



City of
Peterborough

To: Members of the General Committee

From: Michael Papadacos, Commissioner, Infrastructure and Planning Services (Acting)

Meeting Date: September 11, 2023

Subject: Modifications to Transit Service and 2023 Operating Budget Considerations, Report IPSTR23-004

Purpose

A report to recommend modifications to the Transit service incorporating feedback from the Peterborough Transit Liaison Committee (PTLC) and to address the 2023 operating budget shortfall in order to maintain transit service levels for the remainder of the year.

Recommendations

That Council approve the recommendations outlined in Report IPSTR23-004 dated September 11, 2023, of the Commissioner of Infrastructure and Planning Services (Acting) as follows:

- a) That staff commence implementing the short-term recommendations developed with input from the Peterborough Transit Liaison Committee within available budgets;
- b) That the route network presented in Appendix A to Report IPSTR23-004 be approved;
- c) That staff include the proposed service enhancements – addition of 4 full-time drivers at \$340,000 and 2 supervisors at \$256,000 – developed with input from the Peterborough Transit Liaison Committee in the 2024 draft budget;
- d) That the On-Demand Pilot service be discontinued once contractual obligations expire in October 2023 and resources be reallocated to extending conventional service to cover the service periods currently covered by On-Demand; and

- e) That, subject to the City's overall year-end financial position and at the discretion of the Treasurer, up to \$941,000 from the uncommitted funds in the Transit Capital Reserve be used to cover the projected 2023 operating budget shortfall to avoid service cutbacks in the remainder of 2023.

Budget and Financial Implications

Up to \$941,000 may be required to maintain current service levels through the remainder of 2023 and can be accommodated from the uncommitted funds in the Transit Capital Reserve Fund. Funds allocated to the Transit Capital Reserve are used to provide the municipal share of the projects in the Transit capital program. Using these funds will require future recontributions to ensure funding is available to access Federal and Provincial funding that has been approved to support the Transit capital program in future years.

The proposed service enhancements for 2024 include the addition of 4 full-time drivers at \$340,000 and 2 supervisors at \$256,000 and will be included in the 2024 Operating budget to increase service schedule levels and provide support to evening and weekend service.

Background

2022 Transit Recovery Challenges and Customer Concerns

The impacts of COVID-19 remained through 2022, presenting an unexpected and sustained level of uncertainty for Transit recovery. In addition to reduced ridership associated with COVID-19 on some customer demographics, consistent and reliable transit service to the public was further impacted by supply chain issues, workforce/labour challenges, changing customer travel patterns, hybrid/remote employment and education options. Transit achieved 70% of pre-pandemic ridership levels by the end of 2022, short of the 85% target, but consistent with slower than expected rates of recovery for transit across the province.

In July 2021, Council approved a new route network to support the growth and expansion of Peterborough Transit for the future. A soft launch of the system began in May 2022, with optimism that workforce and supply chain issues that had been disrupted through the height of the pandemic, would improve by fall 2022. Based on that assumption, service planning targeted September 2022 to launch additional planned network improvements.

A comprehensive communication plan was undertaken to promote the planned service. Expectations from Transit customers and key stakeholders were set. However, ongoing workforce challenges and labour shortages – primarily absences due to a resurgence of COVID-19 combined with other illnesses circulating in the community – resulted in a large number of daily uncovered trips. In addition, inadequate recruitment and training rates

resulted in rolling trip cancellations that created an extremely unreliable service for customers and a significant revenue shortfall from uncollected fares. Customers were profoundly impacted by the result of these challenges through September/October 2022, the most critical service delivery cycle for Transit with the end of seasonal holidays and return of secondary and post-secondary students. Consequently, customer complaints escalated through the fall, driven by trip cancellations which exceeded 100 trips (17%) on some days. In addition to customer complaints received through City platforms, the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1320 solicited public feedback via an online form. Transit received 43 contact forms, with 34 (80%) in September-October. The majority of forms reflected the same complaints about service unreliability that Transit was receiving through City platforms (cancellations, delays, missed transfers, communication).

