



RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER

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STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: September 6, 2022 **REPORT:** 22-119
FROM: Transportation Demand Management **FILE:** 536
SUBJECT: WHISTLER TRANSIT FUTURE ACTION PLAN 2022 REPORT

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

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

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Council receive the “Transit Future Action Plan - Whistler 2022” attached as Appendix A to this Administrative Report 22-119 and support the vision, transit mode-share targets, and service priorities in the plan; and,

That Council direct staff to work with the Transit Management Advisory Committee and BC Transit to implement the recommended actions in the “Transit Future Action Plan - Whistler 2022”; and further,

That Council authorize the execution of the first year of the Three-Year Whistler Transit System Expansion Plan – 2023/24 to 2025/26 Memorandum of Understanding between BC Transit and the Resort Municipality of Whistler, attached as Appendix B to this Administrative Report 22-119.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to 1) present the revisions to the Transit Future Action Plan (TFAP) for the Whistler Transit System, 2) to update Council on the optimizing of the Whistler Transit System in 2022/23 using the recommendations from the TFAP; and 3) to seek Council’s authorization to work with BC Transit on the expansion and continued optimization of the Whistler Transit System as outlined in the TFAP and the Three-Year Whistler Transit System Expansion Plan – 2023/24 to 2025/26 Memorandum of Understanding (Expansion MOU) between BC Transit and the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW).

Information Report Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

DISCUSSION

Timeline

December 15, 2015	The Sea-To-Sky Transit Future Plan (TFP) was adopted by Council at the Council Meeting Dec 15, 2015 .
Sept 2019 – Jan 2020	Whistler TFAP pre-engagement review of community context and analysis of existing transit system and on-board intercept survey.
February, 2020	Project working group workshop which included a targeted discussion with the Transit Management Advisory Committee (TMAC).
March, 2020	BC Transit’s focus moved to delivering transit service at pandemic appropriate levels and optimizing transit systems across the province to meet new realities. In Whistler, this included implementing a new spring/summer/fall transit service to focus on the Route 10-Valley Express in September 2020.
June, 2021	Due to new travel habit changes due to COVID19 and a revised transit service structure for Whistler, BC Transit lead online public engagement winter 2021 to update proposed service and infrastructure options. Public Engagement Summary Report released June 2021 (attached as Appendix C).
Sept 21, 2021	The draft Whistler TFAP was initially presented and received by Council at the Council Meeting Sept 21, 2021 .
Fall 2021	The draft TFAP was circulated to stakeholders for review and comment in fall 2021.
Jan – June, 2022	Returning to Council with the comments and final TFAP was delayed due to the transit strike that occurred in Whistler from late January to mid-June 2022.
Sept, 2022	The final TFAP presented to Council with the revisions that have been added since last September.

Background

In December 2015, RMOW Council adopted the [Sea-To-Sky TFP](#) a 25-year strategic plan that was developed by BC Transit in collaboration with stakeholders, the public, and staff at the Squamish-Lillooet Regional District, the District of Squamish, the RMOW, the Village Pemberton, the Lílwat Nation and the Squamish Nation. A transit future plan envisions what the study area’s transit network should look like 25 years from now. It describes and prioritizes infrastructure and investment needed to get there by analyzing the existing transit system to determine how it can be improved. Since its adoption, staff have worked through the short-term recommendations listed in the Whistler chapter.

The TFP recommends a plan refresh process every 5 years, with the first refresh for 2020. Therefore, in the winter of 2019/2020, BC Transit initiated the process of updating the Sea-to-Sky TFP by starting the development of the Whistler TFAP, with the goal of developing a prioritized five year action plan. As outlined above in the Timeline section, the first step was completed in February/March 2020, when BC Transit surveyed transit passengers in person. The information from the on-board surveys was processed but the next steps were delayed by almost a year due to the pandemic. The final draft, attached as Appendix A, was further delayed due to the transit strike in the Sea to Sky region.

