



RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER

4325 Blackcomb Way TEL 604 932 5535
Whistler, BC Canada V8E 0X5 TF 1 866 932 5535
whistler.ca FAX 604 935 8109

STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: July 23, 2024 **REPORT:** 24-078
FROM: Climate and Environment **FILE:** 8330-2024/2025
SUBJECT: WHISTLER TRANSIT SYSTEM 2024-2025 ANNUAL OPERATING AGREEMENT
AND TRANSIT UPDATE

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

That the recommendation of the General Manager of Climate Action, Planning and Development Services be endorsed.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Council authorize the execution of the “2024-2025 Whistler Transit System Annual Operating Agreement – Effective April 1, 2024” between British Columbia Transit and the Resort Municipality of Whistler for the provision of Transit services, attached as Appendix A to Administrative Report No. 24-078; and

That Council direct staff to bring forward a budget amendment to adjust the "Five-Year Financial Plan 2024 - 2028 Bylaw No. 2424, 2024" to reflect the increases in the Whistler Transit System operating costs.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval for the 2024-2025 Annual Operating Agreement (AOA) between BC Transit, and the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) for the provision of the Whistler Transit System (WTS) from April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025 (Appendix A), as well as to update Council on the WTS expansion, ridership and associated costs.

Information Report Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

DISCUSSION

Background

The WTS is operated in a three-party partnership between BC Transit, on behalf of the province of BC, the RMOW as the local government partner, and the contracted operating company, Whistler Transit Ltd. (a wholly owned subsidiary of Pacific Western Transportation) through the BC Transit Regional Transit Systems program.

This WTS AOA formalizes the contractual relationship between BC Transit and the RMOW from April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025. It establishes the projected budget for the WTS base level of service and

defines hours of operation, revenues, costs, leasing payments and BC Transit's financial contribution for the defined term.

Analysis

2024-2025 Annual Operating Agreement Highlights

As per the 2024-2025 provincial budget, the BC Transit operating grant was increased allowing for transit service expansion across the province. The WTS received the full 7,650 expansion hours requested in the 2024-2026 Expansion Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) considered by Council in [Administrative Report No. 23-080](#). This is the equivalent of a 10 per cent increase in service.

Phase 1 of the expansion was implemented on April 15, 2024, with just under 3,500 hours added. Phase 2 of the expansion is currently being scheduled and will be implemented in mid-November increasing Whistler's annual service hours from 74,800 to 81,356. The remaining 1,100 annual service hours associated with the approved 7,650-hour expansion will be realized in April 2025.

In addition to the expansion of service hours, the AOA includes the annualized costs of technology upgrades including the NextRide hardware and software, the BC Transit service alerts program, scheduling software and the implementation of Phase 1 of the new Umo electronic fare collection system that went live on June 25, 2024 in Whistler.

Whistler Transit Service Expansion and Ridership

The Whistler conventional transit system was granted 7,650 annual service hours of expansion funding for 2024/2 and implemented just over 3,500 hours in April 2024. This translated to:

- More Route 10-Valley Express service year-round from 5:30 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.;
- Maintaining 30-minute service year-round on the Route 6 Tapley's/Blueberry bus and the Route 7-Staff Housing bus;
- More Route 21-Spring Creek service in the late night, with the last bus leaving Whistler Village at 1:10 a.m. year-round;
- Reintroducing peak hours service through Spruce Grove via the Route 32-Emerald (via Spruce Grove) year-round to better support school and work start and finish times; and
- An earlier bus on the Route 5-Upper Village/Benchlands free shuttle at 8:55 a.m. to allow guests to access the Village a half hour earlier in spring, summer, and fall.

The reallocation of service and recent April expansion of base level service has contributed to the continued ridership growth year over year. Ridership recovered and surpassed 2019/20 numbers. Figure 1 shows WTS ridership by week from 2019 through June 2024. Figure 2 shows how ridership has consistently increased on the Route 10-Valley Express every time service hours were added to the route (through reallocation of hours as was done in 2021, 2022 and 2023). The Phase 1 expansion of service hours to Route 10 as implemented in April this year led to continued high ridership levels from winter through the spring and now into summer, which historically saw a dip in ridership. This demonstrates that the Route 10-Valley Express is becoming the new backbone of our WTS.

