

Transit Master Plan 2018 Review

Strathcona County's first Transit Master Plan (TMP) was adopted in 2012, and since that time, the County has made significant progress in the implementation of the plan's recommendations. However, with ongoing growth in the County, public transportation needs are continuing to evolve. In order to continue to meet the needs of the community as it grows, Strathcona County Transit (SCT) has recognized the need to update the Transit Master Plan (TMP). The development of the updated Plan will include the following components:

Phase 1 – Establishing the Needs

- A review of existing travel market conditions and trends
- A review of the current planning framework for the County and the Edmonton Region;
- An initial round of public/stakeholder engagement to identify issues, transportation needs, and public expectations of SCT's role
- The identification of mobility needs in the urban and rural parts of the County and of potential service delivery options to meet those needs

Phase 2 – Setting the Policy Framework

- The development of an updated policy framework that aligns with the broader framework for the County and Region including a set of vision, mission, and goals to guide actions for the next 10 years, a definition of the role of SCT, and an updated set of service standards and guidelines

Phase 3 – Developing Strategic Directions and Plans

- The development of strategic directions and draft plans for commuter services to/from Edmonton including rapid transit options, conventional local services in Sherwood Park, services in rural areas, and specialized services in the County
- A second round of public/stakeholder engagement to gather feedback on the draft plans
- The development of a recommended final plan, based on input gathered during the second round of engagement

Phase 4 – Finalizing the Plan & Recommendations

- The preparation of an implementation plan including priorities and phasing
- The preparation of a funding plan that outlines capital costs, operating costs, projected ridership, and fare revenues for each stage of the phased implementation plan
- The presentation of the final plan to Council

Phase one: Public engagement process, February 27 – March 25, 2018

This section summarizes six key themes that were shared with the consultation team during the first phase of public engagement from February 27 to March 25, 2018. Meetings were held with the mayor, councilors, bus operators, a focus group of transit stakeholders, and through several public open houses. The team also rode on Strathcona County Transit buses and spoke with customers. These face-to-face opportunities provided Transit with the chance to speak with more than 250 individuals.

The on-line survey reached more than 1000 unique users. Through promotion throughout the County, utilizing the county's new engagement tool SCOOP, and a number of face-to-face opportunities, Transit was able to connect with the community and garner feedback about the future of transit in Strathcona County.

What we heard: establishing needs

.All of these groups were asked about their priorities for the future direction of Strathcona County Transit in the following areas: Big Picture and Vision; Local Service; Inter-municipal Service; Mobility Bus Service; Rural Service; and Passenger Amenities.

For each of these six topics that were put forth for discussion, the results shared during the consultation are summarized below.

Big Picture and Vision

- Transit has a social role to play in making Strathcona County accessible to all residents regardless of age or ability to drive a vehicle;
- Transit has an environmental role to play in reducing emissions and congestion;
- Electric or other alternatives to diesel buses should be considered and implemented if the cost is reasonable;
- Transit has an equity role to play in providing an affordable means of transportation for all residents regardless of means;
- Transit is an important service that allows people at all life stages (particularly youth, students, and seniors) to live in the community;
- Transit needs to continue to grow and evolve to meet changing transportation needs;
- Transit service is an important component of Sherwood Park developing as a more urban and walkable community in the future;
- Future urban development in Strathcona County such as Cambrian Crossing and Bremner need to consider and incorporate transit service; and
- Strathcona County should not be afraid to be on the leading edge of new transit technologies but should avoid the unproven “bleeding edge”.

Local Service

- Many trips around Sherwood Park take unreasonably long by transit and require a transfer;
- The transit terminals are not destinations or located near to destinations;
- Actual destinations such as Millennium Place and Festival Place are awkward to access by transit;
- There is a negative perception of local buses running almost completely empty during the day;
- Service is poor in evenings and on weekends with reduced frequencies;
- It is more convenient to drive to the transit terminals rather than take local transit;
- Although local ridership is low, it is an important service and should continue to be provided; and
- Replacing some fixed-route service with on-demand service should be considered where appropriate, especially in the evenings and weekends.

