

**DATE:** June 10, 2024

**TO:** MAYOR AND COUNCIL

**NAME AND TITLE:** Blake McIntosh, Director of Civic Operations

**SUBJECT:** Transit Service Pattern Review for Davis Road

**ATTACHMENTS:** None

**RECOMMENDATION:**

That Council DIRECTS Administration to work with BC Transit on implementing one of the three following options for a transit service pattern for the 88 Westgate and 89 Hart services:

1. All trips travel via existing routing (no change from current), via Davis, Foster, and Baker Roads;
2. All trips route via the proposed routing, via Ospika and Tyner Boulevards; or
3. Some trips route via the existing routing, while some route via the proposed routing.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

Continue to improve processes and practices to support effective and efficient service delivery.

**PURPOSE:**

To address community concerns with the proposed routing of the 88 Westgate and 89 Hart services along Davis, Foster, and Baker Roads, ahead of service changes in September 2024.

**BACKGROUND:**

Demand for transit in several key portions of the network are increasing, and subsequently some services are operating at-capacity or are unable to accommodate demand. The 88 Westgate and 89 Hart services, forming an important part of the transit system and serving several popular destinations, is experiencing demand beyond its capacity, and challenges with service reliability during the busiest parts of the service day.

In partnership with BC Transit, staff are looking to mitigate and rectify these issues with improvements and changes to be implemented in September 2024. There are two main objectives:

- Increase capacity to reduce pass-ups and wait times at key destinations; and
- Improve service reliability by shifting the route to arterial roads, and removing challenging turn movements where possible.

**Overview of Existing 88 Westgate and 89 Hart Service**

The 88 and 89 services form a north-south spine of the transit network in Prince George. From the south, the route serves the College Heights neighbourhood, Westgate Mall, Pine Centre Mall, Prince George Secondary, the College of New Caledonia, Spruceland Mall, and the Hart area. There is an exceptional amount of demand pressure currently on this service, and we expect demand to grow over the coming years. Capacity and service alterations are necessary to ensure the route can absorb this demand successfully in the long-term.

### Transit Future Action Plan

A larger, long-term plan to address the aforementioned objectives around capacity and service reliability is included as a priority in the Transit Future Action Plan (TFAP), endorsed by Council in 2021. The proposal includes route adjustments that bring the service out of areas that are not conducive to the frequent operation of large buses, and away from busy, unsignalized intersections with difficult turn movements. The proposal also includes a plan to divide the route into three distinct sections – one section serving the Hart, one central section serving key destinations, and one in the College Heights / Westgate area.

Given the complexity and scale of proposed changes to the 88/89 in the TFAP, it is expected that implementation would be done in a phased approach, over a period of years. While the TFAP is written as a five-year plan, there is no fixed timeline associated with proposed changes in the TFAP.

### Davis, Foster, and Baker Roads

On the present routing, from the north, buses traveling south route from Ospika Boulevard on to Davis Road, Foster Road, Baker Road and on to Tyner Boulevard. Traveling north, the service operates along the same route in the opposite direction. The route serves local stops in this area at various cross streets.

This neighbourhood is not designed for or conducive to large buses traveling through with regularity, and buses navigating this area experience:

- Narrow streets with parked cars on either side;
- Inconsistent stop spacing and lack of sidewalks on Foster Road;
- Difficulty making turns from neighbourhood streets onto arterials, particularly at Tyner and Gannett.

This section of the route lies between the College Heights and Westgate areas, and key destinations further north. Subsequently, those traveling between these places often experience slow travel times and delays relating to the above. Delays on this service can also have ripple effects across the entire network, as the route operates with timed connections with other services at various locations, where buses must wait for one another to facilitate transfers.

The infrastructure and road layout in this neighbourhood poses a particular problem to increasing capacity through additional buses. The roads are narrow in several sections, and with parked cars on either side, buses are unable to pass one another in the opposite direction. Further service



Figure 1: Transit Future Action Plan (TFAP) proposal for 88/89 service.

increases are a necessary part of responding to capacity constraints, however road infrastructure may not be able to accommodate these additional buses.

As traffic increases on arterial roads, and ridership demand continues on its current trajectory, these conditions will continue to deteriorate over time, resulting in an increasingly inconsistent, unreliable service.

