

**RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER**

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STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: July 22, 2025
FROM: Climate and Environment
SUBJECT: WHISTLER TRANSIT SYSTEM 2025-2026 ANNUAL OPERATING AGREEMENT

REPORT: 25-061
FILE: 1660-20-2025/26

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

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

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Council authorize the execution of the 2025-2026 Whistler Transit System Annual Operating Agreement between British Columbia Transit and the Resort Municipality of Whistler for the provision of transit services, attached as Appendix A to Administrative Report 25-061; and

That Council direct staff to include the associated increases in Whistler transit system operating costs in an amendment to the "Five-Year Financial Plan 2025 – 2029 Bylaw No. 2465, 2025", to be considered by Council later this year; and further

That Council direct staff to review the feasibility of the free summer weekends and statutory holidays initiative and present a report to Council at a future Regular Council Meeting detailing savings and impacts resulting from eliminating this initiative starting in 2026.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval of the 2025-2026 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, 2025 to March 31, 2026 (Appendix A). This report also provides an update on the WTS expansion, transit 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 Keolis Canada) through the BC Transit Regional Transit Systems program.

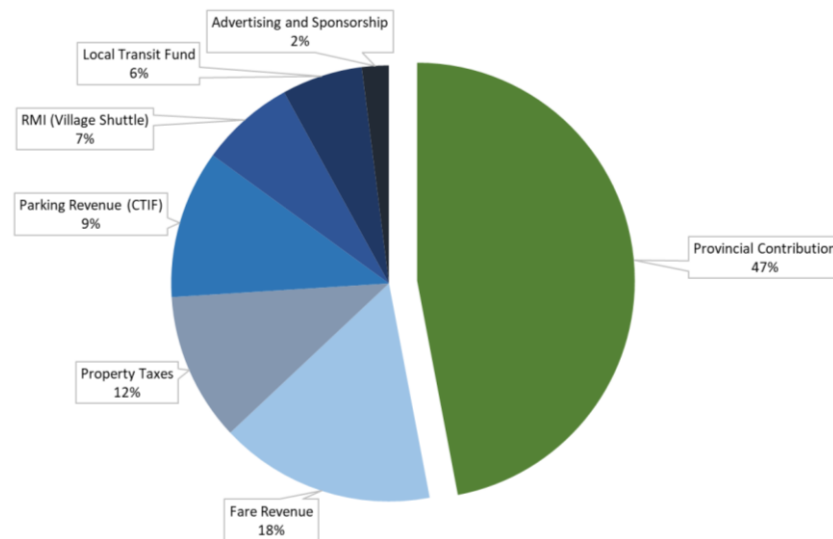
The WTS AOA formalizes the contractual relationship between BC Transit and the RMOW from April 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026. The 2025-2026 AOA is attached as Appendix A and establishes the

projected budget for the WTS base level of service and defines hours of operation, revenues, costs, leasing payments, as well as BC Transit and the RMOW financial contributions for the term.

Council Authority:

Under the BC Transit partnership, the RMOW contributes to funding, approves all service plans and tariffs, accounts for all non-Umo revenue, maintains local transit infrastructure (e.g., bus stops, exchanges, shelters and benches) and markets local ridership benefits and programs. The province, through BC Transit and the AOA, contributes 47 per cent of the funding for the WTS and the RMOW is responsible for the remaining 53 per cent. Figure 1 below shows the 2025 funding sources. The RMOW sources are shown in blue. Fare revenues account for approximately 18 per cent of the total cost of transit. Other revenue sources include revenues from Day Lots 1 to 5 through the Community Transportation Initiative Fund (CTIF), the Resort Municipality Initiative (RMI) to offset the costs of free Village shuttles, the Local Transit Fund (LTF), advertising/sponsorship, and property taxes.

Figure 1: RMOW Funding Sources for the WTS for 2025



Analysis

2025-2026 AOA Highlights

The main changes from the 2024-2025 AOA to the 2025-2026 AOA include 6,000 hours of additional transit expansion, an increase in operating costs related to the increased service and associated operating contract as well as an update in contract language to reflect reserve funding.