At the September 21, 2021 meeting of Council, the following motions were passed:

That Council receive the “Whistler 2021 Transit Future Action Plan, Draft September 14, 2021” attached as Appendix A to this Administrative Report 21-105 for information; and

That Council direct staff to circulate the “Whistler 2021 Transit Future Action Plan, Draft September 14, 2021” attached as Appendix A to this Administrative Report 21-105, to stakeholders for review and to return to Council with the final recommendations including updated five-year municipal budget implications; and further,

That Council authorize the execution of the first year of the Three-Year Whistler Transit System Expansion Plan – 2022/23 - 2024/25 memorandum of understanding between BC Transit and the Resort Municipality of Whistler, attached as Appendix B to this Administrative Report 21-105 and that staff return to Council with budget implications of the second and third year changes for consideration with the final Whistler 2021 Transit Future Action Plan.

The draft TFAP was then circulated to the following list of stakeholders for review and comment:

- Whistler Housing Authority Ltd. (WHA)
- Whistler Chamber of Commerce (Chamber)
- Mature Action Committee (MAC)
- Whistler Community Services Society (WCSS)
- Tourism Whistler (TW)
- Hotel Association of Whistler
- Restaurant Association of Whistler (RAW)
- Pub and Nightclub sectors
- The Measuring Up Select Committee of Council (now known as the Accessibility and Inclusion Committee) (AIC)
- Whistler Blackcomb (WB)
- Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI)
- Transportation Advisory Group (TAG)
- Lilwat Nation

The Transit Management Advisory Committee (TMAC) reviewed the comments received at their October 24, 2021 meeting. Comments included:

- A request that the plan consider WHA upcoming housing developments in Nordic, Cheakamus Crossing and Alta Lake Road.
 - BC Transit confirmed that the Route 10 and 20 expansion recommendations take new development south of the Village into account
- There was support for improvements to the Route 10 service and stop infrastructure, specifically highlighting the benefits to residents accessing employment and recreation opportunities on either side of Whistler Village
- The importance of maintaining and improving transit service into neighbourhoods such as Spring Creek and Nordic.
- It was noted that there was no discussion of Regional Transit or a Pemberton-Whistler Commuter Park & Ride in this local Whistler plan
 - BC Transit confirmed that actions on regional sea-to-sky transit are being pursued through a process outside of the update of the Whistler TFAP.
- That the Whistler Transit System consider expansion of service with smaller, more efficient vehicles to service lower demand routes such as Route 6-Blueberry/Tapley's, the Spruce Grove neighbourhood, and the proposed Alta Lake route.

- RMOW has asked BC Transit to share results of the BC Transit Digital-on-Demand feasibility study when they are available and to consider the Digital-on-Demand option for Route 6 in the third year of the plan.
- BC Transit shared the Digital-on-Demand feasibility study with local partners in late February 2022. It is included in this report as Appendix D.
- The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI) had questions to clarify the timing of adding bus stops on Highway 99 as well as concerns about maintenance of bus stops and shelters on Highway 99.
 - It is suggested that the Highway bus stop review and the Rapid Transit Network Study, be combined and started in 2022 with the RMOW, BC Transit and MOTI staff as part of the working group.

The Transportation Advisory Group (TAG) also reviewed the Whistler TFAP at the TAG meeting on October 27, 2021. TAG strongly recommended keeping the more ambitious target for transit (20% mode-share by 2025), while recognizing the need for adequate investments to attain the goal. TAG members were largely supportive of a pilot project to bring the #10 Valley Express into the Village and Millar Creek Road in Function Junction at non-peak times and broadly supportive of the implementation timing outlined in the TFAP. TAG also discussed that initiatives other than infrastructure or transit service expansion investments, such as communications, credit card tap farebox payments and other incentives, would support achieving the goal.

In January 2022, Unifor Local 114 initiated a job action which resulted in no transit service in Whistler, Squamish and Pemberton from Saturday January 29 through Wednesday, June 22, 2022.

In winter 2022, [BC Transit announced](#) that it had selected the new electronic fare payment system vendor, Cubic Transportation Systems, Inc., and Umo (pronounced “you-mo”) as the brand (UMO Project). The new system will be implemented in two phases, initially enabling mobile app and reloadable smart card payment methods before payment by credit card, debit card, and mobile wallet will be enabled. The UMO system will first be installed on the Victoria Regional Transit System in the fall. Currently, Whistler is scheduled for implementation in April 2023. Staff have requested that BC Transit consider scheduling the implementation in Whistler during the system’s less busy times, such as fall or spring.