#### **DISCUSSION:**

Staff have worked with BC Transit to determine a routing that addresses these issues. The proposed route would have buses travel in each direction along Ospika and Tyner Boulevards, with new stops added to ensure adequate coverage at Ospika at Davis, Ospika at Tyner, and Tyner at Baker. An additional new stop is to be installed upon the completion of the Chancellor Boulevard extension from the University Heights neighbourhood, enhancing the coverage in that area as well. This proposed change is part of a package of changes that would include other minor route adjustments to increase reliability, and an increase in frequency from every 30 minutes, to every 20 minutes during peak periods.

This new routing does result in reduced coverage for the Davis, Foster and Baker Roads area, and users of those stops would be required to walk to either Ospika or Tyner Boulevards to access transit. Staff have been working with the City's shelter provider, Pattison Outdoor Media, to install new shelters at these locations to enhance amenities and mitigate these challenges. Staff will continue to ensure that a high level of winter maintenance occurs during the winter months, ensuring clear access to these new stop locations.

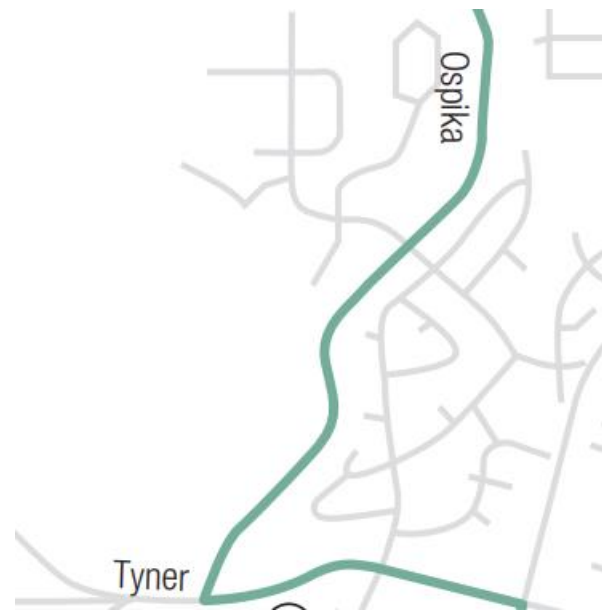
#### **Public Engagement:**

In the fall of 2023, Staff and BC Transit conducted public engagement that included the proposed service changes. This was completed through the following means:

- An online survey; and
- One in-person engagement session.

The engagement was advertised through various means including targeted ads online and physical signage at bus stops. Signage was posted for approximately two months at the affected stops along Davis, Foster, and Baker Roads. The signage included a QR-code that linked to the online survey, and also provided details for attending the in-person engagement session.

The results of this engagement were generally favourable to the proposed changes. 72% of respondents voted in favour of shifting the route from Davis, Baker, and Foster Roads, and on to Ospika and Tyner Boulevards. Staff noted that of the 28% who voted against the changes in the survey, some chose to provide comments expressing concern about the reduction in service coverage. In total, there were 263 respondents who chose to provide feedback on this item. Given the support, Staff and BC Transit made the decision to proceed with the proposed changes upon concluding the engagement.



*Figure 2: Inset of map of proposed changes included in engagement materials.*

**Service Alternatives:**

Recent community concern has prompted a review of these proposed changes. Staff have worked with BC Transit to determine possible alternative service patterns that would still maintain coverage in this neighbourhood, though at a reduced level. These include:

- One-direction is maintained along Baker, Foster and Davis Roads (89), while the other direction routes via Ospika and Tyner Boulevards (88); or
- Alternating trips serve Baker, Foster, and Davis roads, while the balance of trips route via Ospika and Tyner Boulevards; or
- Targeted service in this area during specific times of day.

The challenges that this service experiences while navigating this neighbourhood would continue, however impacts may be mitigated by operating a reduced service in this area. Future capacity increases and greater frequency will be required along this route, and any changes to the service pattern should take this into consideration.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:**

Proposed service changes along Davis, Foster, and Baker Roads for the 88/89 are in response to increasing traffic levels and growing demand, in order to facilitate greater service reliability and capacity. These changes were supported by feedback received during engagement conducted in the fall of 2023. Staff have worked closely with BC Transit to ensure that improvements to amenities can be made to mitigate potential impacts of traveling further to a bus stop. Ultimately, even though customers may need to walk further to their nearest bus stop, customers will also notice improvements to capacity and service reliability.

Should Council reject moving ahead with these service changes, Staff have worked with BC Transit on developing viable alternatives.

Lindsay Taylor, Local Government Relations Manager with BC Transit will be in attendance remotely alongside staff to answer any questions.

**RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:**

Blake McIntosh, Director, Civic Operations

Prepared by Michael Coulson, Transit Planner

**APPROVED:**

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting date: 2024/06/12