



City of
Peterborough

To: Members of the Peterborough Transit Liaison Committee

From: Michael Papadacos, Asset Management and Capital Planning Director

Meeting Date: May 25, 2023

Subject: PTLC23-002 Peterborough Transit Route Review and Long-Term Growth Strategy Summary

Purpose

A background report to share with the Peterborough Transit Liaison Committee the activities, findings, and implementation plans resulting from the Peterborough Transit Route Review and Long-Term Growth Strategy study.

Background

The Peterborough Transit Route Review and Long-Term Growth Strategy study offer recommendations to guide the City of Peterborough in supporting existing and future Peterborough Transit riders; adapting to new land-use patterns set out in the City of Peterborough Official Plan; and, moving the city towards the Transportation Master Plan Transit ridership targets, which ultimately aim to enhance well-being and equity for all residents while ensuring the economic and environmental sustainability of our City.

These reports conclude that the City of Peterborough:

- Adopt and implement a grid-oriented network consisting of 11 regular routes, 5 special routes and 4 community buses to provide reliable service to residents throughout the city.
- Phase in enhanced service levels to reach a 71% increase in annual revenue vehicle-hours over 2018 levels by 2051 to provide residents with greater access to city destinations and flexibility in trip scheduling. This would look like 15–30-minute schedules on most weekday routes, 30–60-minute schedules on weekend routes, and longer hours of service all week.

- Explore provincial and federal funding opportunities to implement infrastructure improvements at transit stops, two high-use terminuses, and the downtown terminal to improve accessibility, efficiency, and comfort.
- Enhance fleet and staff capacity to support the network as it grows.

The following sections provide greater detail on how this comprehensive plan for the City was developed.

Peterborough Transit Route Review and Long-Term Growth Strategy Process

In 2018, the City of Peterborough initiated a three-part study of Peterborough Transit to address existing challenges and opportunities, and act as a feeder study to the Transportation Master Plan.

Part One, the Transit Route Review, consists of a complete review of existing transit services; identification of needs and opportunities; evaluation of network alternatives; and concludes with a recommended network with projections for fleet, staff, infrastructure, and financial requirements. The Review began in 2018 with background reviews of the City's policy framework, peer-city networks, and Transit's operational metrics. The first wave of public engagement was also initiated, along with a Peterborough Transit Survey Study – a comprehensive consultation and technical analysis involving 1,143 households in the Peterborough Census Metropolitan Area which provided a detailed picture of City transit travel behaviour.

Due to the significant impacts of COVID-19 on public transit, Peterborough Transit altered its routes and schedules in July 2020. While the Review of the original route network continued, there was also significant engagement and evaluation of the Interim Route Network between 2020 and 2021. On July 12, 2021, Report IPSTR21-013, Transit Route Review Study Recommendations, went forward to Council recommending an updated route network along with service expansion and enhancement plans. Four of the six recommendations were approved by Council (see Study Recommendation Section).

Part Two, the Long-Term Growth Strategy, provides a Transit vision and service plan for the City through to 2051. This strategy was developed in conjunction with the Transportation Master Plan (TMP). Through the TMP process, a vision was created for the future of transportation in Peterborough. Transit will play a key role in that future as a viable, reliable transportation option for residents of Peterborough, and is responsible for attracting 10-12% of the mode share. To move us towards the goals of the TMP, IBI Group provided the City with the Peterborough Transit 2051 Route Network Memorandum in April 2022. This document proposes enhancements to the route network, fleet, and number of operators necessary to reach the TMP's strategic objectives. The TMP further builds upon this work with Transit priority measures, policy initiatives, and cost estimates. The TMP was approved by City Council in March 2022.

A future Part Three of the Route Review and Long-Term Growth Strategy will consider the location of the downtown terminal in light of future Via Rail service, and other growth and transit operational service improvements.

Study Findings

A. Existing Challenges

The City initially embarked upon this review to address a set of objectives that would result in a transit service that effectively and efficiently meets the travel needs of its existing and future users. These objectives included reducing travel times, improving frequency of service between popular destinations, increasing transit ridership, optimizing the use of vehicles and staff resources, and mitigating challenges experienced at the downtown transit terminal.