Also, during this job action, BC Transit circulated the report attached as Appendix D “Digital On-Demand Transit Feasibility Study Summary Report and Service Strategy”. It defines Digital-on-Demand (DOD) service and how BC Transit plans to implement DOD service across the province. Whistler, through the TFAP, has expressed interest in being a Stage 2 community for implementation.

Finally, during the job action, RMOW staff were advised that the Province of BC did not have expansion funding for the 2022/23 fiscal year and Whistler’s request for 5,000 expansion hours would not be possible. Therefore, RMOW staff worked with BC Transit to optimize the existing Whistler transit service and revise the Expansion MOU for 2023/24 – 2025/26.

Whistler Transit System Service Optimization and Expansion MOU

In accordance with Council resolutions from September 2021, TMAC prepared the spring 2022 transit schedule to incorporate the transit expansions recommended in the draft TFAP for 2022/23. However, in February 2022, when the Province of BC presented the provincial 2022/23 budget, there was no expansion funding for BC Transit systems.

As a result of the lack of transit expansion funding in the 2022/23 Provincial budget, BC Transit initiated transit service optimization reviews across the province. BC Transit found that the Whistler Transit System is already very well optimized and there are limited opportunities to improve allocation of resources. For the 2022/23 service year, BC Transit is implementing the Route 10-Valley Express pilot project routing in the fall schedule as well as the “Return to pre-pandemic seasonality” (the highest priority item in the TFAP) by reallocating all extra summer service hours. Over the fall and winter, BC Transit and the TMAC will review the results of the Route 10-Valley Express Pilot Project Route Deviation.

Appendix B, Three-Year Whistler Transit System Expansion Plan and Capital Initiatives for Information – 2023/24 to 2025/26 (Expansion MOU) is essentially the same as the 2022-2023 Expansion MOU presented to Council in the September 21, 2021 report with the 5,000 service hour expansion for 2023/24 instead of 2022/23. However, the recommended results from this fall and winter Route 10-Pilot Project will be incorporated into the proposed 2023/24 expansion hours. 2000 expansion hours are allocated to ensure pre-pandemic seasonality. The remaining 3,000 expansion hours are allocated for Route 10, 20s and 30s improvements that were originally planned for 2022/23. Therefore, Whistler can return extra service hours to our peak summer and winter seasons where needed.

Summary of revisions to the Transit Future Action Plan – Whistler 2022

The most important revision to the draft TFAP is on page 16, Transit Mode-share Targets. In the draft TFAP, BC Transit had suggested that the 2025 mode-share target be reduced to 15% in 2025 due to uncertainty in ridership recovery post-pandemic. However, after receiving feedback from stakeholders, the 2025 Transit Mode-share Target has been changed back to 20% as was originally stated in the [Sea-To-Sky TFP](#) (TFP) adopted by Council in 2015. The 20% mode-share target better matches the Big Moves Strategy and the target for Big Move 1 - Move beyond the car.

Analysis

From a transit planning perspective, Whistler is seen as an ideal transit community since most destinations are less than a 30 minute transit ride to Whistler Village or Whistler Creekside, the main destinations. As the community has matured and grown, so has the Whistler Transit System.

As noted in the [2015 Sea-to-Sky TFP](#) and the 2022 transit system optimization work by BC Transit, the Whistler Transit System service has been optimized to meet the needs of the resort community and drive ridership by offering more frequency during peak seasons matching the resort peak seasons. Historically, peak winter had approximately double the service hours of spring/summer/fall service. As resort visitation and resort permanent population has increased over the past 30 years, the RMOW and BC Transit have methodically added transit service hours and transit seasons which have resulted in increased ridership. In this TFAP, the majority of the expansion is focused on the spring/summer/fall service to bring it closer to full winter service levels as this was a key message heard during the TFAP public consultation. Transit service expansion in the form of increased frequency and service span on existing routes as well as transit infrastructure improvements including transit priority measures are both seen by BC Transit and the public as means to improve reliability of the Whistler Transit System and bring more passengers onto the system.

