Department business plan update

Strathcona County Transit
March 30, 2021

Department overview

- Transit provides access to all aspects of the community including employment, social, medical, shopping, and government destinations

- Transit services are highly integrated to reduce costs and enhance efficiency

- Our staff are customer focused while maintaining safety and reliability

- Annually, conventional transit travels over 3.3 million kilometres and Mobility Bus travels over 362,000 kilometres

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Core business functions

1. Inter-Municipal transit

2. Local transit

3. Mobility Bus

4. Special events

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Core function highlights

1 Inter-Municipal transit

Inter-municipal transit services and park and ride provide access to major regional destinations, such as downtown Edmonton and the University of Alberta.

Through fare integration agreements, riders can transfer from Strathcona County buses to Edmonton or St. Albert transit systems with minimal cost, to access even more destinations.

- Regional Smart Bus technology was installed on all County conventional buses in late 2019 with full implementation scheduled for 2021

- We continue to work with our regional partners on the Regional Smart Fare system which is scheduled for implementation in 2021

- Further work is being done on recommendations coming out of the Transit Master Plan such as improved service to NAIT

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Core function highlights

② Local transit

Local transit services are provided within Sherwood Park through a hub and spoke network with the Bethel Transit Terminal as the primary terminal, and the Ordze Transit Centre as a secondary location.

Local transit services provide access to all parts of Sherwood Park with one transfer, at most. Local services provide access for many members of the community who do not drive, including youth, seniors, and persons with disabilities.

- Regional Smart Bus technology was installed on all County buses in late 2019 with full implementation scheduled for 2021

- We continue to work with our regional partners on the Regional Smart Fare system which is scheduled for implementation in 2021

- Further work is being done on recommendations coming out of the Transit Master Plan such as Dynamic Transit, an on demand delivery option for evenings/weekends and holidays

- A priority change request was approved where the first local buses arrive at the Transit terminals at 6:15 am rather than 6:00 am

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Core function highlights

③ Mobility Bus

Mobility Bus is a door-to-door service for people with mobility limitations that is provided County wide.

Mobility Bus provides critical access for persons whose limitations prevent them from using the fixed-route services.

- New scheduling software was implemented in July 2019
  - Notifications module implemented in February 2020
  - Passenger Portal module implemented in February 2021

- Rural weekend/holiday service implemented in February 2020

- We continue to work with our regional partners on the Regional Smart Fare system which is scheduled for implementation in 2022

- Further work is being done on recommendations coming out of the Transit Master Plan such as eligibility and travel training

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Core function highlights

4 **Special events**

Special events services provide access to annual festivals and events throughout the region, including Heritage Days, Canada Day, New Year's Eve, and other community events.

- Birkie Ski Festival – 2020 over 1,700 trips provided

- 2020 Santa Convoy

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Successes and challenges

- Pandemic Response and Re-launch Plan created
- A third-party company performed quality control surface sampling on our buses before and after cleaning/disinfecting took place and the results showed that surface contamination was reduced to zero
- Permanent Operator shields and air purification system
- Qualifying Transit Operators are being accredited by the Motor Carrier Passenger Council of Canada (MCPCC) as Certified Professional Bus Operators (CPBO) under our accredited training program
- U-PASS negotiations complete; schools currently voting
- Smart Fare ongoing delays have impacted project timelines

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COVID Impacts

- Staff impacts
  - Bus cleaning
    - Enhanced cleaning processes introduced - Increased workload
    - Redeployed RPC and Transit staff
    - Introduced electro-static sprayers
  - Decreased work for part-time operators
  - Staff working from home

- Service impacts
  - 62% ridership decrease and 18% service level decrease
  - Mobility Bus maximum of 2 passengers per trip
  - 60% ridership decrease on Mobility Bus (mostly due to recreational facilities being closed and adult day programs being cancelled).

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COVID Impacts

- Financial impacts
  - Lost $2.6M of revenue in 2020 compared to budget
  - Increase in COVID costs offset by decreases in Fleet, professional development, smart fare delay, etc.
    - Compared to budget, Transit broke even in 2020
  - Implementing Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program projects including:
    - Permanent operator shields on conventional buses
    - Enhanced air purification on entire fleet
    - Real-time display technology in the transit terminals
  - Forecasting reduced revenue for 2021

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Employee engagement

Engagement survey theme	Engagement initiative	People Plan focus area
Leadership, communication	Supervisors will have face-to-face conversations with their teams and use new available technologies to share information with their groups	Clear purpose, accountability, trust, team
Recognition and Rewards	Work with the Employee Engagement and Recognition Committee (EERC) to continue looking for ways to recognize our team on their level, in ways that they want to be recognized	Team

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Employee engagement

Engagement survey theme	Engagement initiative	People Plan focus area
Communication, recognition and rewards	Use new resources such as the new email addresses for front-line workers, the revamped Insider, and videos as opportunities to improve how we communicate to staff, tell our story and share what we have accomplished	Clear purpose, accountability, positivity, trust, leadership

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Smart Fare/ Smart Bus Technology Implementation - Status

Overall initiative status ●

Initiative status	Current status	Previous status
Time	Y	Y
Scope	G	G
Budget	G	G

Key deliverables

- Smart Fare is a regional transit fare payment system that uses the latest technology to make it easier for customers to pay for their trips.
- Smart Bus is the foundation of the information and telecommunications infrastructure that allows the fare technologies to function.