1. **Expansion** – The WTS received 6,000 additional hours of expansion that was implemented on April 22, 2025. These additional hours are incorporated into the 2025-2026 AOA. However, the Phase 2 (Route 10-Valley Express (Route 10) expansion to 15 minute service) requested in the 2025-2026 Expansion Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) considered by Council in [Administrative Report No. 24-094](#) was not granted as part of this expansion as it requires four additional vehicles. BC Transit advised that Whistler may request this Phase 2 expansion again for the 2026-2027 AOA year.
2. **Operating Costs** – The 2025-2026 AOA includes a 13 per cent increase in operating costs compared to 2024-2025 to reflect the following updates:
 - 6,000 expansion hours, effective April 22, 2025;

- Four months of annualized new operator contract changes, effective August 1, 2024;
 - Province wide increase of vehicle lease fees by five per cent; and
 - Increased cost for fuel, new tires and a full year of Umo service and credit card transaction fees.
3. **Contract Language** – The language contained in the AOA is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect any material changes to the funding model or other special circumstances. The 2025-2026 AOA has the following updates:
- Removed “*Section 9: Safe Restart Contribution*” because provisions outlined in the BC Transit agreement with the Province for the Safe Restart Program expired. The remaining funds in the Safe Restart reserve were moved to a new BC Transit reserve named the “Local Transit Fund or LTF”.
 - Maintained wording in “*Section 8: Local Contributions and Reserves*” regarding reserve funds and the LTF to ensure that any balance that remained in the Safe Restart Contribution was moved to the LTF to be used in future years. The RMOW continues to draw from the LTF to offset the RMOW’s share of eligible operating expenses. It is expected that the LTF will be drawn down to \$0 by the end of 2026.

Whistler Transit Service Expansion and Ridership

The WTS was granted 6,000 additional hours of expansion funding for 2025-2026. These were implemented on April 22, 2025, when the WTS changed from full winter service level to the spring/summer/fall schedule. The expansion provides 30-minute year-round service to the Spring Creek neighbourhood via Route 21 and provides additional direct trips between the Gondola Transit Exchange and Emerald Estates. This is a seven per cent increase in overall service in addition to the 10 per cent increase received in 2024-2025. The 2025-2026 WTS now operates with 88,643 annual service hours.

The optimization and reallocation of service from 2021 through 2023 and recent expansions in service hours have contributed to continued ridership growth year over year. Figure 2 shows WTS ridership by week from 2019 through May 2025. Figure 3 shows how ridership has consistently increased on the Route 10 every time service hours were added to the route. The 2024 service expansion to Route 10 shows consistent high ridership levels year-round without traditional spring/summer/fall dip in ridership. This demonstrates that Route 10 has become the new backbone of our WTS.

Figure 2. All Route – Whistler Transit System Average Daily Ridership 2019 – May 2025

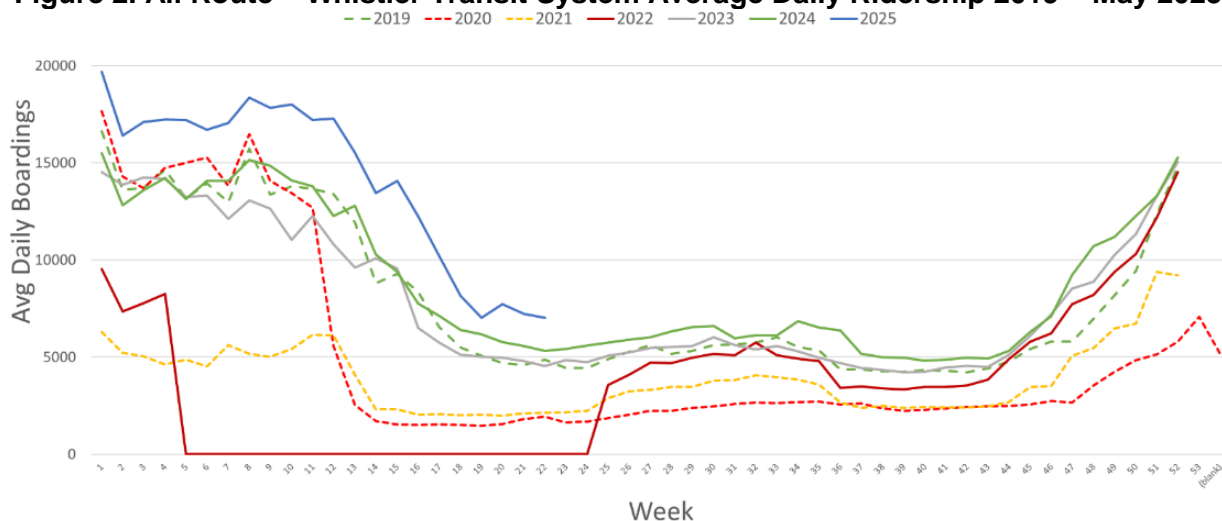
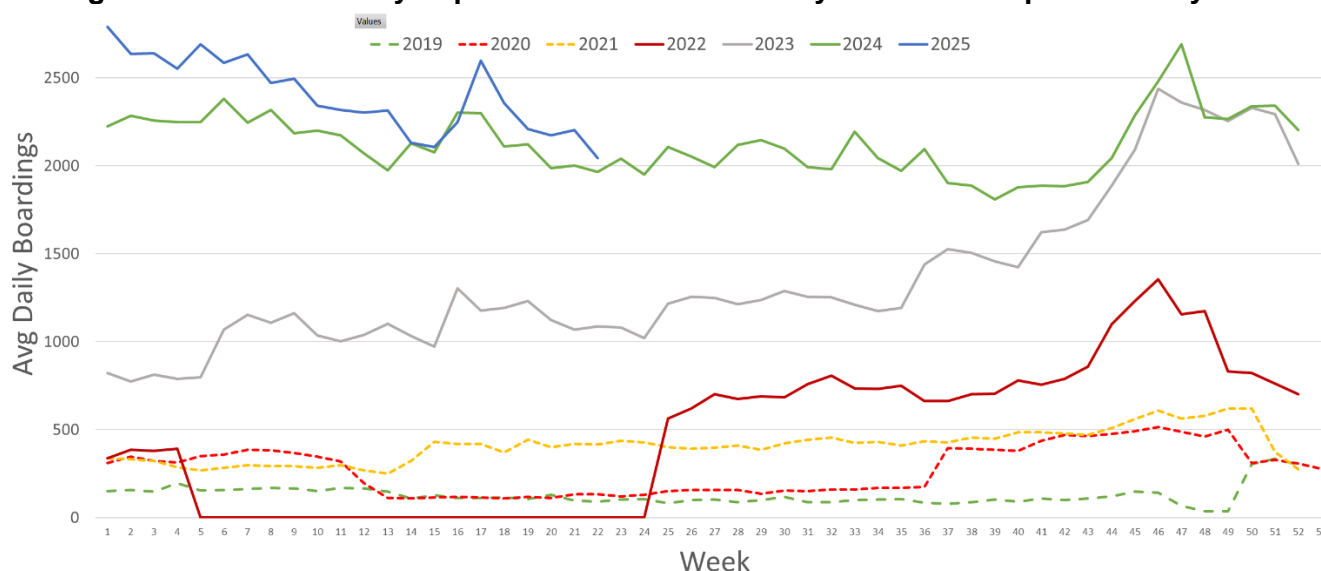


