



City of Prince Albert

RPT 23-358

TITLE: Transit Extended Hours - Budget 2024

DATE: September 5, 2023

TO: Executive Committee

PUBLIC: X

INCAMERA:

RECOMMENDATION:

That the following transit extended weekday hours of operation trial be extended until December 31st, 2024 and included in the 2024 Transit Budget.

1. To reduce operating frequency from half-hourly to hourly for all routes between 6:15 – 7:15pm;
2. To extend all transit routes from 7:15pm – 10:15pm operating hourly;
3. To extend the Rush Hour Service from 9:45am – 2:45pm half-hourly.

TOPIC & PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to approve the extension of the weekday transit hours trial until December 31, 2024 and to include the associated expenses within the 2024 Transit Operating Budget.

BACKGROUND:

Public Transit usage has increased 43% in Canada since 2005. As the costs of fuel and vehicle ownership have increased more people look towards public transit as their primary source of transportation. Since 2005, The City of Prince Alberts annual transit ridership has increased from 258,000 to 399,000 which marks a 55% increase. Over this same time period, scheduled transit hours have increased from 18,732 hours to 19,116.5 hours annually. This shows that over the last 18 years the City of Prince Albert has seen a 55% increase in transit usage and a 2% increase in service hours.

Over the last decade the City of Prince Albert has grown and businesses are now open later. For this reason the Department of Public Works has received dozens of calls, emails and requests from the public to extend transit hours on weekdays. Local examples of regular business hours of operation on weekdays are as follows:

- U of S Campus Classes extend until 9pm.

- Saskatchewan Polytechnic Labs and Library extend until 9pm.
- YWCA English Language classes extend until 9pm.
- Alfred Jenkins Field House open until 10pm.
- Victoria Hospital Visiting Hours open until 8pm.
- Major grocery stores are open until 10pm or later.
- Fast Food stores are open until 9pm or later.
- Many retail stores are open until 8pm or later.
- Most entertainment based businesses open until 10pm.

Transit riders have expressed that they work/study/utilize these locations and currently taxi, bike or walk because transit is not available. Extending service until 10:15pm allows citizens to accept jobs with later hours, attend community events and shop for groceries at normal business/school hours.

In 2017, a four-month transit trial was completed with extended weekday hours to 11:00pm. Following a review of the results of the trial, the recommendation by the Department of Public Works was to extend weekday transit hours to 10:15pm at that time. The data found during the 2017 extended hour's trial was utilized to create a new, more efficient trial.

The City was approved for One-Time Public Transit Funding for a total of \$415,038 from the Provincial and Federal Government on January 25th, 2023.

On February 13th, 2023, City Council approved \$265,000 of the Transit Funding to be allocated towards an extended weekday hours of service trial from March 13th, 2023 to March 31st, 2024. Due to driver shortages the extended transit hours did not officially begin until June 12th, 2023. On June 12th, 2023, the extended weekday hours of operation were officially implemented on a trial basis. The chart below shows the budgeted transit weekday service hours for 2023 as compared to the extended weekday hours of service.

Routing	Budgeted Service Hours 2023		Extended Weekday Hours of Service Trial	
	Main Routes (Half-Hourly)	Rush Hour (Half-Hourly)	All Routes (Half-Hourly)	All Routes (Hourly)
Monday - Friday	6:45am - 7:15pm	6:45am - 9:15am 2:45pm - 6:15pm	6:45am - 6:15pm	6:15pm - 10:15pm
Total Daily Hours	62.5	7	69	12
	69.5		81	

PROPOSED APPROACH AND RATIONALE:

The extended weekday transit service trial has been a success since it began on June 12th, 2023. The timeframe of June 12th – August 31st, 2023 has seen 13,600 more riders than in any other year.

Although, the transit trial has produced positive results thus far it should be understood that transit utilization alters greatly between the summer months and September-June while school is in session. In March of 2023, 522 Post-Secondary and Youth (High-School) monthly transit passes were sold. With the number of students riding transit expected to further increase in the 2023-24 school year it is evident that the true effect of the extended hours will unfold in the coming months. Figure 1 below shows the transit ridership by month in 2019 as an example of the average reduction in ridership during the summer months.