Inter-municipal Service

- Inter-municipal service works very well for commuters to downtown Edmonton;
- Travel time is comparable to driving;
- The high cost of parking is a major incentive to take transit;
- Free parking and low-cost reserved parking at the transit terminals make it convenient to park-and-ride;
- Some combination of more parking, paid parking, or improvements to local service may be necessary to accommodate increasing demand for Inter-municipal service;
- Additional service is desired at the Ordze Transit Centre, especially continuing later in the evening;
- Additional service hours and frequency are desired for the University of Alberta main campus and Campus Saint-Jean in the evening (as evening transit schedules do not align with class schedules);
- There is no direct service to the University of Alberta on weekends;
- Spring/Summer schedules for Inter-municipal buses are reduced for the University of Alberta service, which doesn't meet the needs of students taking classes and employees that work at the University of Alberta campus;
- Additional direct service to Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) is desired;
- There is some demand for Inter-municipal service between Sherwood Park and Fort Saskatchewan; and
- In the long-term, plans should be considered for a Rapid Transit connection between Sherwood Park and Edmonton.

Mobility Bus Service

- Providing door-to-door service is essential;
- Need to evaluate the eligibility requirements and trip purpose restrictions for rural Mobility Bus customers;
- There are a few rural riders who cannot access community events on weekends and would like Mobility Bus service expanded;
- Need better ways to contact Mobility Bus service;

- Not having to book rides well in advance (currently minimum two days) is desired;
- Fares should be standardized with conventional transit (this occurred July 1, 2018);
- Additional destinations in Edmonton are desired, particularly NAIT, and Misericordia Hospital;
- Mobility Bus should not have an 18+ age restriction;
- Mobility Bus attendants are required to pay a fare when riding the conventional service, but not the Mobility Bus service. This should be standardized between both systems; and
- People are open to the idea of using Mobility Bus vehicle to provide an integrated Mobility Bus and conventional transit service for customers in low demand areas (e.g. Rural Service Area) or periods. This would mean that the same Mobility Bus could provide on-demand door-to-door service for registered Mobility Bus customers, while accommodating on-demand stop-to-stop service for conventional customers in the same vehicle when demand does not warrant the justification of a separate fixed-route service.

Rural Service

- Some people are strongly in favour of providing transit service to rural areas of Strathcona County;
- Some people are willing to provide rural transit service only if the demand is there;
- Demand for rural transit service appears to be minimal outside of Mobility Bus users; and
- Ardrossan is the most likely candidate for connections to Sherwood park as it grows, perhaps with a park-and-ride facility

Passenger Amenities

- Praise for customer service and professionalism of drivers and staff;
- Praise for high level of amenities on Strathcona County Transit buses such as air conditioning and plush seats
- Offering modern communications with customers is critical, students are a key part of the transit market and;
- Wi-fi on buses (especially inter municipal routes) is desirable if the cost is reasonable

Round Two – Public engagement, October 22 – November 19, 2018

On October 22, a draft summary of the recommendations was released to community taking into consideration of what we heard in the first round of engagement as well as best practices throughout the transit industry and projections of future land use and population growth.

Through seven open house opportunities throughout Sherwood Park and Ardrossan, stakeholder meetings and the use of the online survey tool, Transit had more than 250 contact with individuals and organization, and more than 270 responses to our survey.

The online survey results (below) aptly reflected the comments and feedback garnered during the face-to-face engagement opportunities.

The survey asked responded A second online public survey was developed and made available to the public between October 23rd and November 19th, 2018. Customers and residents were able to complete the survey individually online or on tablets set up at the public open houses. The survey was reasonably successful with a total of 271 complete responses. This was a short survey to gauge public response after reviewing the report online, viewing the display boards or speaking with the project team about the Transit Master Plan.

