

DATE: September 27, 2021

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCIL

NAME AND TITLE: Blake McIntosh, Director of Civic Operations

SUBJECT: Prince George Transit System – January 2022 Expansion

ATTACHMENT(S): Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) – June 2019

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Council RECEIVES FOR INFORMATION the report dated September 27, 2021 from the Director of Civic Operations titled “Prince George Transit System – January 2022 Expansion”.

PURPOSE:

Provide information to Council on the transit service expansion taking place in January 2022, and a status update on the transit system.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

This report supports Council’s Strategic priorities of maintaining fiscal sustainability and balancing service levels with the affordability of City services, facilities, and operations; of infrastructure re-investment and renewal to ensure the delivery of critical recreation, emergency, transportation, and utility service; and to enhance and integrate various transportation options, including transit, cycle routes, sidewalks, and trails.

DISCUSSION:

In June of 2019, the City of Prince George approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to expand the transit system by 4,000 service hours for the fall of 2020, to grow capacity in the busiest parts of the system, with a focus on services to post-secondary institutions. In April of 2020, this expansion was put on an undefined deferral by the provincial government and BC Transit, and earlier this year, was approved to proceed for implementation in January of 2022. This expansion was encompassed in the previously-approved MOU from June 2019.

Service Expansion Summary

The primary purpose of this service expansion is to better serve the post-secondary institutions which continue to make up a significant portion of our ridership. Pre-COVID-19, UPass holders made up approximately 50% of ridership of the entire transit system. Improvements to travel times and frequencies are also needed to help recover ridership, and ensure that the system is on a path to meeting the transportation needs of the future.

UNBC Service: Enhancements to the 15 UNBC/Downtown are planned to increase daytime off-peak frequency to every 15 minutes from early morning to early evening, and decrease travel times between the

university and downtown. Staff have worked with BC Transit to reduce the “run-time” of this route, meaning that the bus takes less time to make it from one end of the route to the other. Further analysis of scheduling allowed for the run-time to be reduced without implementing a limited-stop service. This is accomplished by removing dwell times at stops for trips that do not meet other bus connections. Staff will continue to work with BC Transit to evaluate further opportunities for improvements to the 15 route.

CNC Service: The new 105 Express bus will be introduced to operate between downtown, Spruceland, CNC and Pine Centre mall, increasing capacity and reducing travel times for CNC students from around the city. The route will operate during weekdays, every 50 minutes from each end, and make limited stops along 5th Avenue and south towards CNC and Pine Centre. This change will also alleviate overcrowding on the 88/89 route, which sees significant loads between Spruceland and Pine Centre. This service was determined to be a short-term priority in the recently-endorsed Transit Future Action Plan (TFAP). A map of the route and proposed stops can be found in Figure 1 (right).

Other Service Improvements:

The new 19 UNBC/Westgate will operate between UNBC and Westgate Mall on weekends. Currently, this route is served by a deviation of the 16 College Heights during specific times on Saturdays and Sundays. This would be a cost-neutral change and the route timing would remain the same from the existing service. This change is designed to reduce rider confusion and clarify the two services as distinct from one another.

Ridership Recovery

Currently, the Prince George Transit System is operating at roughly 63% of our ridership from September 2019. This number is just shy of the BC Transit provincial average of 65%, and is above several systems of similar size or larger. We expect this number to grow further in January 2022 as more post-secondary classes transition from online to in-person, and offices around the city reopen. These improvements would ensure that we have capacity in place to meet these needs, but also encourage more users of transit to utilize the system.

Future Expansion

Staff have determined that, given the progress of ridership recovery, that further expansions are not needed at this time, and the previously agreed upon 4,000 hours will be adequate in meeting the capacity needs of the system in the short term. The MOU outlines a further 5,000 hour expansion to occur two years after the initial 4,000 hours are implemented – at this time, Staff will not pursue these hours until ridership data can support further expansion.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

As outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding, the expansion will include three additional vehicles and 4,000 service hours. These will be budgeted at an estimated annual cost of \$265,881 which will be

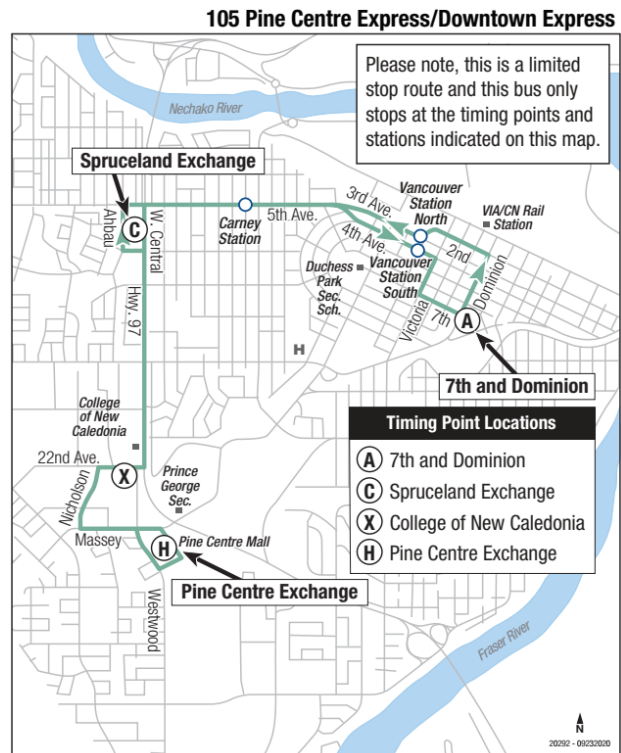


Figure 1: 105 Express bus routing and proposed stops

reflected in the Annual Operating Agreement between BC Transit and the City of Prince George. At full recovery, anticipated annual revenue is valued at approximately \$71,136.

Annual Operating Agreement (AOA) Amendment: An amendment to the AOA between the City of Prince George and BC Transit will be required as part of this expansion. As of the writing of this report, the estimated timeline for that amendment to be brought forward to Council for approval will be in late-January 2022, after the expansion hours are in place.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

City staff and BC Transit will continue to move forward on this service expansion to increase service in the transit system, targeting capacity alleviation in the busiest areas of the system, improving travel times, and enticing riders back on to transit. Future decisions around transit service expansion will be driven by additional data around pandemic recovery, and understanding the direction that the transit system needs to take to serve the city going forward.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Blake McIntosh, Director of Civic Operations

PREPARED BY: Michael Coulson, Transit Planner

APPROVED:

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting date: October 18, 2021