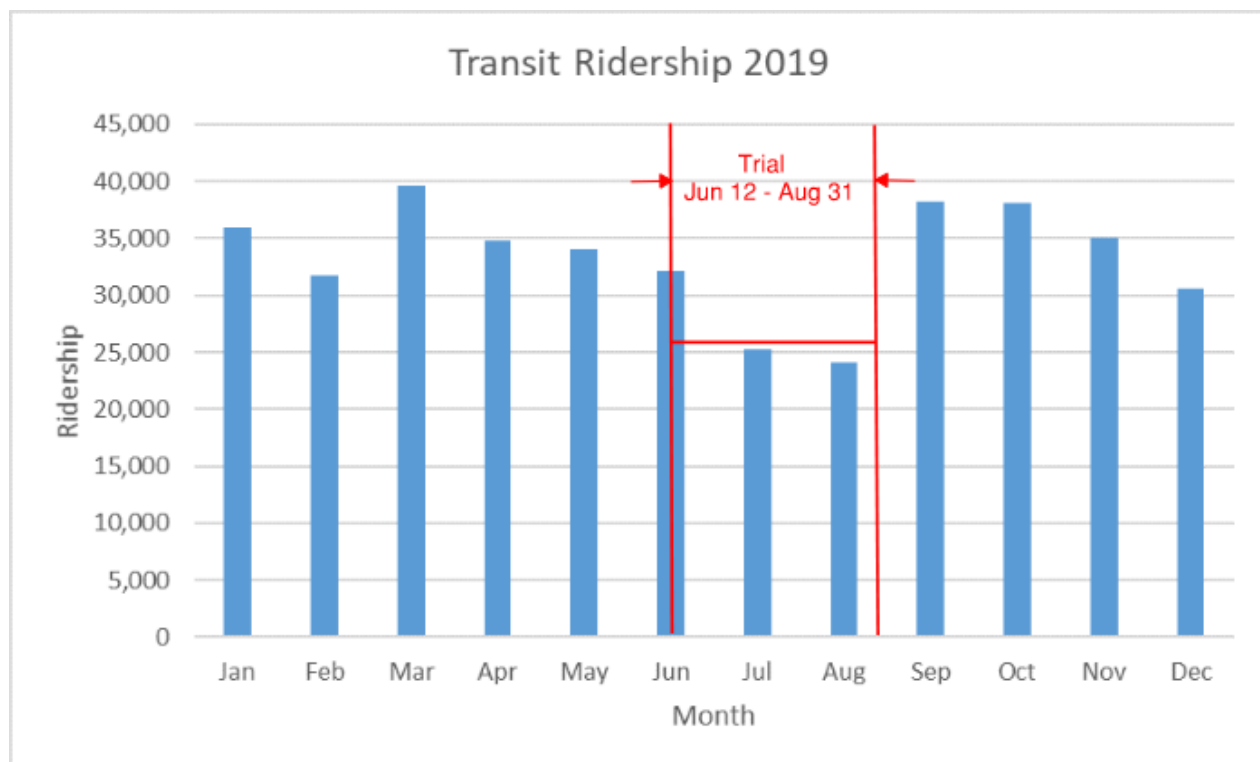


Figure 1: Transit Ridership by Month 2019

Continuing with the extended transit hours trial is recommended in order to provide a large enough sample size to accurately represent the impact of the service to the public. The additional study period will also allow for a more accurate assessment of the financial impact for the extended hours of service.

A report will be brought to City Council prior to the 2025 budget year with a recommendation on whether to proceed with the extended hours or not. This report will include all relevant statistics collected throughout the trial as well as a more detailed financial impact analysis. The remainder of this section of the report will include statistics and trends regarding the alteration of transit hours.

1. Reduction of Operating Frequency from Half-Hourly to Hourly from 6:15pm – 7:15pm

Although, there is a large need to extend transit hours on weekdays it is noted that ridership does reduce after 6:15pm. Similar to this, the City of Brandon was consulted and confirmed that they successfully operate hourly bus service after 6pm on weekdays. This reduction in service frequency creates a savings of approximately \$32,500 in operating expenses annually. This alteration to service hours in conjunction with extending transit hours until 10:15pm has increased the transit ridership between 6:15pm – 7:15pm despite the reduction of service. This is a result of more started trips during this timeframe since transit is now available for return trips until 10:15pm.

2. Extension of all transit routes from 7:15pm – 10:15pm operating hourly

The extension of hours of operation has been promising thus far as the transit ridership from 7:15pm – 10:15pm has increased each week since June 12th, 2023. Table 1 below shows the gradual increase in daily transit ridership from 7pm – 10:15pm along with September projections for when students return to school.