Transit took steps to mitigate the disruption to customers, reducing services with lower ridership for the November-December service period, expanding On-Demand Saturday evening service to include weekday evenings to reduce overall workforce requirements, align shifts with available workforce/absence rates, initiating a comprehensive recruitment campaign, and expanding training programs. The effect of these measures was reflected in a decline of the trip cancellation rate to less than 1% during the January/February 2023 service period. Overall, the data between September 2022 and February 2023 demonstrates that service reliability (trip cancellations) was the key concern for customers.

Combined with the sharp decline and subsequent end of complaints timed with the positive impact of service reliability measures, it can be concluded that service reliability was the root cause for customer complaints, and this has largely stabilized. **In 2023, transit ridership has shown strong signs of recovery with a ~53% increase from August 2022 year-to-date to August 2023 year-to-date (1,134,478 to 1,731,627).** Since Transit is an essential customer facing service, feedback from customers is important and the service needs to operate with a continuous improvement mindset. The establishment of the Peterborough Transit Liaison Committee provides a forum for Transit staff to solicit feedback from customers and key stakeholders.

Peterborough Transit Liaison Committee Update

In the spring of 2022, Council recommended that a Transit Liaison Committee be created to provide a forum for staff to solicit feedback from a cross-section of transit users and key community stakeholders with respect to Peterborough Transit services. Due to the election in October 2022, the establishment of the committee was delayed until 2023 when the newly elected Council could appoint members to the committee.

At the December 12, 2022, meeting, Council directed staff to provide a report on the pros and cons (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats Analysis) of the current transit system and on the operational and financial implications of returning to the former (hub and spoke) system that was in place prior to July 2021, by March 2023. At the meeting on February 27, 2023, Council deferred this report until September to give staff time to meet with the PTLC and ensure that their recommendations were considered.

During budget deliberations in January 2023, Council approved a reduction in the 2023 Operating budget proposed by staff of a net \$941,000, effectively freezing the budget at 2022 levels. On May 8, 2023, Report IPSTR23-003 Transit Budget Considerations was presented to Council outlining the necessary reductions to service levels required to meet the approved 2023 operating budget. The increase to the 2023 operating budget proposed during 2023 budget deliberations was required to maintain service levels and was driven by inflationary pressures – primarily increases in costs for fuel, insurance, and wages. The proposed service reductions included:

- ending weekday and Saturday service at 8:00 pm
- cancelling the community buses
- eliminating Sunday service
- removing statutory service from the schedule
- this plan also resulted in the reduction of 6 full-time positions.

These reductions were scheduled to take effect for the second half of the calendar year. Given the significant impact the proposed reductions would have on transit users, businesses and the community, Council deferred the report until staff had the opportunity to consult the newly constituted PTLC.

On May 11, 2023, the Peterborough Transit Liaison Committee (PTLC) met for the first time. In accordance with the Terms of Reference members represent the following groups:

- Two members of Council (Transportation Chair and a Councillor-at-Large)
- Two conventional/regular transit service riders from the City of Peterborough
- Two specialized van/mobility transit service riders from the City of Peterborough
- One member from the Accessibility Advisory Committee
- One member from Age Friendly Peterborough
- One member from the Council for Persons with Disabilities
- One member from Peterborough Green Up
- One member from the Trent Central Student Association
- One member from the Fleming College Student Association

The work of the committee was also supported by staff resources from Transit and a representative from the ATU Local 1320, along with numerous staff from multiple divisions/sections, including: Transportation Planning; Planning, Development & Urban Design; Climate Change; Accessibility; Diversity, Equity & Inclusion; and Geomatics/Mapping.

During the next few meetings, the committee was presented with the following reports:

- PTLC23-001 Transit and the Transportation Master Plan
- PTLC23-002 Transit Route Review and Long-Term Growth Strategy Summary
- PTLC23-003 Transit Operating Budget Overview
- PTLC23-004 Climate Implications of Public Transit
- PTLC23-005 Public Transit and the New Official Plan
- PTLC23-006 Transit Route Enhancements Options
- PTLC23-007 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- PLTC23-008 Peterborough Accessible Community Transit Service

These reports were presented to the committee to provide members with a comprehensive background on:

- the work that had been completed studying the transit system since 2018;
- the results of several rounds of community consultation and engagement over that period;
- the various Council-approved plans that supported or recommended investments and enhancements to the transit system; and
- the multiple corporate and community objectives that rely on transit.

