the funding plan to help fund the Link capital project costs. It is anticipated that some operational costs, such as snow and ice maintenance, will be required on College Drive and 1st Avenue prior to 2028 as construction is completed in phases. Once Link is operational, the funds will be used for full operations of the newly redesigned transit service. It is expected that an additional increment will be needed in 2028 for the full costs of the service including all ongoing maintenance of the Link corridors, stations and local bus network.

Once operational, the phased-in funds will be used largely to address the proposed 20% increase in service hours required for the system. The proposed 20% service increase reflects:

1. The costs of operating three Link bus rapid transit lines at appropriate service levels;
2. Accommodating population growth and modest citywide enhancements aligning with long-term growth plans and Saskatoon Transit's service standards;
3. Addressing overloads and improving service reliability (on-time performance);
4. Providing additional service to developing communities where full service is not currently provided; and,

5. Realizing efficiencies through optimizations in the existing work which offset a portion of the costs.

To achieve this, additional investment in the following areas will be required:

1. Salary costs and FTEs for Transit Operators, Supervisors, Maintenance, Body Shop, Stores and Information Technology (IT) employees;
2. Additional allocations to the Transit Vehicle Replacement Reserve;
3. Salary costs and FTEs for additional Fire Community Support Workers;
4. Additional snow and ice maintenance;
5. Signage, pavement marking, and signal repair and replacement;
6. Fuel, parts and equipment maintenance;
7. Security cameras and electrical, IT and communication requirements; and
8. Maintenance of medians, flowerpots, shrubs and trees.

Further planning and design work is underway (i.e. redesign of the local bus network, review of service levels, and detailed design of the Link corridors and stations) that will refine the service level requirements and associated operating costs. Future reporting will be presented to City Council prior to the 2028 operationalization of the Link System which will outline in more detail the anticipated needs and potential options.