

**RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER**

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## STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

**PRESENTED:** June 21, 2022

**REPORT:** 22-092

**FROM:** Transit and Transportation Demand Management

**FILE:** 536

**SUBJECT:** REALLOCATION OF TRANSIT SERVICE HOURS

### RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

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

### RECOMMENDATION(S)

**That** Council direct staff to notify BC Transit that the Resort Municipality of Whistler wishes to re-allocate approximately 550 annual transit service hours from the Lost Lake shuttle service to other transit routes, and to include the Lost Lake shuttle service with the contract to provide the Rainbow Park shuttle service in summer 2022.

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to re-allocate Whistler Transit System annual service hours from the Route 8 - Lost Lake shuttle service to other routes that need more peak time transit service as part of transit service optimization.

☐ Information Report

☒ Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

### DISCUSSION

#### **Background**

The Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) has a contract with BC Transit to provide public transit services in Whistler. The Whistler Transit System currently consists of 74,800 annual transit service hours delivered using 31 compressed natural gas fueled buses. Whistler has been without transit service since January 29, 2022, due to a dispute between BC Transit's contracted service provider, Whistler Transit Ltd. and their unionized employees in Unifor Local 114. On June 14, 2022, both parties announced they have approved a new collective bargaining agreement. BC Transit is working with the operating company to safely return transit service to Whistler (and other municipalities in the Sea to Sky corridor) as soon as possible.

Over this past winter and spring, BC Transit and the Transit Management Advisory Committee continued planning for optimizing the Whistler Transit System and the implementation of the draft Transit Future Action Plan.

In February 2022, BC Transit informed the RMOW that the planned 5,000 annual service hour expansion for 2022/23 would not take place, as the provincial government did not include transit service expansion funding in its 2022/23 budget. Instead, the government directed BC Transit to perform transit system service optimization reviews for all systems across the province.

As part of the Transit Management Advisory Committee's (TMAC) annual work, the Whistler Transit System is reviewed and optimized after every season. There are very few opportunities to optimize the Whistler Transit System service other than revising seasonal service start dates and re-allocating extra summer service hours to other seasons.

After a brief demonstration program for two summer weekends in 2020, the Rainbow Park shuttle service was provided on summer weekends from mid-June through Labour Day in 2021 as part of the Summer Experience Plan. A transportation contractor using 14 seat passenger vans that included rear cargo space for limited items such as deflated watercraft, bicycles, wagons, and baby strollers provided this service. The shuttle operated every 15 to 20 minutes from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm. Stops were located at Olympic Plaza in Whistler Village and in the parking lot at Rainbow Park, with intermediate stops at the Meadow Park waterpark and Rainbow Lake/Falls trailhead.

A key finding from summer 2021 operations was that there was confusion amongst guests in the Village looking for the Lost Lake Shuttle (operated by BC Transit from the Gondola Transit Exchange) as opposed to the Rainbow Park shuttle (operating from Olympic Plaza). It was recommended that the RMOW consider co-locating the Rainbow Park shuttle and the Lost Lake shuttle as well as expanding the free park shuttle service to other parks. Historically, the Lost Lake shuttle service has been provided as part of the contract with BC Transit.

### **Analysis**

While there are few new opportunities to optimize the Whistler Transit System, it is proposed that the approximately 550 annual service hours that are in the 2022/23 annual operating agreement with BC Transit allocated to the Route 8 – Lost Lake Shuttle be re-allocated to other services such as the Route 10 - Valley Express and starting the peak season “full winter service” earlier in December. This will allow some of the planned 2022/23 service expansion to proceed, despite not having the additional transit hours that the RMOW requested for this year. BC Transit is aware that the RMOW may pursue this reallocation of transit service hours, and has provided assurance that the requested change is possible from an operations perspective.

The Rainbow Park shuttle is scheduled to begin weekend service June 29, 2022 as part of the summer parks plan, once the 2022 upgrades to the Rainbow Park parking lot are substantially complete. In 2022, the vehicle types used for this service are expected to be a combination of a 20-passenger accessible minibus and a 24-passenger minibus with space for gear storage.

As part of the Request for Proposal issued for the Rainbow Park shuttle service, proponents were asked to provide pricing and other details for potentially providing the daily Lost Lake shuttle service as well. The Lost Lake shuttle service could be provided under the same contract as the Rainbow Park shuttle service and would operate similar hours to what has been provided in the past, but with a 20 passenger accessible minibus. Ridership numbers for past years have been reviewed, and more

than 20 passengers on a Lost Lake shuttle bus happens very infrequently, so staff are confident that the reduced size of the buses will not negatively impact the user experience.

An analysis of the budget considerations for this proposed change are outlined in the budget section below.

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### **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. Re-allocating hours from the Lost Lake shuttle service to other peak season routes would allow an overall increase in transit service to the community despite not having the transit service expansion hours that were originally requested.

☒ Climate Action

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

☐ Housing

*Advance strategic and innovative initiatives to enable and **deliver additional employee housing***

☐ Pandemic Recovery

*Leadership and support for **community and tourism recovery and sustainability** – priority focuses are where recovery needs intersect with other Council focus areas*

☐ Not Applicable

### **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.

### **Goals, Objectives and Policies**

Re-allocation of these transit hours to allow improved service during our seasons of peak transit demand supports OCP Goal 11.1. "To provide a quality travel experience for all visitors, *employees* and residents, and promote a culture of safety and accessibility for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists."

## BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The daily rate for operating the Lost Lake Shuttle under the proposed model would be ~7% more expensive than providing the service through the BC Transit contract, but this change will allow us to reallocate 550 hours of transit service for use on other routes that benefit a wider percentage of our community during our peak winter season.

The RMOW share of costs for the free Village Shuttle services including the Lost Lake shuttle is currently offset by a contribution from the Resort Municipality Initiative (RMI) Fund, and funding of this service is planned to continue to be provided by the RMI Fund into the future.

Approximately \$55,000 of the RMI fund was budgeted in 2022 to fund the predicted level of service for the Lost Lake Shuttle – daily service for 80 days (from June 18 to September 5). For a direct comparison, including this service with the Rainbow Park Shuttle service contract (for 80 days) would cost approximately \$59,000.

With the ongoing construction project at Rainbow Park, operating the Rainbow Park shuttle will not be possible until June 29. Staff are proposing to start both the Rainbow Park Shuttle and the Lost Lake Shuttle on the same day, so for this summer season the Lost Lake Shuttle will only operate for 69 days (June 29 to September 5), and is expected to cost approximately \$51,000.

## 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.

There are no specific considerations for the recommendation in this report.

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## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

☒ Inform    ☐ Consult    ☐ Involve    ☐ Collaborate    ☐ Empower

The RMOW will use all regular communications channels – whistler.ca website, social media, newspaper and signs at the pick-up and drop-off locations to communicate this information to the community.

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## SUMMARY

Staff recommend that transit service hours be re-allocated from the Lost Lake Shuttle Service to other Whistler Transit System routes that would benefit from more peak season transit service. The Lost Lake Shuttle Service could be provided in conjunction with the Rainbow Park Shuttle service contract to ensure residents and guests still have options for access to Lost Lake Park in the busy summer season.

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## **SIGN-OFFS**

### **Written by:**

Emma DalSanto,  
TDM Coordinator

James Hallisey,  
General Manager of Infrastructure Services

### **Reviewed by:**

Virginia Cullen,  
Chief Administrative Officer