

Region of Waterloo
Transportation Services
Transit Services

To: Planning and Works Committee
Meeting Date: March 5, 2024
Report Title: Grand River Transit – Ridership Update – 2023 Year End

1. Recommendation

For information.

2. Purpose / Issue:

To provide council with regular updates on Grand River Transit ridership.

3. Strategic Plan:

The ridership update supports the Strategic Plan’s Climate-aligned growth priority, indicating how well the Region is meeting its goals such as expanding an equitable public transit network.

4. Report Highlights:

GRT has its busiest year ever with annual ridership of 26.4 million, an increase of 48.3% over 2022. This is also an increase of 20.1% over the previous high ridership of 22.0 million in 2019. ION LRT ridership increased to 4.4 millions riders for the year, an increase of 49.4% over 2022. Meanwhile bus ridership increased by 48.1% to 22.1 million.

Daily boardings, which measure every time a person boards a transit vehicle including their transfers, of 132,000 also exceeds previous levels in 2022 of 76,000 by 49.5% and 2019 of 102,000 by 11.2%.

Service hours increased by 5400 hours (0.7%) since 2019 and 10,700 (1.3%) since 2022.

Appendix A, Performance Dashboard, illustrates the current ridership and the year-to-date information. The highest and lowest performing routes are noted. The ION LRT continues to be the highest performing route while the other high performers (110 & 12) serve the post-secondary market as well as a diverse corridor with significant numbers of workers and families using the Route 12. The lowest performing routes are BusPlus routes which serve areas where ridership is still developing, including a new pilot on-

demand transit service.

5. Background:

The previous ridership update report was presented at the November 7, 2023 Planning & Works Committee (Report TSD-TRS-23-011) and illustrated the significant growth in transit ridership as we moved out of the pandemic era. It indicated September as the busiest month that GRT has ever had.

In September, there was a significant service improvement, particularly in Cambridge with roughly 18,000 hours of new annual service added. The network redesign in Cambridge was the last phase of a network redesign as part of the restructuring over several years leading to the implementation of the ION service. As is normal with transit service changes, the ridership impact takes a while to be felt as people adapt to improved service and get an opportunity to try an improved journey. That ridership impact began to be felt during the last quarter of 2023 and will continue to see growth over the next year.

6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public

Area Municipalities: N/A

Public:

Ridership updates were shared with the public in 2023, celebrating new monthly and annual ridership records and reinforcing Waterloo Region's commitments to investing in transit.

7. Financial Implications:

The growth in ridership has resulted in GRT revenue that exceeded the 2023 budget estimate by \$8.5 million. Staff have reflected the increased ridership and revenue in the 2024 budget accordingly. All other things being equal, the additional ridership could result in a higher Provincial Gas Tax Fund allocation in future years.

8. Conclusion / Next Steps:

Ridership update reports will be provided to Council quarterly, aligned with service change timelines.

9. Attachments:

Appendix A: Performance Dashboard - GRT

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