Because there were no new expansion dollars allocated for 2022/23 in the Provincial budget, the expansions planned for 2022/23 have been delayed to 2023/24. However, the first year priority expansion item of returning the winter season to pre-pandemic service dates is being accommodated by reallocating service hours within the existing 2022/23 Annual Operating Agreement base budget.

BC Transit does have resources to start work on the Rapid Transit Network Study in the fall of 2022. This study will include a review of a rapid transit line, transit priority measures and other infrastructure listed in the Infrastructure Priorities. The outcomes of this study will help guide further improvements to the Route 10-Valley Express. Adoption of the Whistler TFAP as recommended in this report will enable BC Transit to allocate resources to this project.

BC Transit revised the Three-Year Expansion Plan with updated 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 priorities and costs based on the TFAP and the service optimization implementations.

It is also important to note the 2015 Sea-to-Sky TFP includes recommendations to explore opportunities to improve the fare structure, pass products, and Custom Transit Options for Whistler. These recommendations are actively being led by BC Transit through the UMO Project and the DOD Project.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

The Whistler Transit System is provided through a partnership between BC Transit and the RMOW. Whistler Transit Ltd is contracted to operate the Whistler Transit System. The three partners manage the system through the Transit Management Advisory Committee (TMAC) appointed by Council. Whistler Transit System service levels and budgets are approved each year by the RMOW, who also set fares and local property taxes to fund their contribution to transit costs. This partnership is formalized through a series of agreements.

The Sea to Sky TFP is the 25-year strategic plan for the Whistler Transit System that was received by Council on December 15, 2015. The following resolutions were passed:

- That Council receive [Administrative Report No. 15-154 Sea to Sky Transit Future Planning](#); and
- That Council support the Vision, Goals, Targets and Transit Future Networks for Whistler Transit and Regional Transit service as presented in the Plan; and further
- That Council direct staff and the Transit Management Advisory Committee (TMAC) to work with BC Transit on the next steps described in the Sea to Sky Transit Future Plan to analyze the regional and local transit improvements; and further
- That Council formally thank the Transit Management Advisory Committee (TMAC) for the effort that went into developing and reviewing the Sea to Sky Transit Future Plan.

Expanding the Whistler Transit System and investing in improvements to infrastructure serving the transit system are guided by Climate Action Big Move 1: Moving Beyond the Car, with the goal that by 2030 50% of all trips in Whistler are by transit or active transportation. This was adopted by Council at the December 15, 2020 regular meeting of Council in Administrative Report [Climate Action Big Moves Strategy Report](#).

As part of the January 19, 2021 report [Whistler Transit System 2020/21 Annual Operating Agreement](#) Council authorized staff to work with BC Transit to seek transit service expansion for 2021 and 2022.

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. It is comprised of 12 routes: two routes are part of the free Village Shuttle service focusing on visitor origins and destinations, which are funded through the Resort Municipality Initiative, and the other ten routes service the areas where our residents live, work, and play.

The TFAP has reviewed the entire transit system and prioritized actions to improve all parts of the system. Actions such as returning our winter season transit schedule to pre-pandemic levels will benefit both resort visitors and the community. In the first three years of the TFAP priorities there is a strong focus on routes that serve Whistler residents and employees.

Climate Action

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

Both increasing the service hours and investing in infrastructure improvements to serve the Whistler Transit System are guided by Big Move 1: Moving Beyond the Car.

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 Whistler Transit Ltd. The RMOW values our relationship with its partners and with transit passengers, as has been demonstrated through the collaborative and inclusive development of the TFAP recommendations used to establish the three-year Whistler Transit System expansion plan.

