



City of
Peterborough

To: **Members of General Committee**

From: **Cynthia Fletcher**
Commissioner of Infrastructure and Planning Services

Meeting Date: **July 13, 2020**

Subject: **Report IPSTR20-019**
COVID-19 Transit Route Network Update

Purpose

A report to provide an update on the process and rationale to develop the interim Transit Route Network intended to support the Community through the phases of re-opening and recovery related to the COVID 19 pandemic.

Recommendation

That Council approve the recommendation outlined in Report IPSTR20-019, dated July 13, 2020, of the Commissioner of Infrastructure and Planning Services as follows:

That Council receive Report IPSTR20-019 for information.

Budget and Financial Implications

There are no budget and financial implications in Council approving the recommendation in this report.

Executive Summary

At the Council meeting of June 22, 2020, staff was directed to provide a report at July 13th, 2020 General Committee meeting regarding the amendments to the City of Peterborough's bus routes.

In response to the world-wide pandemic, the City of Peterborough activated its Emergency Control Group (ECG) on Friday, March 13, 2020 and the group has met frequently since that date. Currently, the ECG meets weekly and as issues requiring input or direction arise. In addition to activating the ECG, on March 23, 2020, Mayor Therrien declared a State of Emergency for the City of Peterborough, after careful consideration of the increasing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our Community is still considered to be in a pandemic and creeping into recovery. Public Health officials stress re-opening needs to happen incrementally and monitoring of community health is key at every stage. If cases start to spike, we have been advised that restrictions could be re-instated. In other countries, including in the United States, there have been significant flare ups of COVID-19 occurrences after restrictions have been eased.

The ability for Peterborough Transit to support the community to safely transition through the re-opening phase is contingent upon the City following direction from Public Health officials, Provincial Orders and the transit providers industry. Peterborough Transit has been given parameters for a "re-opening", related to personal protection/barriers, distancing requirements on buses/transit stops/terminal, traffic flows, signage, communication. Staff considered these parameters along with the following additional factors in developing the interim Transit Route Network:

- Public and driver input gathered to date via the initial stages of Transit Route Review;
- Peterborough Public Health guidelines;
- Provincial Orders;
- Emergency Services; and
- The adjusted downtown street/ sidewalk layout and construction underway.

Currently, direction and adjustments for City services are often required the same day or within days. For this reason, the ECG has been providing direction during the pandemic and recovery periods. Changing transit routes in this period of time has required substantial preparation in a relatively short time frame to ensure the service can continue to be provided in a safe manner and as ridership increases.

Any proposed permanent, long-term changes to transit routes would be presented to Council when we are functioning in a business as usual setting. Further community consultation would occur as part of that process.

Background

As the City moves through re-opening phases and recovery during/post COVID 19 pandemic, Peterborough Transit has been continually adjusting service and operating

policies to ensure community and employee health/safety remain a top priority. The service model implemented in response to the pandemic included:

- Operating seven days per week on Sunday service schedule (hours reduced from 6:00 am to 11:20 pm to 8:00 am to 7:20 pm) for conventional and specialized service;
- Vans providing by-reservation essential worker trips early morning and evening;
- Enhanced cleaning of all high contact areas within buses;
- Closure of the customer service counter and waiting room at the terminal and reuse of space to allow for distancing of employees;
- Rear door boarding and suspension of fare collection;
- Reduced seating capacity on buses for social distancing; and
- Operating a number of stand-by buses to reduce crowding on routes.

This already strained operating model is not sustainable over the medium to longer term, especially as the Community begins to gradually re-open. Balancing staffing resources with the need to operate with reduced bus capacity, mandated by provincial guidelines, and the inability to provide adequate space for social distancing at the downtown terminal were key factors driving the need to redesign the route system on an interim basis.