More specifically, the radial (i.e., Hub) system was experiencing the following challenges as our city grew:

- As destinations away from the downtown area became increasingly important, the radial system resulted in longer travel times.
- Intensification corridors identified in the City's Official Plan (Lansdowne Street and Chemong Road) and growth in new areas of the city were not and could not be serviced by the radial system.
- The 40-minute routes were experiencing challenges remaining on-time which created a snowball effect of delaying other routes at the terminal.
- The downtown transit terminal was at capacity for the radial system, both in terms of customer space on the platform and the number of bus routes that could be accommodated.
- Finally, ridership on Peterborough Transit had plateaued and was very low among resident households.

Past experience has demonstrated that increases in service resulted in increases in ridership while maintaining cost-effectiveness of the system, which showed promise for further investment. To reach the Transportation Master Plan mode share target of 10-12%, Transit needed to address service gaps and capacity limits to ensure the system met the needs of residents and attracted new riders.

B. Transit Rider Experience Data

In addition to the operational review, public, stakeholder, and operator consultation informed the Route Review and Long-Term Strategy objectives and evaluation of alternatives. Initial consultation took place in 2018-2019 and consisted of a workshop

session, web-based survey, and a public information centre. Following the implementation of the Interim Route Network deployed during the COVID-19 pandemic, public feedback was collected through the Transit Rider Survey, Transit Ambassadors, Transit staff, and stakeholder information sessions. A second round of formal consultation was also held from 2020-2021, which included travel surveys conducted by the Council for Persons with Disabilities and Peterborough Transit, online town hall meetings, an interactive map, a dedicated Transit study phone line, and a set of stakeholder presentations. The main themes among feedback received were:

- Reduce travel times and walk time distance to stops. Long travel times made transit less attractive.
- Increase frequency of service and hours of operation.
- Add and maintain more direct routes. Increase service outside of downtown core. Increase service in new and developing areas.
- Eliminate the need for all transfers downtown. Make transfers more convenient and reliable. Missed connections combined with low service frequency made for very long waits.
- Improve service equity and accessibility. Improve customer communications and access to route/schedule information (wayfinding, maps, transfer signage). Improve amenities (benches, shelters, waste disposal) and accessibility features.

It was also learned from surveys that 70% of respondents indicated the COVID-19 interim route system worked for them or would with minor adjustments, while 30% indicated it did not. Peterborough Transit implemented several interim improvements to the Interim Route Network and worked closely to support educational and mentorship programs while the larger study carried on.

C. Refined Objectives and Assessment of Alternatives

The study objectives were updated to reflect what was learned through the background studies and public engagement. These new objectives provided the foundation for the development and evaluation of proposed network changes. The study objectives were:

1. Balance access to service (coverage) and mobility (travel times).
2. Meeting the needs of distinct travel markets.
3. Providing high-quality service in challenging urban context.
4. Improving the convenience of transit.
5. Minimizing service duplication.

6. Improving service to areas outside of downtown.
7. Providing services to developing areas.
8. Mitigating operational issues at the downtown terminal.

Following an assessment of alternatives, the resulting recommended network, now known as the grid network, scored highest in the evaluation, and was found to provide:

- Reduced reliance on the downtown terminal and better service to key locations outside of the downtown.
- Increased service to and between post-secondary institutions along various routes that would also enhance travel times for non-student riders.
- Faster, more direct trips to major destinations, and minimized transfers.
- Balanced service coverage and travel times, minimized duplication, and increased efficiency.
- Improved on-time performance and reliability.

Study Recommendations

While the long-term vision for network and service levels are outlined at the start of this memo, the study recommended a phased approach to implementation and detailed the next steps that should be taken to move us towards the long-term vision.

