

Mission Abbotsford Transit Committee Report

DATE: March 27, 2014
TO: Mission Abbotsford Transit Committee
FROM: Rebecca Newlove, BC Transit
SUBJECT: Service Efficiency Review Engagement Results and Next Steps

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT the CFV Efficiency Review Public Engagement Report be received for information
2. THAT MATC approve BC Transit and municipal staff to proceed work on the recommended next steps and report back to MATC with an update on the findings in April 2014

PURPOSE:

To present the following to MATC for their comment, input and approval:

- Feedback from the public engagement on the draft Efficiency Review service proposals
- Resulting areas of focus for route and schedule changes
- Infrastructure investments associated with the implementation of amended service changes and to address public feedback

BACKGROUND:

One of the first recommendations from the Abbotsford-Mission Transit Future Plan (approved January 2013) was to conduct a system-wide efficiency review. At its May 2013 meeting, MATC developed and approved the following three principles to guide the review:

- **Budget neutral planning:** both Abbotsford and Mission do not have the financial capacity to increase spending on transit. This means that service changes must work within existing service hours and vehicles.
- **Improve system performance:** in terms of improved efficiency and increased ridership.
- **Service equity:** match the level of service to the characteristics of the area being served (i.e. neighbourhoods with similar density and land use should receive a similar level of service).

Service change proposals including new routes and schedules were designed based upon these objectives. In improving system performance and service equity, these proposals would also progress the transit system towards Phase 1 of the Abbotsford-Mission Transit Future Plan. The focus of these changes was the restructuring of the Abbotsford routes to improve the efficiency of the service, reallocating service hours from areas with lower ridership to areas of higher demand and to increase overall ridership. Based upon this, the outcome of the efficiency review resulted in a restructure of the three main routes 1, 2 and 3 and development of a rapid network along Maclure, South Fraser Way and McCallum to UFV, similar to that depicted in the Phase 1 network of the Abbotsford-Mission Transit Future Plan. As a result, the main Abbotsford exchange needs to be relocated from Bourquin to Downtown to increase service efficiency and improve the direct nature of travel by locating the main exchange at the key junction in the rapid network. This will save time taken to divert off a main corridor to the current Bourquin Exchange and also benefits from locating the exchange to a location on a frequent line that would have direct access to the future regional transit service (Fraser Valley Express). For example, dependent upon the existing routing structure (whether

the route returns to South Fraser Way or continues via Ware St. and Bevan Ave.) this can save approximately 2 to 4 minutes per trip if continuing to downtown or approximately 2 minutes per trip for the Bourquin Exchange detour on other routes. In addition, congestion on Bourquin Crescent can increase this time requirement. The number of routes serving the Bourquin Exchange in the proposed service changes has reduced from 9 to 4, which equates to an approximate reduction from 500 trips to 150 trips per day. This could equate to savings of approximately 3,000 – 5,500 hours per year albeit this figure is a high level estimation given the variety of other routing factors that can influence service hour requirements. Savings in service hours from the restructured routes, reduced service to areas of lower ridership and reduced school routes were reallocated to increase service and frequency to areas of high demand and the rapid network, resulting in an increase in the total number of trips to the new proposed Routes 1, 2 and 3.

At its January 2014 meeting, MATC approved the draft service proposals and a consultation strategy in order for BC Transit and local municipal staff to commence public engagement. The engagement events were organized in collaboration with First Canada, the City of Abbotsford and District of Mission and conducted throughout late February and early March. A summary of the engagement process and results is provided in Attachment 1.