The following goals and guiding principles for the Interim Transit Route Network design were endorsed by the ECG at their meeting of May 13, 2020

Goals:

- Ensure personal/community health and safety
- Optimize transit assets (human/buses)
- Provide service agility

Guiding Principles for Transit Service during Recovery

Each of the guiding principles influenced decision-making and route structure(s) that allows transit to resume increased levels of operation, while keeping people safe.

Over-Arching Guiding Principle:

- **Personal and Community Safety:** Protecting the health and safety of people is paramount as the community begins to return to public spaces/services as part of the COVID-19 recovery phase.

Secondary Guiding Principles:

- Support Physical Distancing:
 - Reduce number of buses into “hub/transfer” centre
 - Reduce number of people gathering in one place
 - Ensure physical distancing: passengers, at the terminal, in route boarding
 - Measures to safe-guard frontline employees
- Reduce payment/personal interactions
 - Expanded app payment options
- Agility within the service model
 - Ability to manage/optimize resources: drivers, staff, vehicles
 - Ability to scale up/scale down, if necessary, based on community health numbers and Public Health direction and Provincial Orders
 - Ability to meet passenger volume increase as restrictions ease and services are re-instated.
- Instill Public confidence in transit as a safe mode of transportation.
 - Specific and targeted messaging to highlight measures taken to ensure safety and reduce risk

In addition to initial community feedback from the Transit Route Review outlined below, staff connected with stakeholders, industry colleagues and Peterborough Public Health for input and “best practices/standards”. This input, along with key travel destinations and ridership data, was used to develop the guiding principles and design a service model for implementation during the recovery phase of the COVID 19 pandemic.

To help make it easier for customers to practice physical distancing, several measures were in place starting June 28, 2020.

New Interim Route Network: Borrowing from Community Consultation from Transit Route Review

With the City in a pandemic and slowly moving into recovery, Public Health officials stressed that re-opening needs to happen incrementally and monitoring of community health is key at every stage. Changes to the operation at Transit needed to be made during the summer months to continue to provide physical distancing and enhanced safety measures with normal reductions in staffing levels. With the gradual reopening of the Community, higher ridership demands are anticipated along with increased need to return to regular operating hours.

Instead of cutting the number of routes or further reducing the frequency of service to meet these objectives, staff looked to redesign the routes to help meet the public health objectives while providing a more sustainable operation.

In terms of the transit network redesign, full consultation was not possible given the current situation and the timelines required for developing a response plan; however, staff have incorporated a number of themes and ideas generated from other consultation activities.

In 2018, the Transit Route Review and Long-Term Growth Strategy was launched. It included in-person consultation sessions, a workshop with stakeholders and drivers, and a public survey as part of developing options for the City's Transit Route Network.

The project team was preparing for further community consultation on a series of transit route design options just prior to the pandemic, associated Provincial orders and local Public Health directions. Completion of the study has been put on hold while staff and community stakeholders focused on the health emergency impacting Peterborough and while consultation activities are restricted by the Provincial Emergency Order related to the size of gatherings.

While the overarching goal of the interim route system changes is to help protect the health and wellbeing of customers, employees, and the community during the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the themes generated as part of the previously collected community feedback on the route system were considered such as:

- Reduce the number of trips that are forced to travel to and transfer at the downtown terminal by making routes more direct to destinations;
- Improve passenger travel times to high demand destinations – provide options for more direct routes from Point A to Point B;
- Consider transfers at locations other than the downtown terminal to reduce out of way travel;
- Increase the number of community buses between key destination points such as community centres, shopping nodes, and health care providers; and
- Maintain accessibility goal for transit system, of a stop within 450 m from 90% of the population.

The new interim route network was designed to reduce congestion at the Bus Terminal and onboard buses, allowing for greater physical distancing. The new network realigns several routes to be direct and reduces the number of routes that directly service the Bus Terminal, relieving the significant congestion, due to customers having to transfer at a central location to board another bus to complete their trips. Onboard buses, customers traditionally experience crush loads on primary routes and peak trips, particularly when they leave the terminal or return to the terminal. Staff has focused on customer safety, creating an interim network that allows customers more options to move around the city without going into the Bus Terminal or taking an overloaded peak bus.