Agreement with Draft Recommendations

The initial question asked respondents whether the recommendations reasonably reflect their ideas of what the future of transit in Strathcona County should be. The survey results indicate that 90% of respondents felt the Strategic Direction recommendations represent their ideas of what the future of transit should be in Strathcona County seen in figure 21.

To what extent do you agree that the recommendations reasonably reflect your ideas of what the future of transit in our community should be?

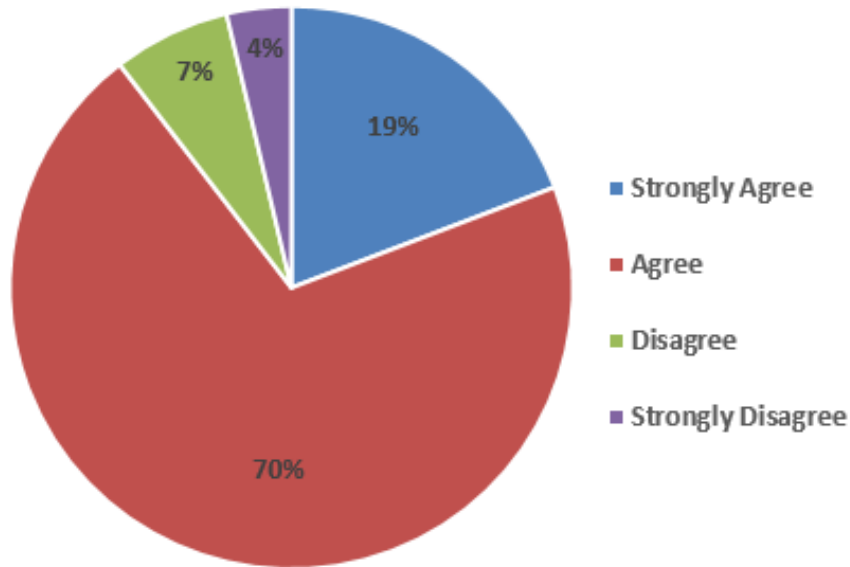


Figure 21 – Agreement with draft recommendations

Areas of Improvement

Respondents were asked to identify the service recommendations that they felt could be improved.