Table 1: Daily Ridership (7pm – 10:15pm)

	Daily Ridership (7pm - 10:15pm)
July	68
August	72
August 29th	94
September Projection	110

Aside from the increased ridership during the extended hours it is important to note that the ridership throughout the rest of the day has also increased significantly. The late night weekday hours make the transit system more functional and allows citizens to accept jobs with later hours, attend community events and shop for groceries at normal business/school hours. For this reason dozens of users who previously could not utilize the transit system are now riding.

On August 30th, at the Saskatchewan Polytechnic Community Fair a number of students commented that they would be taking transit this year due to the extended hours of operation allowing them to get to and from work and school. On August 31st, Saskatchewan Polytechnic increased their requested September monthly post-secondary passes to a total 280. In comparison in October 2022, the institution sold 85 monthly transit passes. This institution alone is anticipated to generate \$90,000 of monthly transit pass revenue from September 2023 – April 2024, an increase in \$44,000 compared to September 2022 – April 2023.

3. To extend the Rush Hour Service from 9:45am – 2:45pm half-hourly

On August 30th, 2022 the Rush Hour Route was altered to increase service along 28th Street East, 13th Street East, at Carlton High School, in Crescent Acres and in the Cornerstone Shopping District. (Attachment 1 – City of Prince Albert Transit Map).

On September 1st, 2022 Prince Albert Transit absorbed the Public High School Transit Service within the City. As a result, monthly youth passes increased from 90 monthly to 320 monthly. Many of these students are located at PACI or Carlton, each of which are located on the Rush Hour Route.

Due to the high utilization of the route, the extended hours of service trial extends the Rush Hour from 9:45am – 2:45pm operating half-hourly. This allows for full day service to Crescent Acres and allows quick access from Cornerstone/Saskatchewan Polytechnic to the transfer station. Additionally, the route allows for rapid access from the transfer station to P.A.C.I. and Carlton high schools.

Since the extended hours trial began on June 12th, 2023 the Rush Hour Route has increased in popularity as riders recognize it as a full day service. Throughout the months of June and July the route averaged 139 riders per day. On August 30th post-secondary schools opened and the Rush Hour Route serviced 219 riders. The route is projected to host 275 – 300 riders per day once high school begins which would make it the 4th most utilized transit route ahead of the All Day Express and West Flat.

It should be understood that the Rush Hour Route services PACI, Carlton and Saskatchewan Polytechnic schools. These schools represent over 400 monthly transit passes and have a profound impact on ridership during the school year. For this reason statistics taken as part of the extended hours trial (June 12th, 2023 – August 31st, 2023) are only representative of what summer operation of the route looks like. Further analysis of the impacts of this extension requires further information that will be collected during months where school is in session. Figure 2 below shows the Rush Hour ridership per loop from August 1st – August 25th, 2023. This figure shows the average utilization of the Rush Hour route per loop during summer operation.

