

DATE: March 17, 2021

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCIL

NAME AND TITLE: Blake McIntosh, Acting Director, Civic Operations

SUBJECT: Endorsement of the Prince George Transit Future Action Plan

ATTACHMENT(S):

1. Prince George Transit Future Action Plan
2. PowerPoint Presentation

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Council ENDORSES the Prince George Transit Future Action Plan, as attached to the report dated March 17, 2021, from the Acting Director of Civic Operations, titled “Endorsement of the Prince George Transit Future Action Plan.”

PURPOSE:

This report and the Transit Future Action Plan are presented to Council for review and endorsement.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Enhance and integrate various transportation options, including transit, cycle routes, sidewalks, and trails.

BACKGROUND:

The Transit Future Action Plan (TFAP) is a document that outlines the short-term priorities for the development and expansion of the transit system, based on the 2014 Transit Future Plan (TFP). It serves as a “check-in” with the 2014 TFP and allows the community to comment on the execution of that plan. It further offers a direction in how those priorities will be implemented going forward, with a breakdown of details such as routing, resource allocation, service hour requirements, and other rationale.

The TFAP’s priorities are set within a five-year timeline to provide short-term direction on these actionable items. The priorities were shaped on a variety of factors, including existing capacity constraints, resource requirements, and public consultation sessions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed the implementation of this plan, and Staff are currently working with BC Transit to ensure that the transit system has sufficiently recovered ridership and service hours to justify commencing substantial expansion. This could mean that the execution of priorities set out in the plan may exceed the five-year timeline, although it is still too early to predict how the recovery will take shape. It is likely that small-scale expansion will be required in the short-term to accommodate ridership growth compounded on capacity constraints that were occurring pre-pandemic.

Extensive consultation was conducted on the TFAP to collect feedback, both on specific proposals outlined and on the direction of the plan generally. This feedback was provided through a number of methods, including in-person sessions at both post-secondary institutions, the Prince George Public Library and the Pine Centre Mall, as well as online through the TFAP web portal on the BC Transit website.

DISCUSSION:

The development of the Prince George TFAP is rooted in implementing priorities from the 2014 TFP that address capacity constraints in the system and making the system operate more effectively and efficiently. The TFAP does this by adding additional direct connections to post-secondary institutions and working towards route directness and off-peak improvements system-wide.

Outline of service hours

The TFAP outlines several service options to be implemented on a five-year timeline after recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. These options include:

Timeline	Service name	Destinations / target areas	Rationale
Short-term priorities	105 Express	Pine Centre-CNC-Spruceland-Downtown	With this new route we can look to improve the directness of trips, and make travel by transit faster. This route links core sections of the transit network, and alleviates current capacity constraints at CNC. <i>This route was scheduled to be implemented in the fall of 2020, however it was delayed to a future date due to the COVID-19 pandemic.</i>
	115 Express	UNBC-Downtown	With this new route we can look to improve the directness of trips between UNBC and key destinations on the transit network, making travel by transit faster. It will also alleviate current capacity constraints on the 15 UNBC/Downtown. <i>This route was scheduled to be implemented in the fall of 2020, however it was delayed to a future date due to the COVID-19 pandemic.</i>
	Off-peak and weekend improvements	Various (hours not yet allocated to specific routes)	Improvements to core routes during evenings and weekends where demand warrants. These hours would also be utilized to fill in “missing trips” on the 15 and 88/89 routes, where frequency is not consistent in the evening.
Medium-term priority	88/89 Redesign	Bon Voyage Plaza-Westgate-Pine Centre-CNC-Spruceland-Hart	Dividing the route into three smaller routes would make the service more reliable and allow us to target improvements to specific areas.
Long-term priority	Aiport/BCR Site Service	Pine Centre-BCR Site-Airport	Target new areas that are not currently served by transit.
	Route Directness	Various	Dividing one-direction “loop routes” into smaller segments allows for more reliable service and targeted service improvements.