Interim Network Highlights:

- Reduction in conventional routes from 17 to 9
- Increase in Community Bus routes from 1 to 3
- Only four routes will service the Bus Terminal
- One route will service Simcoe street at the Bus Terminal
- New routes are more direct and multiple routes link many key destinations around the City directly, reducing the need to transfer and reducing passenger volumes on buses serving popular destinations
- Three new hubs (Trent University, Fleming College, and the Hospital) are served by more routes facilitating trips that still need to transfer
- All routes, including those servicing the Bus Terminal will be able to connect customers across the City with multiple transfer points, rather than the single point at the Terminal
- Modified routes to eliminate some areas currently served by TransCab
- All new routes were mindful of improving coverage throughout the city, providing more localized service for mobility assisted riders, adjusting to rider limits on buses while still providing consistent service, providing good connections for riders to move across the City

Benefits of the interim Transit Route Network

- Improved physical distancing opportunities
- More travel options
- More direct point to point trips linking key destinations
- Fewer transfers; more transfer points
- More Community Bus routes
- Reduced travel time for many trips, limiting time spent on board where physical distancing can be more difficult
- Ability to scale up service frequency in response to further increases in demand

Communication

- As significant changes were to be implemented, a full communication plan was implemented:
 - New maps and route information posted along the existing system and online, printed copies made available
 - Customer Service Ambassadors present at the terminal and onboard buses to assist customers
 - Extensive coverage by media partners to raise awareness
 - Paid advertising campaign in print, radio, and television as well as through online platforms
 - GOOGLE Transit planning app to assist with trip planning – available for smart phone download and on our website at peterborough.ca/transit

- Transit staff are front-line workers who represent the service and provide assistance to customers in a friendly, professional manner

Protective Measures

Measures are being put in place to protect customers and employees including:

- Protective barriers installed around the driver's cab (by the end of July).
- Employees have access to and are expected to wear personal protective equipment.
- Public expectation to wear a mask when using transit and use designated seats
- Enhanced and improved cleaning continues on buses and vans.

Fare Collection:

For now, customers will be asked to continue to board buses at the rear doors only, unless they need to use the accessibility features at the front doors, and fares will not be collected at this time. Peterborough Transit is putting in measures for touchless fare payment and onboard safety enhancements, such as the driver barrier that will allow for front-of-bus boarding and fare collection to resume by the end of July.

Service Hours

On June 28, 2020, Transit resumed regular service hours, to assist customers as they return to employment and get back to other activities in the community. With the resumption of regular service hours, essential workers can now access the new conventional routes to key locations across the City. This means that the by-reservation essential worker service was discontinued, and accessible transit services were returned to regular hours to accommodate our mobility customers.

Summary

As the City's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has evolved, the measures put in place to protect the public and City employees have also evolved, based on direction from local and provincial health directives. Changes to City services, including transit have been coordinated through the City's Emergency Control Group, in accordance with the City's declaration of a State of Emergency.

Previous measures put in place at Peterborough Transit, while necessary at the early stages of the pandemic, are not sustainable as the restrictions imposed by Provincial Orders are relaxed and businesses, workplaces, and institutions begin to re-open and transit ridership grows. The redesign of the Transit Route System was a necessary next step in the COVID-19 response plan to provide a safe and sustainable transit operation for passengers and employees that complies with provincial and local health directives and can accommodate increased ridership demand as the City gradually re-opens.

Ongoing monitoring of service needs, community/personal safety and progress through the pandemic recovery will occur over the next several months.

As the community continues on a path of re-opening and moves into recovery, the next phase of the Transit Route Review will be re-activated and further community consultation on the proposed options and the interim network will occur. The temporary changes implemented during the pandemic will help inform the Transit Route Review when it resumes.

Submitted by,

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Attachments:

Appendix A: Community Bus Map
Appendix B: Regular Bus Map