

**RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER**

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STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: May 10, 2022
FROM: Transit and Transportation Demand Management
SUBJECT: WHISTLER TRANSIT SYSTEM UPDATE

REPORT: 22-063
FILE: 536

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

That the recommendation of the General Manager of Infrastructure Services be endorsed.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Council receive the Whistler Transit System Update Information Report No. 22-063.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to update Council and the public on the actions taken by staff and Council with respect to the job action that has impacted the Whistler Transit System.

☒ Information Report ☐ Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

DISCUSSION

Background

The Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) has a contract with BC Transit to provide transit services in Whistler. BC Transit owns the property and buses used in Whistler to deliver the transit system and the RMOW pays lease fees to BC Transit for the use of these assets.

Whistler Transit Limited (WTL) is the transportation contractor hired by BC Transit to provide the people and expertise required to operate transit services in Whistler, and has operated the Whistler Transit System since 1992. Pacific Western Transportation (PWTransit) is the parent company of WTL and operates several transit systems in British Columbia. Unifor Local 114 is the union that represents the employees of WTL.

The contract between WTL and their employees expired and several meetings to negotiate a new contract have taken place, but in late January, 2022 talks between WTL and Unifor Local 114 broke down and the Unifor employees stopped working on January 29, 2022. A picket line was set up at the Whistler transit yard and remains in place. This transit strike is also affecting transit service in Squamish, Pemberton, and Mt. Currie.

The RMOW is not a party to the contract or negotiations, so we do not have the authority or ability to force the union and contractor to resume negotiations.

Summary of Actions Taken

Since the beginning of the job action, Mayor and Council have been asking the two parties involved in the dispute to return to bargaining, find a solution to the differences, and return transit service. This request has been shared with BC Transit (our partner in providing transit services), is documented on the RMOW website, and has been shared in various forms of media.

As soon as the interruption of transit service began, the RMOW took action to improve other ways for Whistler residents to get where they need to go. Enhanced clearing of the valley trail began while snow was still a concern, the early opening of the Valley Trail between Emerald Estates and the Rainbow neighbourhood was negotiated with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI), and lights and reflectors for pedestrians and cyclists were made available at no cost at Municipal Hall, Meadow Park Sport Centre, and Whistler Library.

At the beginning of the transit strike the RMOW also informed all of our resort partners about the job action and posted information about transportation options on the RMOW website. Council and staff also continue to explore other ways to support our community during the strike that comply with labour laws and the protected collective bargaining process.

Council and staff are concerned about the safety of Whistler residents and communications about safe practices for walking and cycling have been increased.

On February 16, and again on March 8, Mayor Crompton met with the CEO of BC Transit asking BC Transit to help the disputing parties to get back to bargaining.

On February 18 Unifor Local 114 held a rally in Whistler Village, and negotiations between PWTransit and Unifor took place on February 25. Unfortunately little progress was made during those talks and negotiations broke off.

On March 8, 2022 the two sides in the dispute met with the provincial Minister of Labour. During that meeting the Minister asked the two parties to resume negotiations.

On March 14, 2022 CAO Cullen met with Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure Deputy Minister Kay Krishna and Executive Director of the Transit Branch Jody Dong. During this meeting, she communicated the impacts of the strike on community residents and small businesses and they reviewed options for improving safety along the highway at night.

Global News interviewed Mayor Crompton about the transit strike on March 14. During the interview the Mayor expressed his frustration that no negotiations were taking place and asked both sides to resume talks.

On March 16 and 17 negotiations did take place, but talks broke down after two days and have not resumed. According to press releases, PWTransit made an offer of increased wages and benefits, but the Union negotiating team turned down this offer without that offer being voted on by the Union membership.

On March 21 the RMOW re-opened the secure bike parking facility at Whistler Library (earlier than normal) to help provide facilities to support other means of transportation.

On March 22 PWTransit requested that the dispute go to binding arbitration, but two days later this request was turned down by Unifor.

On March 29 Mayor Crompton met with Ministry of Labour staff, asking for their help to end the transit strike.

In the provincial legislature on April 6, Minister Bains stated that he had met with both sides twice and made it clear that they need to go back to the bargaining table. He also stated that the NDP government supports the free collective bargaining process and that this dispute would be solved by bargaining.

On April 7 the Mayor and CAO met with the CEO and key staff of BC Transit to get a clear understanding of what options were available to BC Transit to help accelerate the negotiations, and to discuss ways that the municipalities could help to achieve a resolution to the dispute and get transit back in service.