Figure 3. Route 10-Valley Express – Whistler Transit System Ridership 2019 – May 2025



Staff are working with the Transit Management Working Group to include minor refinements to service levels based on lessons learned from last winter as part of the regular winter schedule change in late November. For example, the addition of two Route 7 - Staff Housing trips between 6:45 am and 7:30 am and additional time to Route 10 during peak periods.

Transit Fare System Update

Last year saw the implementation of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Umo electronic fare system in Whistler. Phase 3, the introduction of credit card tap, is scheduled to be introduced on the WTS before the end of the year. In preparation for this next phase, the RMOW and BC Transit conducted a WTS fare review, presented to Council on June 24, 2025 in [Administrative Report No. 25-053](#). Council endorsed the recommended fare and product structure change to better support the Umo technology and increased operating costs. Implementation of the fare change is scheduled for October 1, 2025.

RMOW and BC Transit staff have initiated discussion with employers in Whistler to review BC Transit's proposed terms and conditions for a payroll deduction ProPASS program with the goal of introducing a Whistler ProPASS pilot program that could be available for the upcoming winter.

Other Transit Updates

BC Transit has now fully committed to the Umo app for transit trip planning in all BC Transit regional transit systems in addition to electronic fare payment services. BC Transit passengers can now access transit trip planning and live bus tracking information on the Umo app, which was previously only offered through the Transit app. BC Transit also upgraded the Transit Alert system available on its website. To optimize resources and reduce provincially shared information technology costs in the AOA, BC Transit discontinued paying for a premium subscription for the Transit App. This subscription fee allowed all BC Transit passengers to access the premium Transit Royale service for free. Effective April 29, 2025, new and existing Transit App users have the option to subscribe to Transit Royale (for a fee), or access the free Umo app, which should be sufficient for all users.

Free Summer Weekends and Statutory Holidays

Since the WTS started in November 1991, the RMOW has provided many strategic free or discounted initiatives for residents and visitors. The programs have been funded by contributions from the MRDT, RMI, CTIF and third parties for free event days or special free shuttle services.

In summer 2016, the WTS piloted free Saturdays as way to reduce traffic and parking congestion in Whistler. At the recommendation of the Transportation Advisory Group, Council authorized staff to introduce free summer weekends funded by the Day Lot 1-5 parking revenue starting July 1, 2017. Staff estimate the loss in farebox revenue to be in the order of \$150,000 to \$200,000 annually.