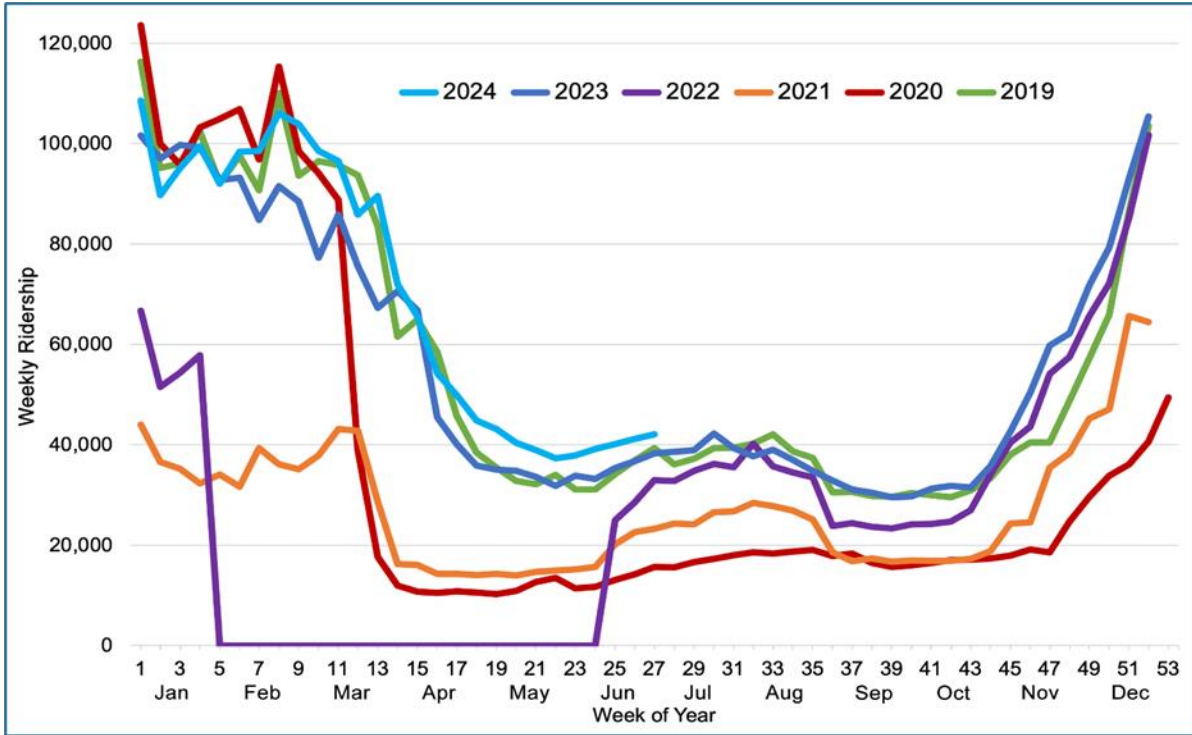


Figure 1: All Routes - WTS Ridership 2019 – June 2024

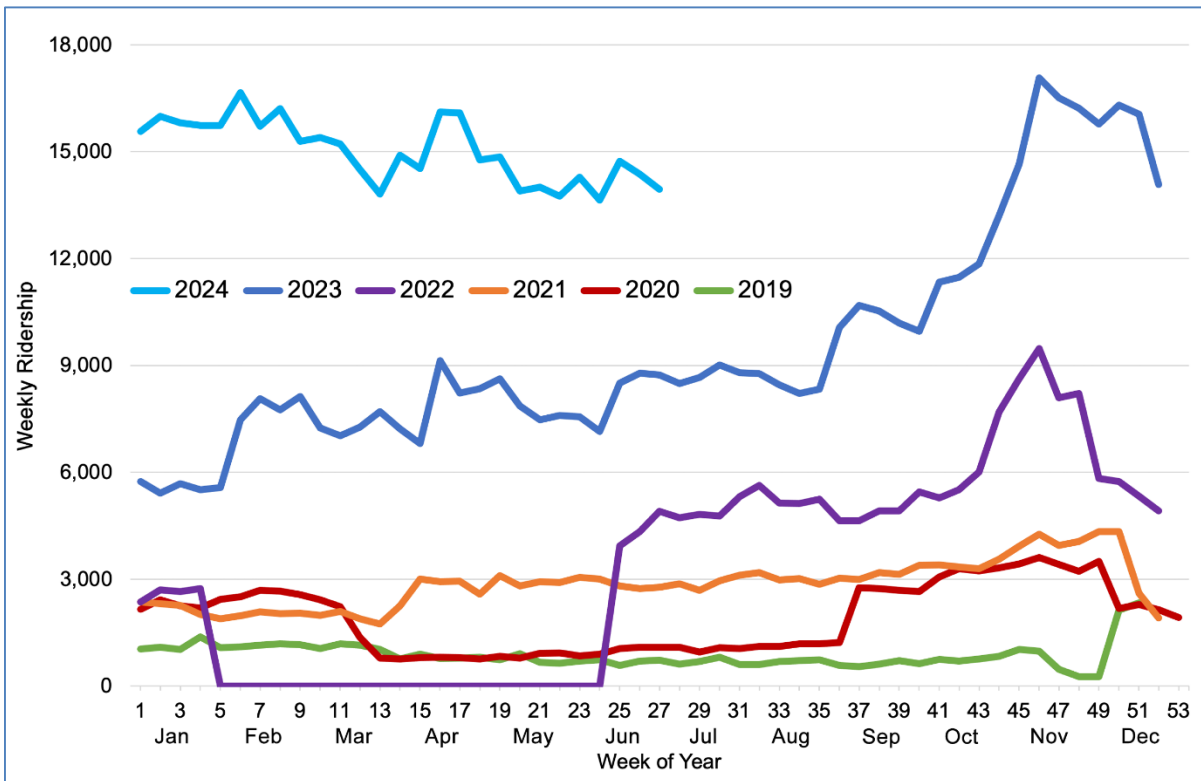


Figure 2: Route 10-Valley Express - WTS Ridership 2019 – June 2024

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RMOW staff are working with the RMOW Transit Management Working Group to refine the existing expanded base schedule and implement Phase 2 of the expansion for mid-November 2024. The Phase 2 expansion will focus on addressing priorities outlined in the RMOW [Transit Future Action Plan](#) (Transit Action Plan) and issues raised by transit users over the past year such as reintroducing the Route 32 – Emerald/Rainbow/Village via Spruce Grove during peak times, giving Spruce Grove and Whitegold peak a.m. and p.m. service year-round.

Other Transit Updates:

Fall 2023 and winter 2023/2024 saw the implementation and completion of many capital projects including the completion of the bus wash retrofit at the Whistler Transit Facility, technology updates of BC Transit equipment and software, such as NextRide hardware on the buses, transit service alerts on the BC Transit website, new scheduling software for both BC Transit and the operating company. On June 24, 2024 the Umo electronic fare system was launched in Whistler with the 30-Day, 1-Day and 10-Ride products. The 6- and 12-month products are scheduled to go live later this summer. BC Transit will introduce credit card tap across the province during Phase 2 of implementation.

In 2023, BC Transit issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for Transit Management Services for the Sea to Sky Region (Squamish, Whistler, and Pemberton-Valley transit systems). After a rigorous evaluation process the BC Transit Board recommended to award the transit management services contract to the incumbent, PW Transit/Whistler Transit Ltd. at their May 2024 meeting. The new transit management services contract with a new cost structure will start on August 1, 2024.

The full annualized costs for the completed capital projects and the new management costs have been included in the AOA.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

The WTS is provided through a partnership between BC Transit and the RMOW, and Whistler Transit Ltd. is contracted to operate the system. The three partners will continue to manage the system through the RMOW Transit Management Working Group. WTS 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 including the AOA.

Under the *BC Transit Act* and BC Transit Regional Transit Model, the Local Government Partner (the RMOW) has the responsibility to set fares and service levels in partnership with BC Transit.