Alignment to strategic goals

- Goal 2: Manage, invest and plan for sustainable municipal infrastructure
- Result: Efficient and effective multi-modal transportation network

- Goal 5: Foster collaboration through regional, community and governmental partnerships
- Result: Regional assets leveraged for mutual benefit

- Goal 6: Provide facilities and services that are available and accessible to residents
- Result: Connected, accessible multi-modal transportation network, including trails

Opportunities/Challenges

- Smart Fare technology replaces paper fare media with the electronic equivalent for cash, passes, and tickets.
- Fare amounts are computed electronically without the need for a bus driver to visually validate the fare product or money dropped in the fare box.
- Payment details are recorded, which helps to reduce fare disputes, ensures the correct fare has been paid, and provides comprehensive ridership, revenue, and audit reports based on actual transactions.
- Smart Fare technologies provide real benefits to transit agencies in terms of better data collection for improving service levels, and integration with neighbouring transit systems.
- Smart Bus provides real time information to enable passengers to plan their trips while minimizing wait time and missed connections, using near real-time information.
- Smart Bus allows passengers to use web based tools such as Google Transit to display near real-time transit information.

Risks	Mitigation
As this is a regional project led by the COE, Strathcona County has limited ability to control the overall progress of the project.	Strathcona County continues to be actively involved with COE on the progress of the project.
	Associate Commissioner Johnston is part of the Regional Smart Fare Executive Steering Committee.
	Transit Director Coombs is part of the Regional Smart Fare Resourcing and Risk Steering Committee.

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Mobility Bus Vehicle Additions - Status

Overall initiative status 🟢

Initiative status	Current status	Previous status
Time	G	G
Scope	G	G
Budget	G	G

Key deliverables

- A permanent increase to the Mobility Bus fleet from 10 buses to 13 buses to meet demand and maintain an adequate spare rate (allow for buses out of service for maintenance or repair work).

Alignment to strategic goals

- Goal 1: Build strong communities to support the diverse needs of residents
- Result: Diverse and inclusive communities

- Goal 2: Manage, invest and plan for sustainable municipal infrastructure
- Result: Efficient and effective multi-modal transportation network

- Goal 6: Provide facilities and services that are available and accessible to residents
- Result: Connected, accessible multi-modal transportation network, including trails

Opportunities/Challenges

- As part of the 2015 Transit Fare Strategy Final Report, fare parity (56% reduction in average fare) for Mobility Bus clients was recommended and approved in the 2018 Operating Budget.
- With this significant decrease in cost it is expected that demand for Mobility Bus will increase up to 62%.
- Trips requests have increased by about 35% since this initiative was implemented in July 2018.

Risks	Mitigation
N/A	N/A

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Dynamic Transit - Status

Overall initiative status 🟢

Initiative status	Current status	Previous status
Time	G	G
Scope	G	G
Budget	G	G

Key deliverables

- Dynamic Transit will provide dynamic, on-demand transit services within Strathcona County's urban service area.
- The implementation of this technology will better meet the mobility needs of County residents who require flexible, on-demand transportation.

Alignment to strategic goals

- Goal 6: Provide facilities and services are available and accessible to residents
- Result: Connected, accessible multi-modal transportation network, including trails
- Result: Enhanced community interaction and connectedness
- Result: Accessible community and cultural events, entertainment, shopping and dining opportunities

Opportunities/Challenges

- Understood against current events, the community's feedback and Transit's on-going service analysis, as currently provided, components of the existing local service operated by SCT do not provide the necessary flexibility to respond to fluctuations in ridership demand. Nor does it fully meet the mobility needs of County residents who demand flexible, on-demand transportation.
- Dynamic Transit therefore represents an opportunity expected to both enhance the customer experience, while also improving service productivity and providing greater operational flexibility and resiliency.

Risks	Mitigation
N/A	N/A

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NAIT Service Pilot - Status

Overall initiative status ●

Initiative status	Current status	Previous status
Time	G	G
Scope	G	G
Budget	G	G

Key deliverables

- The NAIT Service Pilot, represents an opportunity to investigate if whether providing direct service to NAIT would increase ridership and better meet the needs of passengers. This initiative will contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of transit services, by improving productivity and passenger choice.

Alignment to strategic goals

- Goal 6: Provide facilities and services are available and accessible to residents
- Result: Connected, accessible multi-modal transportation network, including trails
- Result: Enhanced community interaction and connectedness
- Result: Accessible community and cultural events, entertainment, shopping and dining opportunities

Opportunities/Challenges

- Currently, Transit provides service to NAIT via a circuitous route through downtown Edmonton; taking approximately 45 minutes, compared to an average of 20 minutes by personal automobile.
- In order for transit to be a transportation mode of choice, it must be comparable enough to attract passengers. A direct route to NAIT would attract passengers travelling to NAIT, as well as those wishing to commute to and from the north side of Edmonton.

Risks	Mitigation
N/A	N/A

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Transit 6:00 AM Service - Status

Overall initiative status 🟢

Initiative status	Current status	Previous status
Time	G	G
Scope	G	G
Budget	G	G

Key deliverables

- A priority change request was approved where the first local buses arrive at the Transit terminals at 6:15 am rather than 6:00 am. This change impacts 9 local routes and approximately 17 passenger trips.

Alignment to strategic goals

- Goal 2: Manage, invest and plan for sustainable municipal infrastructure
- Result: Efficient and effective multi-modal transportation network

Opportunities/Challenges

- This service change saves 3.5 platform hours per day or $56,000 per year.
- Due to COVID, this change was implemented with no County Connects received.

Risks	Mitigation
N/A	N/A

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Questions?