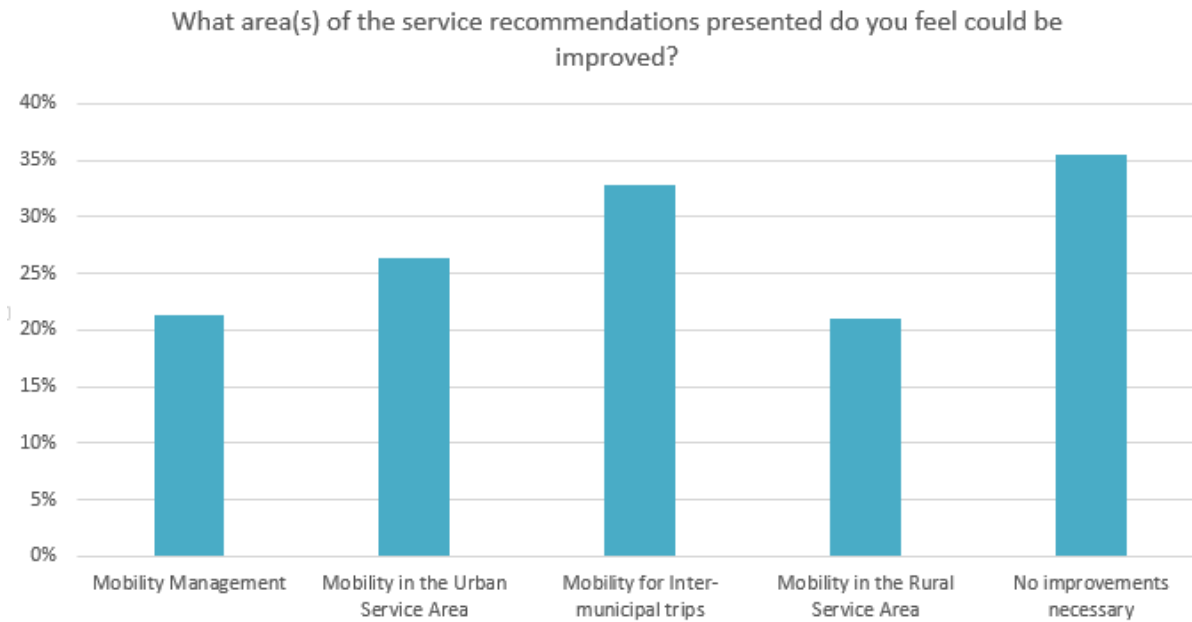


Figure 22 – Areas for improvement in recommendations

Priority Setting

Recognizing that there will be a cost to implement any of the recommendations, which recommendation should we focus on first as a community?

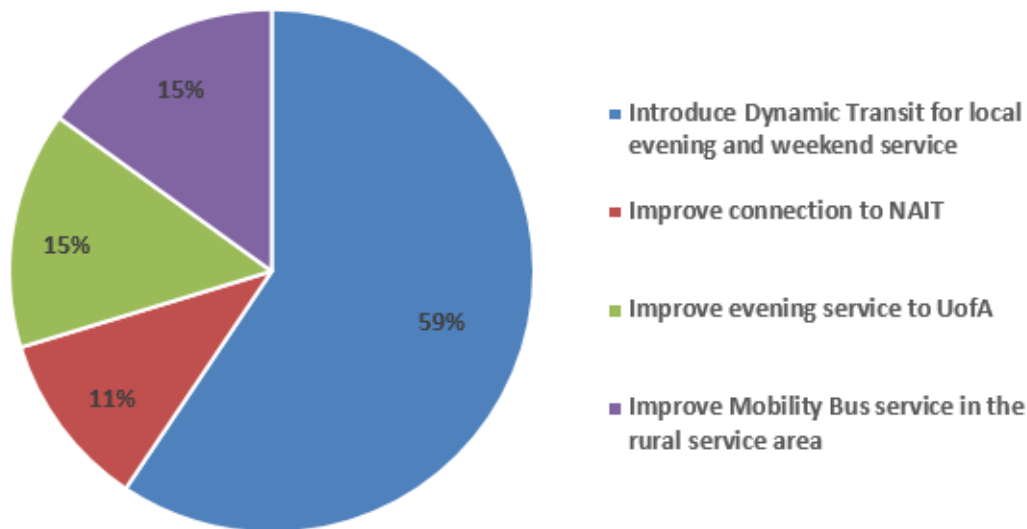


Figure 23 – Top priorities for new service recommendations

Figure 23 illustrates the overall result, with 36% of respondents indicating that there is no need to improve any of the recommendations. The top area for improvement was Mobility for Inter-municipal Travel, where 33% of respondents indicated that these recommendations could be improved.

Strathcona County Transit should focus on for implementation (recognizing that there will be a cost to implement any of the recommendations). Overall, the majority of respondents (59%) indicated that the introduction of Dynamic Transit service should be the first priority.

Summary of Engagement process

From February 27 – November 19, 2018, Transit and Dillon Consulting had the opportunity to connect with more than 1700 Transit users, residents and businesses, garnering feedback through two online surveys, 18 open houses and 12 stakeholder meetings.

Feedback was collected on the overall vision for Transit's future, priority setting, strategic planning and recommendations on inter-municipal, local, rural and Mobility Bus services, as well as passenger amenities.

There is agreement that improvements are required for service to post-secondary destinations within the City of Edmonton as well as improvement to local service.

The Transit Master Plan (TMP), scheduled to go before Council on February 26, 2019 contains strategies to solve these issue. The complete TMP report is available at strathcona.ca/tmp or at strathcona.ca/engagement. The report contains detailed analysis of the feedback from our community as well as the statistical studies and best practices that has lead transit to the final recommendations.