2023-2026 Strategic Plan

The 2023-2026 Strategic Plan outlines the high-level direction of the Resort Municipality of Whistler to help shape community progress during this term of Council. The Strategic Plan contains four priority areas with various associated initiatives that support them. This section identifies how this report links to the Strategic Plan.

Strategic Priorities

Housing

Expedite the delivery of and longer-term planning for employee housing

Climate Action

Mobilize municipal resources toward the implementation of the Big Moves Climate Action Plan

Community Engagement

Strive to connect locals to each other and to the RMOW

Smart Tourism

Preserve and protect Whistler’s unique culture, natural assets and infrastructure

Not Applicable

Aligns with core municipal work that falls outside the strategic priorities but improves, maintains, updates and/or protects existing and essential community infrastructure or programs

The RMOW and BC Transit are continuing to implement the recommendations from the community engagement conducted by BC Transit in December 2022, the adopted Transit Action Plan, as well as to respond to customer and community comments and suggestions received in response to the reallocation of service over the past three years to refine and create the transit 2024-2025 Spring base service and winter 2024/25 transit service layers.

Community Vision and Official Community Plan

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

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

Other Relevant Policies

The Sea-to-Sky Transit Future Plan and RMOW Transit Future Plan outline transit service levels for Whistler and the neighbourhoods throughout the community. The proposed service expansion is consistent with these plans.

The [Whistler Transportation Action Plan 2018-2028](#) also has several actions supporting improvements to the transit system including Action 4.2.1: Continue to strategically expand transit service on the core transit network prioritizing the connection of neighbourhoods north and south of Whistler Village to key destinations.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The anticipated WTS AOA costs from April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025 are summarized in Schedule C, page 11, of the AOA (Appendix A) and are shown in Table 1 below. BC Transit’s fiscal year starts on April 1, while the RMOW’s starts January 1, so there is a difference between the municipal annual budget for transit and the AOA budget summarized in Schedule C.