Through several meetings and presentations, evidence was presented to the committee that the transit service had: (1) outgrown the former route network, (2) the new route network better supports corporate and community objectives, and (3) the Transit Route Review Study and Long-term Growth Strategy was a key feeder study that informed the recommendations of the Transportation Master Plan (TMP). The key benefits of the updated system includes:

- Expansion to service allowing routes to service areas that could not be effectively serviced under the previous system (i.e., Chandler Crescent neighbourhood, Rowberry/Broadway Boulevard and Francis Stewart Rd/Cunningham Boulevard);
- Reduced service delays from having all buses depart the terminal resulting in more reliable schedule adherence;
- Less crowding at the terminal (buses and riders);

- Fewer buses using the terminal allows for the bus bay layout to be realigned to a sawtooth/pull through design, eliminating the need for the reversing of buses and improving the overall safety of terminal operations;
- Increased route travel speeds with fewer overlapping routes from all buses converging on the downtown terminal simultaneously;
- Fewer trips requiring transfers;
- More direct routing to key destinations;
- Increased Community bus coverage;
- Flexibility to meet the long-term goal of implementing a 71% increase in service hours by 2050 with 15-minute service on key corridors with 20 to 30-minute service elsewhere;
- Capable of achieving the TMP goal of having 12% of all trips within the City being taken by transit by 2050; and
- Reduced greenhouse gases, since as transit ridership increases, single occupancy vehicle trips are replaced.

At the June 22, 2023, meeting, members of the Committee were separated into four working groups. Each working group was facilitated by City staff to discuss potential methods by which various service themes within Peterborough Transit could be improved. The four service themes discussed were as follows:

- Route Improvements,
- Wayfinding and Navigating the System,
- Accessibility within the Transit service; and
- Customer Service and Communication.

Staff circulated throughout the meeting so that each PTLC working group would have an opportunity to provide insights into each of the four service themes. Following the workshop, the improvement suggestions were compiled and assessed based on both their likely impact (High Impact / Low Impact) and the investment required (High Cost / Low Cost). The assessed suggestions were then divided into 2 categories; “Short-term Wins” – actions requiring little to no investment which can be implemented within a few weeks / months that would have a high impact, and “Mid-term Improvements” – high impact actions requiring Capital and/or Operating investments to be implemented in 2024 and beyond.

At the August 10, 2023, PTLC meeting, staff presented Report PTLC23-009 Transit Service Improvement Options and Staff Recommendations, that provided a summary of the recommendations.

Short-term Wins

- The return of paper transit route maps; these can be printed and made available as a resource for transit passengers. Timeline: October 2023.
- Route maps are to be placed in the holders located in bus shelters. Timeline: October 2023.
- Visitor and new student welcome packages; these can be assembled once maps are printed and documents to be included are identified. Timeline: October 2023.
- Bus frequency/route information to be posted at bus stops. Timeline: October 2023.
- “Ride With Me” training promotion – contingent on filling vacant Supervisory positions. Timeline: October/November 2023.
- Destination sign information: for route clarity, the route number and name be added to the primary information on the destination sign and the end point(s) be identified below that information. Timeline: September 2023.
- Route realignment: Realigning Routes 4 “Weller”, 6 “Sherbrooke” and 9 “Parkhill” plus adjusting the path of Route 5 “Parkway” and 8 “Monaghan” for better service. Timeline: September 2023.
- Reinstate the former “Collison” Route during weekdays between 8:30 am and 5:00 pm with a 40-minute frequency. Timeline: November 2023 dependent on staffing.
- Implement an East City loop pilot to service the area of East City, south of Parkhill Road. Timeline: November 2023 dependent on staffing.
- Improve/standardize communications; requires time to develop a policy and educate all staff. Timeline: November/December 2023.
- Replace On-Demand Service with regular routing; On-Demand Pilot program contract expires at the end of October 2023. Timeline: can return to regular routing for November board period. Further discussion on this modification is provided below.