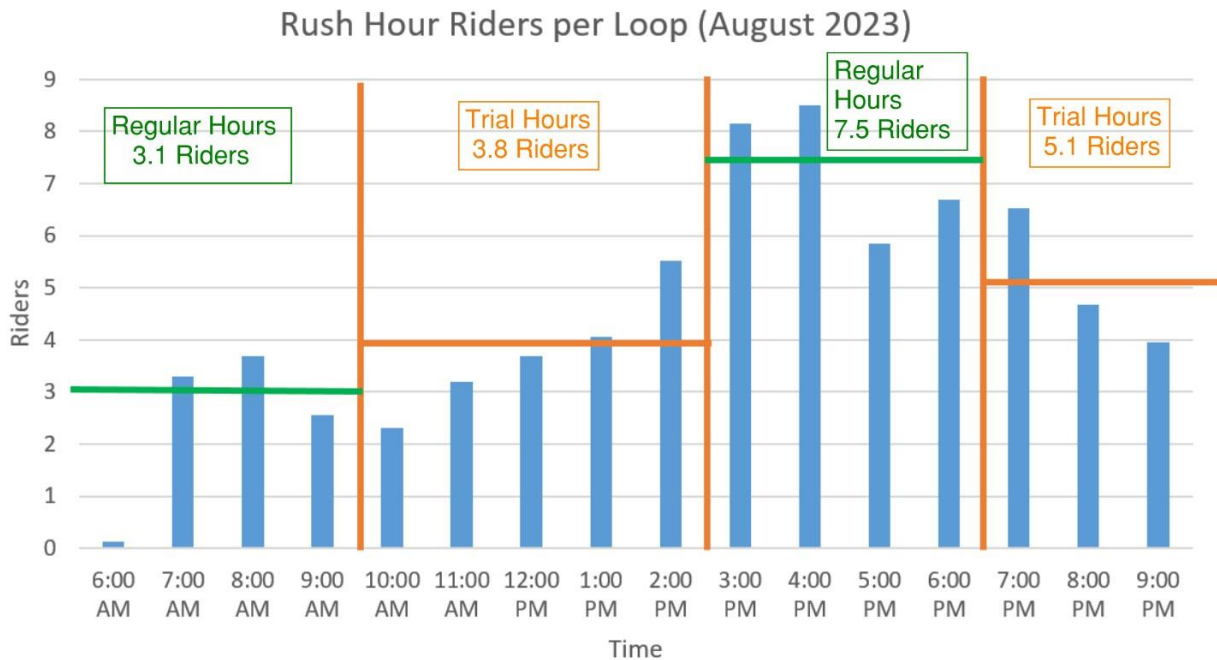


Figure 2: Rush Hour Ridership share percentage per hour

Flexibility

The City of Prince Albert is growing rapidly. On the south side of the city major developments such as the Yard District and City Arena and Aquatics Center are underway. On the southwest side of the City the Marquis Road extension was completed in 2021 and various developments have started nearby. As the City continues to expand public transit will be required to ensure the public has access to all new City facilities, shopping, services and more.

The extended transit hours and 6th full time weekday transit route provided in this report allow additional flexibility when planning future transit services.

CONSULTATIONS:

On August 30th, 2023, at the Saskatchewan Polytechnic Community Fair, a poll was provided to over 110 students. 84% of respondents who take public transit are planning to utilize the extended transit hours on weekdays between the hours of 7:15pm – 10:15pm this year. The City's Transit Service Contractor First Canada ULC was consulted and is able to provide service during the trial is extended.

This extension of hours has been a consistent request from the public and multiple organizations. The Department of Public Works has received dozens of calls, emails and requests to extend transit hours on weekdays in particular.

The City of Brandon Transit Department was consulted in determining successful hours of transit operation. The City of Brandon has a similar transit system to Prince Albert and operates on weekdays 6am - 12am. The system successfully turns from half-hourly to hourly service from 6pm – 12am.

COMMUNICATION AND/OR ANNOUNCEMENT PLAN:

The Department of Public Works will work with the Department of Communications to create an advertising strategy/campaign for the trial to ensure the public is informed of the extension to the transit trial. This will include publishing a media release, posting and advertising on social media and various updates to the City's Transit Page.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

As part of the One-Time Public Transit Funding received in 2023, \$62,000 is carried forward into 2024 to operate the transit extended hours until March 31st, 2024.

The cost to the City to operate the extended hours of service from April 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024 is \$189,000 including fuel.

The additional transit service hours are related to increases in transit pass revenue and increased ridership as the service becomes functional for more residents that work, shop, or attend school on weekday evenings. Transit pass revenue was budgeted to be \$375,000 for 2023 and as of August 31st, 2023 the transit pass revenue for 2023 is at \$321,000. The projected transit pass revenue is now \$450,000. While not all additional revenue can be attributed to extended hours of service it should be noted that transit ridership projections have increased to 480,000 which is 81,000 more riders than the previous high in 2018.

In 2024, it is projected that with the extended transit hours PA Transit reaches \$485,000 in transit pass revenue. Approximately \$70,000 of this is expected to be as result of the extended transit hours of service. Further analysis of the financial impacts of the extended hours will be available as the trial progresses.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/IMPLICATIONS:

There are no options to the recommendation. There are also no privacy or policy implications for this report.

STRATEGIC PLAN:

This report supports the City's Strategic Plan to strive to meet the needs of City Transit users by extending hours of operation and improving functionality of the public transit service.

OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN:

Increasing hours of transit service will enhance the functionality of the City's Public Transit System. Section 7.4 Public Transit supports transportation services commensurate to demand to and from major areas of employment, education, health care and shopping provided by the City's Public Transit System.

PUBLIC NOTICE:

Public Notice pursuant to the Public Notice Bylaw No. 24 of 2015 is not required.

PRESENTATION:

PowerPoint presentation by Transportation and Traffic Manager, Evan Hastings.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Attachment 1 - City of Prince Albert Transit Map
2. Extended Transit Service Hours Trial Powerpoint Presentation

Written by: Evan Hastings, Transportation and Traffic Manager

Approved by: Director of Public Works & City Manager