Goals, Objectives and Policies

There are many goals, objectives, and policies in Whistler's OCP that guide the development of the Whistler Transit System. One overarching statement in the OCP that guide transit's role in the transportation system is Objective 11.4.2 “Make public transit affordable, convenient, safe and enjoyable throughout the year”.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The TFAP recommends increasing transit service hours from the current 74,800 annual hours to 100,600 annual hours, over the next five years. This will be an increase of 25,800 hours, or 35 per cent. The TFAP and the Expansion MOU propose that three quarters of the expansion happen in the first three years of the plan at an estimated additional net cost to the RMOW of approximately \$1.5 million. This increase in costs could be accommodated by a combination of property tax increases, allocation of Community Transportation Initiative Funds (generated from Day Lot 1-5 parking fees), and Resort Municipality Initiative (RMI) funds.

The Three Year Transit Expansion Plan (2023/24 – 2025/26) memo includes the estimated net cost to the RMOW of \$298,637 in the first year of the plan. It is important to note that once BC Transit receives confirmation of support for expansions from the RMOW, BC Transit will request matching funds from the Provincial government. BC Transit will only receive confirmation from the Province in February when the provincial budget is released. At that point BC Transit will confirm the actual expansion allocated to the Whistler Transit System and actual costs through the Annual Operating Agreement. The 2022 Provincial budget did not include any additional funding for transit, so the 5,000 hour transit expansion requested by the RMOW in September 2021 was deferred and a new request will be submitted.

LÍŁWAT NATION & SQUAMISH NATION CONSIDERATIONS

The RMOW is committed to working with the LÍŁwat 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.

The Sea to Sky TFP adopted in 2015 was developed in conjunction with the LÍŁwat Nation and Squamish Nation. Individuals from these communities may also have participated in the on-board surveys in 2020 or the on-line engagement in 2021. The draft TFAP was sent to the LÍŁwat Nation for review. There were no comments related to transit service within Whistler outlined in the TFAP, however, there were questions related to regional transit service.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

Inform Consult Involve Collaborate Empower

The TFAP development was led by BC Transit. The TFAP included an on-board passenger survey in February 2020 and an on-line interactive website to gather feedback from Whistler residents and transit riders as well as an on-line survey open from January 7 – February 5, 2021. BC Transit has also worked closely with the TMAC to develop the draft plan that is attached as Appendix A. Staff circulated the draft plan to stakeholders for review in September and October, 2021. Stakeholders included MOTI, TAG, AIC, WCSS, MAC, the Association of Whistler Area Residents for the Environment and stakeholders who were involved in developing the Sea to Sky TFAP.

REFERENCES

- Appendix A – Transit Future Action Plan – Whistler 2022
 - Appendix B – Three-Year Whistler Transit System Expansion Plan and Capital Initiatives for Information – 2023/24 to 2025/26
 - Appendix C – Public Engagement Summary Report, July 2021
 - Appendix D – Digital-On-Demand Transit Feasibility Study Summary Report and Service Strategy, February 2022
 - Appendix E – Electronic Fare Collection Announcement
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SUMMARY

Council received the 2015 Sea-to-Sky TFP in December 2015 and authorized RMOW to work with BC Transit staff to implement the recommendations related to Whistler. As part of the TFP, it is recommended that every five years a TFP refresh process be initiated. The TFAP is the document summarizing the TFP refresh process. Staff presented the draft Whistler TFAP to Council on September 21, 2021 and the Three-Year 2022/23 – 2024/25 Transit Expansion plan which was directly related to the first three years of recommended expansions. Council authorized staff to circulate the draft TFAP to stakeholders and to work with BC Transit to implement year one priorities of the TFAP for April 1, 2022.

In general the stakeholders supported the direction of the draft TFAP for Whistler including the priorities for expansion. Comments from stakeholders related to keeping the mode-share targets ambitious for 2025 and 2040 resulted in the mode-share target for 2025 changing back to 20%, as originally presented in the 2015 Sea-to-Sky TFP.

The TFAP proposes a 35% increase in transit service hours, or approximately 25,800 annual service hours, over the next five years.

Council is being asked to receive the TFAP – Whistler 2022 and support the vision, transit mode-share targets, and service priorities in the TFAP. Council is also being requested to authorize the execution of the first year of the Three-Year Whistler Transit System Expansion Plan 2023/24 – 2025/26, which will allow BC Transit to request matching funding from the province for the 5,000 service hour expansion proposed for 2023/24.

SIGN-OFFS

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