The decision to prioritize these projects is based on a combination of public feedback and pre-pandemic ridership data. This will come in addition to any service optimization that is done to reallocate resources away from underperforming segments of the transit system to areas with capacity constraints.

Many of these improvements will likely be implemented using a phased approach; meaning that the full extent of the specific project may not be immediately realized. They could also see implementation as a combination of new service hours and redeployed service hours from underperforming runs and routes. A separate planning process will be undertaken for larger priorities and network changes.

Outline of Bus Stop and Exchange Infrastructure Goals

The TFAP outlines opportunities for upgrading existing passenger facilities and exchanges for the safety and comfort of riders, and capacity upgrades as necessary to accommodate service hours.

Location	Type of Improvement	Rationale / Scope
Downtown Exchange, Pine Centre Exchange, Spruceland Exchange	Major exchange upgrades	Expansion of capacity as necessary, while new routes are added and service hours increased. Upgrades to lighting and passenger amenities. Improvements to traffic flow as needed.
UNBC Exchange	Off-street exchange upgrades	Minor modifications to accommodate new services as necessary.
Westgate and Hart Exchanges	Minor exchange upgrades	Expansion of capacity and improvement of passenger amenities as necessary
Various / all bus stops considered	Bus stop upgrades	Improvements to bus stops system-wide as needed. Consider high-ridership stops for upgrades to existing facilities and installation of shelters and benches.

Future plans and Strategic Priorities

The TFAP considers future planning and operational considerations by setting specific strategic priorities going forward as we look to expand and improve the transit system. These priorities will require their own specific planning process, and include:

- Restoration of ridership and service to pre-COVID 19 levels;
- A future Rapid Transit Study;
- Improvements for off-peak services;
- Service optimization on under-performing routes;
- Improvements on route directness;
- Improve frequency overall; and
- Creation of local area transit plans for the College Heights and Hart areas.

SmartBus Program

The transit industry has seen many technological developments in recent years that enhance rider experience and allow for transit agencies and funding partners to better target services. BC Transit is well underway in implementing the province-wide SmartBus program, which is working to enhance transit service through new technology. Smartbus includes measures that allow for improved ridership data collection, on-board GPS systems, stop announcements, new fare payment methods, among other improvements.

NextRide 2.0 (replacement for the original NextRide program) will be implemented in Prince George during the initial stages of the program rollout. NextRide 2.0 will include equipping buses with GPS capabilities, on board stop announcements, and on board LED displays. This program will improve ridership experience and system accessibility.

The Electronic Fare program will also be implemented in Prince George during the initial phase of the program, and will include a new methods of payment by way of a smartphone. This program will not replace existing physical fare media, however will allow for customers to purchase prepaid fare products through their smartphone. It will also allow BC Transit and local governments to access ridership and trip data in greater detail. This program is still in development and features have not yet been finalized.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

There are variable ongoing capital and operational costs associated with the implementation of these priorities, and will depend largely on what is implemented. New service hours and new transit services often require new infrastructure, bus stops, transit drivers, fleet, and other expenses, depending on how they are executed. Each of the priorities in this plan have different costs associated with them, and those costs may vary depending on when and how they are implemented. These priorities may change over time and will be reviewed on an ongoing basis depending on the necessity of services. City staff will work with BC Transit on ensuring a cost-effective approach to implementation of new transit services.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

The TFAP will provide guidance in the further planning, development, and evolution of the Prince George Transit System with priorities for the next five years. These priorities include actionable projects in additional service hours and infrastructure. City staff, BC Transit and the transit operating companies will continue to work together to evolve a transit system that meets the needs of Prince George over the term of this plan, and beyond.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Blake McIntosh, Acting Director of Civic Operations

PREPARED BY: Michael Coulson, Transit Planner

APPROVED:

Walter Babicz, Acting City Manager

Meeting Date: 2021-04-12