The Mayor is organizing a meeting with the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, tentatively scheduled in early May. The purpose of this meeting will be to ensure the Minister understands the importance of the transit system in Whistler, and to ask for the Minister's help with resolving the transit strike.

When appropriate, the Mayor and CAO have coordinated with other stakeholders in the Sea to Sky Corridor who are affected by the transit strike when meeting with the Ministry of Transportation and BC Transit.

Contact email addresses for the representatives of PWTransit, Unifor Local 114, the Minister of Labour, the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, the CEO of BC Transit, and our MLA have been added to the RMOW website at [Transit Service Disruption](#). This is to encourage and facilitate those impacted by the strike to write to the various parties that can more directly influence a return to negotiations, leading to a return of the transit service.

As part of the Mayor's report at each Council meeting since the transit strike began, the Mayor has stated his support for the collective bargaining process, and urged both sides to resume talks.

On three occasions since the beginning of the job action, RMOW staff have asked for legal advice on specific issues with respect to what the RMOW can and cannot do to help end the transit strike.

RMOW staff have been continuously monitoring social media during the transit strike and have reported any new developments to senior staff and Council and to BC Transit staff where appropriate.

RMOW staff continue to work with BC Transit on plans for improving and optimizing the transit service in Whistler once the system is back in operation.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

The Whistler Transit System is provided through a partnership between BC Transit and the RMOW, and WTL is contracted to operate the system. The three partners manage the system through the Transit Management Advisory Committee (TMAC) appointed by Council.

Corporate Plan

The RMOW Corporate Plan is updated annually and articulates strategic direction for the organization. This section identifies how this report links to the plan.

Council Focus Areas

☒ Community Balance

*Effectively **balance resort and community needs** through deliberate planning, partnerships and investment*

The Whistler Transit System serves the needs of both our visitors and residents. Returning transit service is a top priority for Council and staff.

☒ Climate Action

*Provide leadership to **accelerate climate action and environmental performance** across the community*

The Whistler Transit System is a significant part in Whistler's strategy to further climate action and returning service is also a priority for this reason.

Community Vision and Official Community Plan

The Official Community Plan (OCP) is the RMOW's most important guiding document, and sets the community vision and long-term community direction. This section identifies how this report applies to the OCP.

Community Vision

The success of the Whistler Transit System supports the OCP Community Vision statement "We value our relationships and work together as partners and community members." The Whistler Transit System is delivered through a partnership with BC Transit and Council and staff have been working with BC Transit to urge the parties back to bargaining.

Goals, Objectives and Policies

There are many goals, objectives, and policies in Whistler's OCP that guide staff's approach to the Whistler Transit System. One overarching statement in the OCP that guides transit's role in the transportation system is Objective 11.4.2 "Make public transit affordable, convenient, safe and enjoyable throughout the year". Restoring the transit service as soon as possible is a priority for Council and staff.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The RMOW is paying reduced transit costs due to the lack of transit service, but also has significantly reduced revenue. While the reduced transit costs are shared 53%/47% with BC Transit, the revenue losses are entirely born by the RMOW.

The RMOW is obligated to pay lease fees for the BC Transit property and equipment (buses), but is working with BC Transit to minimize those costs.

LIL'WAT NATION & SQUAMISH NATION CONSIDERATIONS

The RMOW is committed to working with the Lil'wat People, known in their language as *L'il'wat7úl* and the Squamish People, known in their language as the *Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw* to: create an enduring relationship; establish collaborative processes for Crown land planning; achieve mutual objectives; and enable participation in Whistler's resort economy. This section identifies areas where RMOW activities intersect with these relationships.

Council and staff are aware that the transit strike has affected members of both the Lil'wat and Squamish First Nations as this job action has also stopped transit service in Mt. Currie / Pemberton, between Pemberton and Whistler, and in Squamish.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

☒ Inform ☐ Consult ☐ Involve ☐ Collaborate ☐ Empower

Mayor and Council have consistently requested that the two parties (WTL and Unifor Local 114) return to bargaining, find a resolution to their differences, and resume transit service. This request has been made public in several different forums.

Information on the transit job action is regularly updated and posted to the RMOW website at [Transit Service Disruption](#).

SUMMARY

Since the start of the transit strike Council and staff have been working to encourage a resolution to the dispute and return of transit services, have been taking actions to improve safety for Whistler residents, and have been meeting with provincial officials to request their help in ending the transit strike.

SIGN-OFFS

Written by:

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Reviewed by:

Virginia Cullen,
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