



INFORMATION ONLY COUNCIL REPORT

To: Paul Gipps, CAO

Date: August 23, 2022

From: Chris French, Planner I

File No: P 22-04

Subject: **P 22-04, 2023 Transit Service Review**

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to advise Council on a scheduled transit service review in 2023 for the Kelowna Regional Transit System and outline previous work completed as part of the 2012 Central Okanagan Transit Future Plan. This report was prepared in consultation with BC Transit, who will be coordinating key aspects of the transit service review with local government and community partners of the Kelowna Regional Transit System.

STRATEGIC AREA(S) OF FOCUS

Economic Development and Prosperity: We will work with our partners on the Westside and throughout the region to advocate for and support efforts aimed at helping West Kelowna businesses prosper. With a focus on the future, we will advance opportunities to expand our economy, increase employment, and develop the community in ways that contribute towards prosperity for all.

Foster Safety and Well-Being: We will pursue through direct action, advocacy, and partnerships with Westbank First Nation and local service providers, investments in community health, needs-based housing, emergency preparedness, policing, and other services that foster safety and well-being in West Kelowna.

BACKGROUND

BC Transit is the provincial authority responsible for the planning, funding and operation of all public transit throughout the Province outside of Metro Vancouver. The agency delivers services and supporting infrastructure that is based on a combination of public policy objectives set by the Provincial Government, and priorities, routes and rates determined by local governments. Funding for regional transit systems across the province is shared between BC Transit, local governments, health authorities and operations revenue as prescribed by a legislative funding formula in the *British Columbia Transit Act* and British Columbia Transit Regulations. BC Transit facilitates transit service in the City of West Kelowna as part of the Kelowna Regional Transit System, while operations are provided by First Transit ULC, a third party.

Central Okanagan Transit Future Plan

The Central Okanagan Transit Future Plan was completed in 2012 and provided a vision of the region's transit network until 2037. Since adopting the plan, many projects have been accomplished such as the introductions of the 97 Okanagan RapidBus and Frequent and Local routes throughout the region. As part of the Central Okanagan Transit Future Plan, transit service reviews are conducted throughout the duration of the plan to refine priorities and guide decision making for the transit system.

Previous Transit Service Reviews

The previous transit service review, called the Transit Future Action Plan was completed in 2018 with changes across the entire Kelowna Regional Transit System. As part of the consultation process, the previous City Council was presented with a number of options to improve transit service in February 2017, and a workshop was held with BC Transit and City Council and staff in May 2017.

As part of the Plan, several action items were identified. Some of the key initiatives included service and route changes as well as other improvements such as digital payment and fare collection. The sections below highlight key actions that were taken as part of the previous plan in West Kelowna.

Digital Fare Collection

BC Transit is now preparing to launch Umo which will be the digital fare collection system within the next two years in the Kelowna Regional Transit System. Umo is a smartphone application that riders can use to pay their fares, in addition to credit and debit cards, and reloadable smart cards. This is similar to the Compass Card system that is currently used by TransLink in the Lower Mainland but with additional payment options.

Service Expansion beyond Shannon Lake

One of the key transit priorities identified by West Kelowna residents in the previous Transit Future Action Plan was to extend transit coverage to the rapidly developing area along Shannon Lake Road between Shannon Ridge Drive and Bartley Road. The City worked with BC Transit to increase coverage of the transit network to these areas by extending routes 24: Shannon Ridge and 28: Shannon Lake (Figure 1, 2 and 3).



Figure 1: Gaps identified in previous transit service network in Shannon Lake neighbourhood