In addition, BC Transit scheduling staff worked in collaboration with First Canada in early March to undertake route timings of the proposed routes with a transit vehicle. This allows for verification of the draft schedule and identifies areas of tight timing that may cause issues for service reliability or could require adjustments to the schedule or proposed routes.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS:

Consultation Feedback

Over 200 people were engaged at the open house events and there were a total of 416 responses to the online/hard copy survey. Overall there was a generally positive response to the proposals in Abbotsford, with a balance of comments supporting the service changes versus those identifying concerns. Some of the minor concerns raised may be addressed by amending schedules and considering individual trip requirements. However, there was an unanticipated significant level of concern raised by many attendees and respondents relating to the Downtown Exchange in Abbotsford. Many stressed that their supportive comments were only valid if the Downtown Exchange concerns were addressed. These concerns related to:

- poor personal safety - prevalence of drugs, prostitution and crime in the area
- lack of lighting
- road safety issues related to making trip connections (crossing the road, jay-walking, etc.)
- lack of facilities for drivers including a washroom and break room
- lack of amenities for public when waiting between trips (e.g. transit shelters, benches, etc.)
- lack of police presence or security cameras
- lack of space

In addition, there were a considerable number of responses requesting an increase in service frequency and later trips on multiple routes. This desire would require additional service hours and operational budget.

In comparison, there was a less positive overall response to the Mission proposed service changes. Albeit the overall online survey responses were slightly positive, a significantly lower number of respondents travelled on Mission routes regularly in the last 6 months. Several concerns were identified by respondents, particularly attendees at the open houses. These primarily related to the reduced evening service, removal of some sections of routes and poorly timed connections with the West Coast Express trips. However, many concerns were also raised about the existing service, primarily relating to service reliability, traffic safety and a desire for increased frequency, later service and service to new areas. In engaging the attendees at the open houses in Mission, it was explained that the removal of route sections and minor trip reductions were intended to help

improve the reliability of service and on-time performance whilst remaining within the existing budget. However, attendees indicated a strong desire for increased funding to address the identified issues rather than reduced trips or service area.

In addition to the above, a number of safety concerns were received from respondents and attendees relating to traffic safety and the Mission Exchange. These concerns relate to:

- poor lighting at the exchange
- road safety issues related to making trip connections (crossing the road, jay-walking, etc.)
- cars often go through the pedestrian crossing on Lougheed Hwy near McDonalds
- traffic safety on #39 regarding left turn from James St onto 7 Ave.

Route Timing and Scheduling

The timing of new routes indicated some areas and times where congestion significantly impacted the proposed schedule. Some infrastructure improvements including leading green lights or right hand turn lanes have been suggested in the Public Engagement Report that may help to alleviate these constraints. However, the schedules for some routes will need to be reviewed in light of refined time requirements in addition to the public feedback. An update on amended routes and schedules will be provided to MATC at the April, 2014 meeting.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS & INFRASTRUCTURE REQUIREMENTS:

Prior to public engagement, it was considered that the changes proposed will negatively affect some existing passengers but on the whole were projected to be positive. A preliminary and conservative estimate of impacts that took into account possible ridership losses as well as gains from the changes proposed showed that the proposals in the first year could result in an additional 48,450 passenger trips (+2.0% over 2013/14 budget) and \$46,500 in revenue (+1.6%). Further ridership and revenue gains were anticipated to accrue in the following years as the restructured system stabilized and matured. In addition to the revenue and ridership gains, it was indicated that there may also be further operational savings through fleet adjustments. The proposed service changes indicate that there are sufficient service hours to enable a small conversion from heavy duty to light duty vehicle(s) and a potential saving of vehicles. This will need to be verified with the updated scheduling information and detailed kilometre readings as well as discussions with First Canada regarding their union agreement.

Once the routes and schedules are amended to accommodate the engagement responses and route timing analysis, these financial impacts will be reviewed. From an operational perspective, it is still considered that the changes proposed will result in a positive outcome overall albeit with negative impacts to some riders. However, concerns regarding the safety of the Abbotsford and Mission Downtown Exchange by many open house attendees and respondents may result in implications for the ridership and revenue estimates if the concerns are not adequately mitigated.

Therefore, albeit the service proposals are designed to operate within the existing hours and vehicles, it is recommended that capital investment is made to the infrastructure at the Downtown Exchanges to address the public's concerns regarding this location. Other infrastructure investments associated with relocating and establishing new stops and shelters, parking removal and road and sidewalk improvements will also be required to enable the service change proposals to be implemented. Estimations of vehicles savings and increased ridership and revenue will indicate the level of savings available over time to offset these costs.