To that end, staff presented Council with Report IPSTS21-013, Transit Route Review Study Recommendations outlining the following path forward:

- Adopting the new Transit Route Network for implementation in May 2022.
- Initiating an On-Demand pilot program in the fall of 2021 to provide greater functionality to the overall network and supplemental service as required.
- Beginning work on an implementation plan for a proposed Service Enhancement Plan that would add express routes to the system, increase operating hours of the community routes, and extend routes to provide transit to new areas of the city (e.g., Peterborough Airport).

At the City Council Meeting on July 26, 2021, Council approved the new Transit Route Network and the On-Demand pilot program. The proposed Service Enhancement Plan was not endorsed.

Strategy Implementation

Following Council direction, the Interim Route Network was maintained until implementation of the new Transit Route Network in May 2022. The new Transit Route Network consists of 9-10 regular routes and 4 community buses, which run on 20-, 30-, and 60-minute schedules that vary through the day and on weekends.

The On-Demand pilot program was launched the end of March 2022 as the “Pink Community Bus” (covering the south /east area of the city). In September 2022 the service was expanded to the entire city on Saturday evenings from 8:00 pm – 12:00 am, this city-wide evening service was further expanded to weeknights in November 2022.

To support the new network, the City of Peterborough initiated a set of capital projects that will add accessibility features, pedestrian amenities, and facilities for drivers along the new routes.

- Upgrades to the satellite hubs at Trent University and Fleming College to provide passenger amenities and facilities for drivers.
- Reconstruction of public transit stops to be fully accessible and compliant with AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) Transportation and Built Environment standards. (Note: it is estimated that 65% of the 620 transit stops in the city are fully accessible and that 220 require additional work)
- Installation of new transit shelters to accommodate various levels of passenger demand.

Finally, Phase 1 of the Transit ITS (Intelligent Transit System) Program has installed cameras, passenger counters, and advanced vehicle location equipment, and provided the software required to provide real-time data and improved travel information for customers. Phase 2 is scheduled for funding in the coming years and will build upon the existing platform to enhance travel time, passenger services, and safety.

The 2023 Operating Budget included an increase in Transit funding necessary to maintain the current service levels. These cost increases are primarily driven by significant increases in the cost of diesel fuel, operator wage increases in-line with collective agreements, and increasing insurance rates for the municipal market. Funding to implement the previously rejected service enhancements was not requested. During the 2023 Budget deliberations, Council did not approve the 2023 Transit Operating budget increase and instead chose to maintain funding at the 2022 levels pending a report from staff regarding the transit grid system. Given the increases in fixed costs current service levels cannot be maintained within the approved 2023 Transit Operating Budget.

The staff report on a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of the Grid and Hub systems was then deferred until Fall 2023 so that the Peterborough Transit Liaison Committee could meet and offer suggestions regarding operations. Given the uncertainties around 2023 budgets and the recent staffing

changes at Peterborough Transit, the capital projects set to improve daily operations and rider experience mentioned above have been delayed.

Summary

Peterborough Transit works diligently to provide an effective and efficient public transit service that supports residents and non-residents in making daily essential trips in the City of Peterborough. This fundamental public service carried 3.8 million Transit riders in 2017. However, Peterborough Transit was also experiencing challenges as the city and the service grew, including longer routes, delayed buses, and congestion at the downtown terminal. Transit had also identified that there were opportunities to serve a greater number of riders and new areas in our growing city.

A comprehensive study was completed between 2018 and 2021 to address these challenges and opportunities. The study included a Transit Route Review and Long-Term Growth Strategy, and was supplemented by a Transit Travel Survey, On-Demand Transit Planning Study, and significant public and stakeholder consultation and engagement. The study concluded that Peterborough Transit move forward with a grid-oriented network, enhancing service levels overtime to achieve a 71% increase in transit service by 2051.

In July 2021, City Council approved the recommended network and On-Demand pilot program, but not the Service Enhancement strategy. These new service changes were implemented in 2021 and 2022, as the City was experiencing the on-going impacts of COVID-19. Further development of the network's supportive infrastructure have been postponed as staff respond to uncertainties around the 2023 budget and recent staffing changes.

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