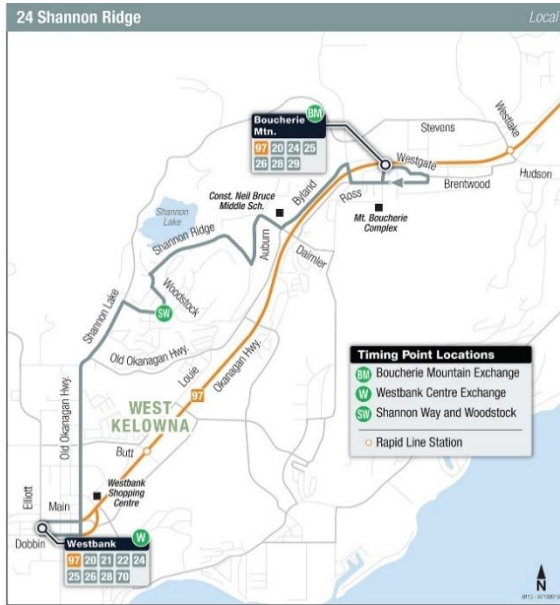


Figure 2: 24 – Shannon Ridge

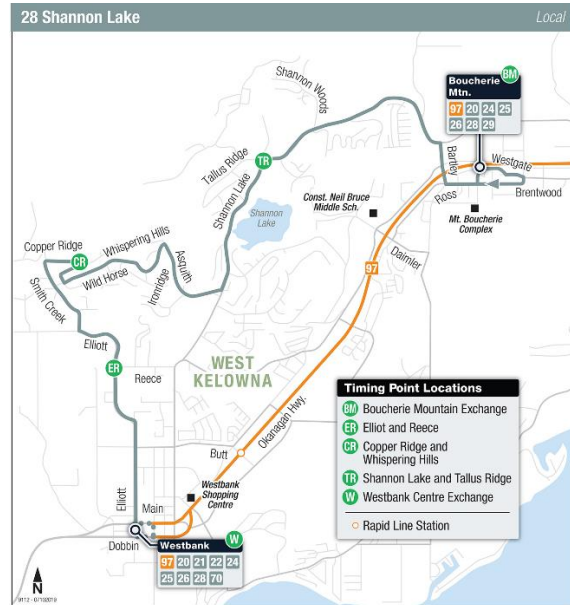


Figure 3: 28 – Shannon Lake

Service Expansion to Gellatly

Service along the Gellatly waterfront from Westbank Centre to Pebble Beach was identified as a community priority. In addition, parking was identified as a challenge on weekends and holidays around the West Kelowna Yacht Club boat launch. The service was trialed as a summer seasonal service in 2018 but discontinued due to exceedingly low levels of ridership. Service standards used by BC Transit targeted a minimum of 15 rides per hour.

Service Optimization on Routes 27 and 29

Routes 27: Horizon and 29: Bear Creek were the two lowest performing routes on the Westside. Three optimization options were examined, however combining the two routes to become the 26: Bear Creek was identified as the preferred option through the 2018 Transit Future Action Plan (Figure 4). This resulted in a reduction of 750 service hours from these routes that were reallocated to provide transit service to other areas within the Westside.

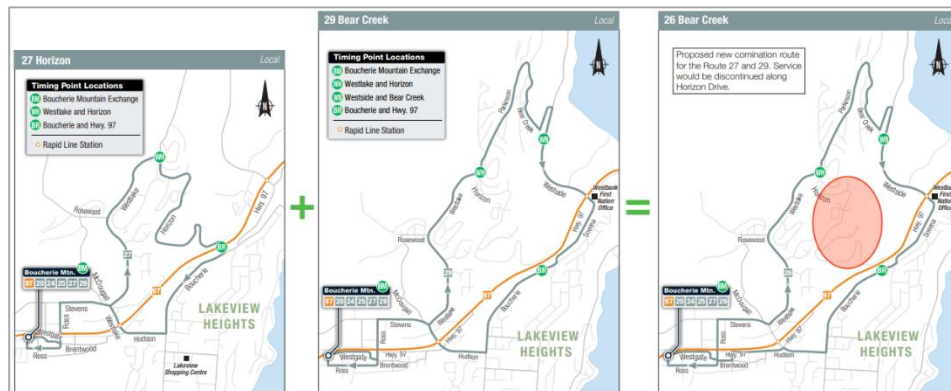


Figure 4: Routes 27 and 29 were combined to become the 26: Bear Creek.

Investment in Rapid Routes (Route 97)

Route 97: UBCO/Westbank is a RapidBus service that operates from Westbank Centre to the University of British Columbia's Okanagan campus in Kelowna. An additional 1,000 annual service hours were added to the route to improve off-peak service during mid-day, evenings and weekends.

DISCUSSION

A service review is scheduled to begin in 2023 which will continue to shape how transit works in the Central Okanagan over the following three years (2024-27). This review will update transit service and infrastructure through consultation with the public and recommendations generated by local governments across the region.

Transit service improvements and expansions typically will come from BC Transit service planning documents, but can also be driven by the local government, or the local government's strategic plans. The transit service review planned for 2023 will coincide with updates to the Official Community Plan and Transportation Master Plan, offering a unique opportunity to start on actions identified to improve mobility in the City. Council will be included in this consultation in 2023 to develop a number of action items to improve or expand transit service in the City and region. A suite of initial considerations for the service review that could be considered are outlined in detail below.

Improve Service Standards

Service standards identify the recommended minimum service levels for transit services by service layers and the minimum characteristics for considering transit service expansion to new areas. Service standards used by BC Transit for existing service can include several factors such as service span, frequency, bus stop spacing, and walking distance to bus stops.

BC Transit typically also looks at overall ridership on routes to determine if they are performing or underperforming. However, ridership has yet to rebound to pre-pandemic levels and they are currently not making any recommendations based off of their 2020 service guidelines. When BC Transit does return to pre-pandemic levels, 15 rides per hour will once again be the standard used to determine if a local transit network route, like most in West Kelowna, are performing.

Optimize Transit Network and Routes

Route and network optimization includes a series of interventions that help to improve the reliability, efficiency, and cost per rider of bus routes. This may include revisions to route design, which refers to how long and how direct a service is, and whether the service uses a consistent path or adjusts its path depending on demand. In addition, the size of transit vehicles may also be altered depending on demand as was the case in the redesign of the Shannon Lake routes in the previous Transit Future Action Plan.

Optimization is a service level improvement. Simple service level improvements that do not modify routing can be as quick as 8-12 months depending on a series of factors. However, optimization to routes that look to modify routing or the network require additional engagement, which may add up to an additional 6 months. Changes that require additional service hours may be completed within three years as they need to be incorporated into the Transit Improvement Process. However, should they acquire funding within the first year, they may be implemented as early as two years after planning.