Table 1: WTS AOA Budget Summary

| | 2023-24 | 2024-25 |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| Total System Operating Costs | \$11,586,086 | \$13,551,472 |
| TOTAL SYSTEM COSTS (including Local Government Share of Lease Fees) | \$13,128,768 | \$15,143,432 |
| BC Transit contribution to the total operating cost | -\$5,409,543 | -\$6,327,182 |
| Municipal Administration credit | -\$168,770 | -\$172,145 |

| | | |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|
| RMOW Local Transit Fund contribution | -\$1,000,000 | -\$1,000,000 |
| Total Revenue (farebox) | -\$1,870,860 | -\$2,550,885 |
| | | |
| Net Local Government Share of Costs | \$4,679,595 | \$5,093,220 |

As outlined in Table 1 – AOA Budget Summary above and Schedule C of the 2024-2025 AOA, the total maximum annual cost of the WTS will be \$15,143,432, an increase of \$2,014,664 from the previous AOA. This increase is related the 7,650 annual service hour expansion; new operations contract wages; increased cost of fuel, parts, and equipment including the technology costs associated with the installation of new NextRide equipment and software; upgrades to the software for BC Transit Service Alerts and implementation of the new Umo electronic fare collection system.

The Provincial contribution through BC Transit has also increased by \$918,000 to \$6,327,182 (this amount does not include the provincial share of Lease Fees). BC Transit has estimated the WTS revenues will be \$2,550,885 in the 2024-2025 fiscal year. Farebox revenue is 90 per cent of the 2019/2020 AOA budgeted revenue and takes into account the expected new revenue from expansion as well as the expected slight decrease in revenue collected for monthly passes due to the replacement of the calendar monthly pass to the Umo 30-Day pass which can start any day of the month. Also, BC Transit recognizes that the RMOW continues to expand free transit programs with more days and groups added compared to 2019.

This AOA also includes the use of \$1 million of the RMOW Local Transit Fund (previously called the Safe Restart fund) (Fund) in the 2024-2025 Schedule C budget reducing the RMOW’s net funding obligation for the 2024-2025 AOA to \$5,093,221. As of March 31, 2024, the Fund has a balance of \$2,788,120. After this AOA, the RMOW will have \$1.8M remaining in the Fund that we can allocate across future year’s budgets to reduce our net funding amounts.

The RMOW’s net increase in cost from the previous 2023-24 AOA is \$413,626. \$300,000 of this net cost was accounted for in the approved “Five-Year Financial Plan 2024-2028 Bylaw No. 2424, 2024”. The remaining \$114,000 needs to be added to the 2024 and 2025 budgets. Therefore, a budget amendment for 2024 is required to accommodate the full transit service expansion at the new RFP transit management service contract cost and will be brought forward at a future Council Meeting. January, February and March 2025 costs will be included in the 2025 annual municipal transit budget. Staff suggest that this amount should be allocated from the Community Transportation Initiative Fund.

LÍLWAT NATION & SQUAMISH NATION CONSIDERATIONS

The RMOW is committed to working with the Lílwat 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 planning on unceded territories, as currently managed by the provincial government; achieve mutual objectives and enable participation in Whistler’s resort economy.

There are no specific considerations to include in this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

- Inform
 Consult
 Involve
 Collaborate
 Empower

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The WTS AOA budgets for a service level that is guided by the 2015 Transit Future Plan and more recently from the Transit Action Plan as well as BC Transit consultation in December 2022 on Whistler 10-Valley Express Service Review and comments received from passengers throughout the year. The development of both plans included extensive community engagement.

REFERENCES

Appendix A – 2024/25 Whistler Transit System Annual Operating Agreement, Effective April 1, 2024

SUMMARY

The WTS received expansion funding for a 10 per cent increase in service hours in 2024/25. The 2024/25 AOA includes the full cost of that service expansion as well as costs associated with the new Transit Management Service contract that starts on August 1, 2024 and the full cost of recent technology upgrades including NextRide, Transit Service Alerts, scheduling software and Umo electronic fare system.

The total municipal share of costs for this twelve-month period is \$5,093,221, an increase of \$413,626 from the previous AOA. The RMOW's funding obligation contained within this AOA is not fully accommodated within the current municipal budget.

Council is requested to authorize the execution of the 2024-2025 WTS AOA, effective April 1, 2024 (Appendix A) and to direct staff to include the associated increases in WTS operating costs into the next amendment of the "Five-Year Financial Plan 2024-2028 Bylaw No. 2424, 2024" to be considered by Council later this year.

SIGN-OFFS

Written by:

Emma DalSanto,
Transportation Demand Management
Coordinator

Reviewed by:

Luisa Burhenne,
Manager of Climate and Environment

Dale Mikkelsen
General Manager of Climate Action, Planning
and Development Services

James Hallisey,
Acting Chief Administrative Officer