

Region of Waterloo
Transportation Services
Transit Services

To: Planning and Works Committee
Meeting Date: June 6, 2023
Report Title: GRT Route 2 and 73 Service Change Mitigation

1. Recommendation

For direction.

2. Purpose / Issue:

The purpose of the report is to respond to a motion on May 9th, 2023 at the Planning & Works committee directing staff to “continue with planned public information sessions, explore alternatives to mitigate the closure of route #2, and report back to Council on these alternatives in June 2023.”

3. Strategic Plan:

The overall restructuring of Grand River Transit (GRT) transit service for 2023, including expanded service and reallocated service supports Sustainable Transportation Objective 2.1: Enhance the transit system to increase ridership and ensure it is accessible and appealing to the public.

4. Report Highlights:

Report TSD-TRS-23-003 2023 Proposed Transit Service Changes, dated February 7, 2023 outlined the impacts of cancelling Routes 2 and 73, both of which were low performing routes compared to the average GRT service, and of reallocating the corresponding resources to other routes with higher actual and potential ridership. Ridership levels and type of service were considered along with budget impacts. Due to concerns expressed by customers, Council asked staff to look at alternatives that will mitigate their discontinuation.

Route 2

As the lowest performing route provided by GRT, excluding the BusPlus services, Route 2 as currently structured is unsustainable. The bulk of the feedback from customers related to service in the peaks for needs such as student trips. In reviewing ways to mitigate the impact of discontinuing the service, staff have developed an option that

would provide service coverage in the AM/PM peak with an extension of the Route 34. As shown in Appendix A, this option would provide coverage through the central section of the former Route 2 in the Greenbrook/Stirling area, connecting Central Station to the Sunrise Centre terminal and serving the Forest Hills Centre and Public School. By providing a number of new destinations, this has the potential to increase two-way ridership in this area.

The service impact in Forest Heights would be mitigated by adding stops on Highland Road at the walkway to Burnaby Crescent served by the 204 Highland iXpress. The recently reconstructed Highland Road with a new pedestrian crossing at this point makes this stop feasible and provides service coverage to a large area no longer served by Route 2. Route 1 Queen South will continue to service the majority of the subdivision west of Fisher-Hallman, with a level of service higher than that offered by route 2.

The stretch of Ottawa Street east of King Street without any Route 2 service will continue to receive service using the Route 205 Ottawa iXpress.

There is considerable growth in west Kitchener, which will result in the need for additional transit in the future. The entire area bound by Ira Needles to King, and Ottawa to Highland will be reviewed in the coming years.

Route 73

Route 73 Northlake is provided as a BusPlus service which is generally the lowest level of service. BusPlus service uses smaller vehicles typically targeting areas and timeperiods where low levels of service can still be effective.

Route 73 currently operates only in the weekday peak periods. As such it is not possible to reduce the service further or shorten the route in any way that can continue to provide some reduced level of service.

There is a significant level of planned housing growth in north-west Waterloo that will result in the need for additional transit in the future. With that in mind, the Route 73 service area will be reviewed in the coming years.

5. Background:

As part of the 2023 Plan and Budget, staff put forward 2 route cancellations (Route 2 & 73) in order to re-direct funds from underperforming routes, to others with growth potential. Route #2 consistently had about 9 riders per hour on average, while Route #73 had less than 9. This compares to over 34 riders per hour on all local routes.

The report (TSD-TRS-23-003, 2023 Proposed Transit Service Changes) was shared with the public and the service level changes were included in the broad public engagement around Plan and Budget, but did not allow for targeted information sessions to take place. GRT has continued to gather feedback from the community

through e-mail and phone calls, and has additional information sessions planned in June.

Regional staff have reviewed alternatives to mitigate the discontinuation of Routes 2 and 73 and have sought feedback from the public as directed by Council. Based on the information gathered, as outlined in Report TSD-TRS-23-006, staff are seeking direction from Council.

(Note: Planned May sessions were delayed due to the labour disruption).

6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public

Area Municipalities:

Staff has reached out to area municipal staff to gather any additional considerations to inform the present report.

Public:

The public was engaged as part of the 2023 Plan and Budget, which presented all service level changes put forward by staff.

Once the budget was approved, specific information was conveyed to the public about the approved changes to the routes via social media, press release and notices at bus stops. Staff have gathered feedback on concerns through the GRT.ca feedback form, and also through the Region's Service First Contact Centre, with feedback centred on access to schools and medical facilities. Public Information Centres (PIC) planned in May were postponed to June due to the labour disruption at GRT and are taking place virtually on June 5th and in person on June 14th at the Forest Heights Community Centre. Information on the proposed options will be presented at that time and any feedback will be gathered and presented to Council during the Planning & Works Committee on June 6th (from the virtual PIC only), and for final consideration of this report at the Council meeting on June 21st (both PIC sessions).

7. Financial Implications:

The cancellation of routes 2 and 73 was approved through the 2023 Budget and results in a net savings of approximately \$413,000 in 2023 (\$1,240,000 annualized). Subject to Council approval, enhancements to Route 34 would be effective September 5, 2023 and are expected to cost \$111,000 in 2023 (\$333,000 annualized) with anticipated fare revenue of \$13,000 in 2023 (\$40,000 annualized), for a total net cost of \$98,000 in 2023 (\$294,000 annualized). The additional stops on Route 204 iXpress will also require an allocation of approximately \$45,000 from the iXpress Station Development Project (#66029) in 2023 to install the additional shelters/pads. The additional work can be accommodated within the existing capital budget provision of \$720,000 in 2023.

8. Conclusion / Next Steps:

PIC's (virtual and in-person) will be held with the public on June 5th & 14th with any feedback provided to Council on June 21st. If Council directs staff to proceed with the

option to extend Route 34 in the weekday peaks, service adjustments will take place on September 5th.

9. Attachments:

Appendix A: Proposed Route 34 Extension - Map & Details

Appendix B: Historical Route 2 Performance - Map & Details

Prepared By: Blair Allen, Manager Transit Development

Reviewed By: Doug Spooner, Director Transit Services

Approved By: Mathieu Goetzke, Commissioner Transportation Services