Land use is also a critical element in designing transit routes and frequency, and helps to determine where services are needed. High density areas with mixed uses support routes with frequent transit, compared to lower density areas that may be served by fewer trips. The City is currently in the process of updating the Official Community Plan (OCP) and Transportation Master Plan (TMP). As part of the new OCP, two major urban centres and five neighbourhood centres are planned for transit supportive development. These changes to development patterns in the City may prompt changes to the shape of the transit network and routes in coordination with Westbank First Nation and BC Transit. The City has been in ongoing consultation with Westbank First Nation through the OCP and TMP reviews and similar to the City, Westbank First Nation has identified that there is an interest in further evaluating transit service levels.

Staff have begun conceptualizing a renewed vision for the transit network in West Kelowna that connects these development centres with reliable bus service as shown in *Attachment 1*. This network is purely conceptual, serving as a discussion tool to initiate potential options for improving transit planning in the City of West Kelowna. Any changes to transit service, routes or the network on the west side would need to be coordinated with BC Transit, Westbank First Nation, other local governments and external agencies as the west side grows over time. A key consideration of evaluating service level improvements will be the rate at which the urban and neighborhood centres develop in the future.

Transit Priority and Infrastructure Measures

Traffic congestion continues to grow at the William R. Bennett Bridge crossing into downtown Kelowna, and in West Kelowna. Transit priority measures on frequent service routes can help make buses faster, more reliable and an attractive alternative to driving. Strategies to enhance bus service can be implemented by improving speed and reliability along specific corridors. One possibility could be expanding the road shoulders of Highway 97 to become dedicated bus lanes. Such a measure could grow the number of transit trips on Route 97 from West Kelowna to Kelowna and reduce traffic congestion in the region by enabling both local and interregional routes to use the bus lanes. Transit queue jump lanes, among other priority measures, could also be considered at congestion pinch points on transit routes in the community (Figures 5 and 6).



Figure 5: Dedicated transit lane on the side of a highway



Figure 6: Transit queue jump lane at an intersection

Infrastructure improvements are subject to provincial funding but have typically longer timelines in comparison to route and network optimization. Construction for priority and infrastructure measures may start as early as 2 years from their initial conception and may require coordination with other external partners including the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Digital On-Demand Transit

Digital On-Demand (DoD) transit allows customers to request transit service in a specific service area using a smartphone app. This gives operators the ability to alter their routes based on where the demand is, rather than following a fixed route and schedule. DoD transit also brings benefits for customers including reduced wait times and trip length, and the type of service could vary between using smaller vehicles in a curb-to-curb pick up format or using larger conventional buses and bus stops.

BC Transit has conducted a study of transit systems in the Province where implementation of DoD transit may be feasible and the Kelowna Regional System was one of two that were identified.

Operations and Maintenance Facility

The above actions could greatly expand affordable and sustainable mobility options in West Kelowna through changes and improvements to transit services. However, service expansions are inhibited by limited fleet capacity at the existing bus depot on Hardy Street in Kelowna. BC Transit is continuing to work with the City of Kelowna who was successful in their application to remove a 16.2 acre parcel of the 4690 Hwy 97 property from the Agricultural Land Reserve for the purpose of a new transit operation and maintenance facility. This new location will increase the size of the bus fleet, which may allow for greater service expansion and higher frequency transit across the region. Staff are working in conjunction with the overall Kelowna Regional Transit system partners to advance this initiative.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

All conventional fixed-route transit service is cost-shared between BC Transit and the local government(s) according to a legislated formula whereby 54% is allocated by the local government(s), and 46% by BC Transit. In the Kelowna Regional Transit System, the local share is split between the Kelowna Regional local government partners according to the hours provided in each jurisdiction.

Any changes to the local transit system such as new routes or additional service hours may require additional funding. Improvements or expansions identified in transit service reviews need to be incorporated into BC Transit's Transit Improvement Process, which takes place over the next three fiscal years. When an improvement or expansion project goes into the Transit Improvement Process, BC Transit provides annual costing for the project in a Memorandum of Understanding. Any costs in Year 1 are financial commitments once signed, while any in Years 2 and 3 are shown for planning purposes and are re-evaluated the following year. All expansion initiatives are subject to provincial funding, which is released to BC Transit each February. Further, infrastructure improvements require cost-shared studies which may require additional funding. Additional information on funding arrangements for identified service changes and priorities will be provided to Council when engagement for the 2023 Transit Service Review occurs next year.

NEXT STEPS

Council will be participating in a Transportation Master Planning workshop with engineering staff in September 2022 as part of engagement for the update to the Plan. BC Transit will consult Council for the Transit Service Review in early 2023.

REVIEWED BY

Brent Magnan, Director of Development Approvals

Warren Everton, Director of Finance, CFO

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APPROVED FOR THE AGENDA BY

Paul Gipps, CAO

PowerPoint: Yes No

Attachments:

1. Transit Network Concept