Abbotsford Downtown Exchange Requirements

Based upon the medium and long term downtown exchange requirements, infrastructure investment required for the 2014 service change proposals could accommodate the future transit requirements if an off-street facility with 8-10 bays and additional parking is developed. An off-street facility would assist in addressing the identified public concerns regarding the Downtown Exchange location and would address the medium and long term needs of the Transit Future Plan. The only additional requirements outlined in the Transit Future Plan relate to establishing a park and ride facility at this location. Several locations have been identified and feasibility and costs are being explored by BC Transit and the City of Abbotsford for this exchange location. It should be noted that an off-street exchange would not be in place for service implementation in 2014.

However, if an off-street exchange is not constructed in the short term, the on-street exchange would require the following infrastructure improvements:

- 6 large bus shelters – cost sharing program (City of Abbotsford and BC Transit).
- Driver Facility Room – construction of building including sewage and water connection. There is a current agreement with Community Services for the use of their washroom facilities by transit drivers between 9am-5pm on weekdays. However, there is no access in the early morning, evenings and weekends. With an increase in routes terminating and starting at the Downtown Exchange, including layover and breaks, greater access to washroom facilities will be required. The lack of businesses in this location will impact the ability to continue providing this service via an agreement with a local organization. Should a suitable location be identified that is further away from the Downtown Exchange, it would require additional time for drivers to take breaks. Options and alternatives are currently being explored.
- Central barrier on Montrose Av. to discourage jay-walking.
- Improved street lighting.
- Improvements to the pedestrian crossing including road surface treatment & painting.
- CCTV surveillance cameras.
- Some sidewalk improvements may be required at the south end of Montrose Av. near McDougall Av. dependent upon bus bay locations and exchange design.
- Removal of some parking spaces on Montrose Av. and Laurel St. - discussion with the Abbotsford Downtown Business Association and local businesses will be required.
- Retention of bus parking and potential expansion of the bus parking area at Jubilee Park.

Additional non-essential investments that would help to alleviate public concerns:

- Creation of a landscaped road median on Montrose Av. to discourage jay-walking. This would address both the need to discourage jay-walking and improve the public realm if implemented instead of a barrier.
- Increased sidewalk space for increased numbers of passengers
- Safety improvements such as:
 - Cross-walk lighting at the improved pedestrian crossing
 - Police presence
- Additional public realm improvements such as landscaping and repaving would be beneficial. Development of mixed use facilities such as coffee shops, shops, residential that provide eyes on the street to increase safety. These developments would most likely be included as part of any downtown planning projects for regeneration.
- Potential to lower the speed limit from 50Kph to 30Kph.

Mission Exchange and Infrastructure Requirements

The following infrastructure improvements would be required to address the public engagement concerns in Mission:

- Improved street lighting at the Downtown Mission Exchange
- Improvements to the pedestrian crossing including road surface treatment & painting and consideration of lighting
- Audible signal for the pedestrian crossing on Lougheed Hwy near McDonalds
- Potential route restructure on Route 39 from James St to 7 Av.

Mission could consider could look at advancing the exchange and safety improvements as part of the Downtown revitalization project.

NEXT STEPS:

Subject to the outcome of the scheduling exercise to address public feedback and timing analysis, the successful implementation of service changes will be dependent upon exchange and infrastructure improvements. More detailed information regarding the costs associated with these improvements and the expected vehicle savings and revenue generation that could offset these costs will be useful in determining funding availability. As such, it is recommended that staff proceed with the following next steps:

1. Amend schedule and routes based upon public engagement feedback and timing analysis
2. Confirm vehicle savings based upon updated schedules
3. Update increased ridership and revenue estimates based upon updated schedules and public engagement feedback
4. Provide detailed estimates associated with the proposed Abbotsford and Mission exchange and infrastructure improvements

A timeline for implementation could then be determined once the scheduling exercise and service change proposal amendments are completed and a decision on the Downtown Exchange and infrastructure improvements is made.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. CFV Efficiency Review: Public Engagement Report March 2014