Discontinuation of On-Demand Service

The On-Demand (OD) service pilot was introduced with the Pink community bus in April of 2022, providing service to the southwest area of the city. The afternoon portion of route 10 “Technology” was discontinued at that time.

In September 2022, OD replaced regular routes on Saturday evenings from 8:00 pm until 12:00 am, (routes 5 “Parkway” and 6 “Sherbrooke” remained to provide the late-night service until 3:00 am). An evening shift was added to the transit administration schedule to book trips over the phone.

In November 2022, the Saturday evening OD service was expanded to include weeknights with the same 8:00 pm until 12:00 am service, the phone call bookings for these evenings are provided, for a fee, by the software provider of the service. Routes 2 “Chemong” and 7 “Lansdowne” have since been extended to also operate Monday – Friday until 11:30 pm.

The contract for the OD pilot expires the end of October 2023. Feedback from the PTLC has not been favourable. The service was partially funded from the MTO Safe Start Program and from a transfer out of the uncommitted balance of the Transit Garage Replacement Project to fund the pilot of this service.

Mid-term Improvements

- **Increased bus service frequency:** This request rated highest with the committee membership and is consistent with best-practice literature on key factors that impact the success of a transit service. The hourly service is not sufficient to serve as a key community economic development tool to meet the needs of residents and businesses and is a barrier to increased ridership and revenues. Increasing to half-hour frequency weekdays between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm requires a minimum of 4 full-time drivers, plus supervisory staff to provide on-street support. Report IPSTR21-013 Transit Route Review Study Recommendations made recommendations to incrementally increase the staff complement to achieve adding 28 full-time driver positions and supervisory staff over multiple years to achieve target route service and frequencies.
- **Continue with planned capital improvements to stops and shelters:** A common comment provided by PTLC members was the number of stops that lack adequate accessibility features (i.e., concrete pads, connections to sidewalks) and amenities (i.e., shelters). The absence of these features is a barrier to all users, but particularly for those users with a disability. The City is already in the process of completing detailed designs for many stop improvements to address these known deficiencies, and the committee recommended this program continue and be accelerated to the extent possible.
- **Improve services at Major Hubs:** Funding has been requested from the Invest in Canada Infrastructure Program – Transit Stream (ICIP) for enhancements at the

Simcoe Street Terminal, and at Trent University and Fleming College. To eliminate the unsafe practice of having buses back out of the bays at the Simcoe Street Terminal, a conceptual design utilizing a sawtooth format – to allow busses to depart the loading bay while driving forward – has been developed. Additional physical infrastructure is also desirable at the Trent University and Fleming College satellite hubs as passenger and vehicle volumes increase over time. To accommodate the increased bus volumes, additional bays are recommended at both locations, with dedicated bays for each route. For routes with express variants, separate bays are recommended for the variants to make wayfinding simpler. Passenger amenities, such as weather protection, seating, and garbage bins will also be considered at these locations. As the current network relies less on the Simcoe Street Terminal driver facilities (washrooms or access to washrooms, break rooms, etc.) will also be considered for the satellite hubs to facilitate operations and driver switch-over. Transit pass or digital vouchers being available at these locations will also be considered. These plans will be developed collaboratively with both institutions.

- Implement a Transit Ambassador Program: The committee recommends that this be developed to compliment the “Ride With Me” program. The Transit Ambassador program will be a service provided by volunteers and/or transit staff who will be stationed at the transit hubs, and occasionally riding on buses, to assist walk-up passengers by answering questions, assisting with route selection, and navigating to desired destinations. This will take the form of an “information desk” type of format and will involve less hands-on type of assistance compared to the “Ride With Me” program, which schedules “ride-along” appointments. The “Ride With Me” program works with other community agencies (i.e., Age Friendly Peterborough, Center for Persons with Disabilities). Appointments are scheduled with a mentor who will meet up with a mentee and aids them with accessing the transit system. The mentor is selected according to the persons travel and functional needs and will travel with the mentee assisting with boarding and alighting, identifying bus stop locations, and navigating to key points of interest such as doctors’ offices, grocery stores or support program locations. The “Ride With Me” program is free for participants.

After reviewing and discussing the report, the PTLC passed the following recommendations:

- a) That short-term, low-cost improvements as outlined in this report be implemented through the remainder of 2023 to improve the current transit experience;
- b) That the longer-term strategies and investments for improved service as outlined in this report be endorsed to support the growth and success of Peterborough Transit; and

- c) That upon conclusion of the On Demand pilot study and the City's contractual obligations, the On Demand service be replaced with an extension of regular service route hours.

As part of discussing Recommendation (b) above, the committee indicated that they would prefer the request for 4 full-time drivers to be increased to 8. An increase of 8 full-time drivers would allow for increases in service frequency on busy routes to be extended later in the day and on weekends, extending the hours of service for community buses and increase frequency to half hour on route 23 "Red" Community Bus. Staff agreed this would be a valuable enhancement to service levels but suggested these be phased in over time to spread the budgetary impact over time.

Options to Address 2023 Operating Budget Shortfall

Report IPSTR23-003 Transit Budget Considerations presented the necessary service level reductions required to meet the approved 2023 operating budget, provided the reductions were implemented effective July 2, 2023. If service level reductions were to be implemented over the remainder of 2023 effective the beginning of the next board period (November 2023) all Transit service would need to be cancelled, all Transit staff would need to be put on temporary layoff, and the City would be in violation of its contractual obligations with key stakeholders (i.e., Trent Central Student Association, Fleming College Student Association) who contribute approximately \$3.77M (~65%) of revenue projected in 2023. Recognizing this is an untenable option, the only way to address the 2023 operating budget shortfall is to draw uncommitted funds from the Transit Capital Reserve. The PTLC agreed that eliminating service in the final months of the year was not a viable option.

The Transit Capital Reserve funds are intended to provide the municipal investment into capital projects; however, its use is not restricted. Some of these projects are being funded through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program – Transit Stream. Using this reserve will require the City to make up these funds in future budget years in order to deliver the planned capital program and ensure that Federal and Provincial funding (at 73.3%) is not put at risk.

Input from Peterborough Environmental Advisory Committee

In addition to consulting with the PTLC, staff sought feedback from the Peterborough Environmental Advisory Committee (PEAC), with a focus on environmental considerations of any contemplated changes to the Transit service. At the February 15, 2023, meeting of the PEAC, Report PEAC23-001 Climate Implications of Transit Route Network Options was presented, which outlined environmental benefits of the new network over the previous network and explained that there would be a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions as more non-student residents took the bus to commute over time. PEAC received this report for information and passed the following motion in support of a route network that prioritizes long-term climate mitigation (i.e., greenhouse gas emission reductions) of the overall transportation system in Peterborough:

- a) That Report PEAC23-001 be received for information;
- b) That the Peterborough Environmental Advisory Committee (PEAC) endorse the findings identified in this report; and
- c) That PEAC advise Council to consider the implications of climate change and the importance of the transit system in meeting the community's long-term climate change goals; and to support the Grid system design that has the best long-term outcomes for increasing ridership and trip mode share, reducing reliance on single occupancy vehicles, and mitigating long term Greenhouse Gas emissions from the Community Transportation Sector.

Summary

After meeting with the PTLC and receiving feedback on ways to improve the transit system, staff recommends the implementation of above mentioned “Short-term Wins”, “Mid-term Improvements”, and that in order to maintain current transit service levels for the remainder of the year, the 2023 Transit budget be increased, by transferring \$941,000 from the Transit Capital Reserve as required, with a plan to repay these funds in subsequent budgets. Staff will continue to convene the PTLC to obtain feedback on the initiatives implemented and seek ongoing input into how to improve the transit system to meet short and long-term community and corporate objectives. Future impacts and improvements will be reported to Council in subsequent annual updates.

Submitted by,

Michael Papadacos, M.A., P.Eng.
Commissioner, Infrastructure and Planning Services (Acting)

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Attachment:

Appendix A – Transit Route Network

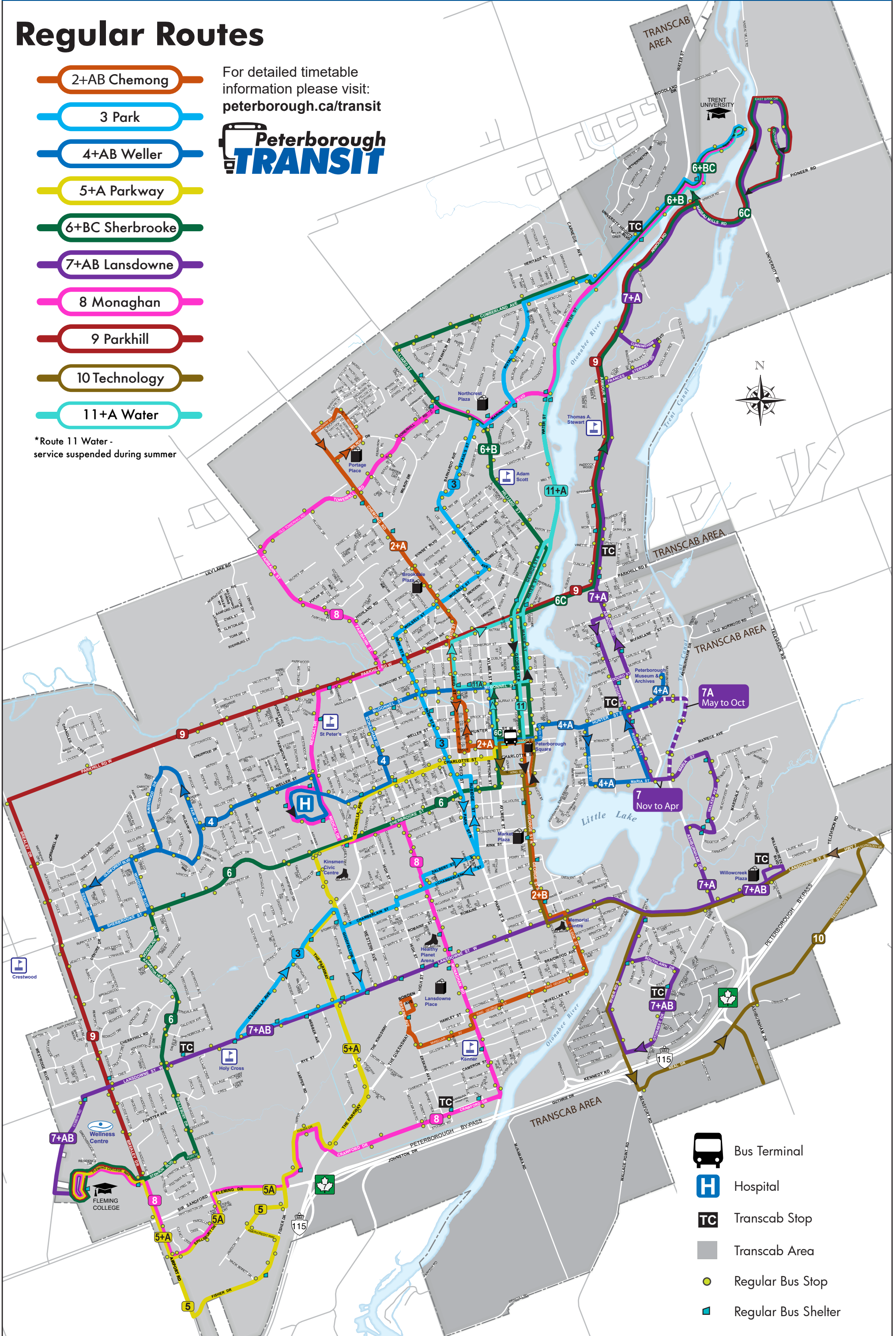
Regular Routes







-  2+AB Chemong
-  3 Park
-  4+AB Weller
-  5+A Parkway
-  6+BC Sherbrooke
-  7+AB Lansdowne
-  8 Monaghan
-  9 Parkhill
-  10 Technology
-  11+A Water

For detailed timetable information please visit:
peterborough.ca/transit



*Route 11 Water - service suspended during summer



-  Bus Terminal
-  Hospital
-  Transcab Stop
-  Transcab Area
-  Regular Bus Stop
-  Regular Bus Shelter