Staff review all revenue sources annually as part of the municipal budget process. Should Council approve the recommendation to review the free summer weekend and statutory holiday transit initiative, staff will undertake the necessary analysis and prepare a report for Council detailing the potential cost savings and any operational or community impacts associated with discontinuing this program beginning in 2026.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

Under the *BC Transit Act* and BC Transit Regional Transit Model, the RMOW has the responsibility to set fares and service levels in partnership with BC Transit. WTS service levels and budgets are approved each year by Council, 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.

[July 23, 2024, Administrative Report No. 24-078](#): Whistler Transit System 2024-2025 Annual Operating Agreement and Transit Update Report.

[October 8, 2024, Administrative Report No. 24-096](#): Whistler Transit System Expansion and 2024 Transportation Update.

[June 24, 2025, Administrative Report No. 25-053](#): 2025 Whistler Transit System Fare Review.

2023-2026 Strategic Plan

The 2023-2026 Strategic Plan outlines the high-level direction of the RMOW 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

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. Two overarching statements in the OCP that guide transit's role in the transportation system are included in:

Objective 10.2.2: Prioritize infrastructure development and policies that support seamless, convenient and affordable access to preferred modes of transportation for intra-community travel.

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](#) (pg. 37) and [Whistler Transit Future Action 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](#) (pg. 118) also has several actions supporting improvements to the WTS 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 WTS AOA costs from April 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026, are summarized in Schedule C, page 10 of the AOA (attached as Appendix A), and are shown in Table 1 below. BC Transit's fiscal year starts on April 1, while the RMOW's is January 1. The updated costs in the new AOA will affect RMOW budgets in both 2025 and 2026.

Table 1 – Whistler Transit System AOA Budget Summary

	2024-25	2025-26	Variance	
	(\$)	(\$)	(\$)	(%)
Total System Operating Costs	\$13,551,472	\$15,368,595	1,817,123	13
TOTAL SYSTEM COSTS (including Local Government Share of Lease Fees)	15,143,432	17,024,476	1,881,044	12
BC Transit contribution	6,327,182	7,175,597	848,415	13
Municipal Administration credit	172,145	174,727	2,582	1
LTF contribution	1,000,000	1,000,000	0	0
Total Revenue (farebox)	2,550,885	3,127,794	576,909	23
Net Local Government Share of Costs	5,093,221	\$5,545,497	452,276	9

As outlined in Table 1 – AOA Budget Summary above and Schedule C of the 2025-2026 AOA, attached as Appendix A, the maximum annual cost of the WTS for the transit year is \$17,024,476. This is a 12 per cent increase from the previous AOA. This increase is due to the expanded service and changes to operating costs highlighted in the analysis section of this report.

Provincial contribution as a percentage of system operating costs is legislated at 46.69 per cent. Their dollar contribution for the transit year will increase by 13 per cent to \$7,175,597 (this amount does not include the provincial share of Lease Fees which are never included in the AOA). This AOA also includes the allocation of \$1 million from the LTF to the 2025-2026 Schedule C budget. The RMOW LTF is held in reserve by BC Transit and can be allocated across future year's WTS budgets to reduce the RMOW's net costs. As of March 31, 2025, the RMOW LTF has a balance of \$1,875,429. At the end of the 2025-2026 AOA, the RMOW will have \$0.8 million remaining in the LTF, and by 2026-2027 it will be exhausted which will require the RMOW to identify a new/replacement source for this funding.

The RMOW's net increase in costs from the previous 2024-2025 AOA is \$452,276. This amount may be reduced from what is shown on Table 1, as the farebox revenue calculation does not include the estimated increase in revenue from the fare change approved by Council on June 24, 2025. Staff estimate that the increase in costs associated with the 2025 calendar year to be \$280,000 and that the fare change will generate approximately \$50,000 by December 31, 2025. The remaining \$230,000 needs to be added to the RMOW's 2025 base transit budget requiring a budget amendment for 2025 to accommodate the 2025-2026 AOA. Staff recommend that the \$230,000 be allocated from the 2025 Operating Reserve and included in the Five-Year Financial Plan as base transit budget. January to March 2026 costs will be included in the 2026 annual municipal transit budget.

LÍŁWAT NATION & SQUAMISH NATION CONSIDERATIONS

The RMOW is committed to working with the Líl'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 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

The WTS AOA budgets for a service level that is guided by the [Sea to Sky Transit Future Plan](#) (pg. 37) and more recently from the [Whistler Transit Future Action Plan](#) as well as BC Transit consultation in December 2022 on Route 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 – 2025-2026 Whistler Transit System Annual Operating Agreement

SUMMARY

This report summarizes the 2025-2026 AOA (Appendix A) between BC Transit and the RMOW for the provision of the WTS from April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026 for Council consideration. The main updates in the 2025-2026 AOA include 6,000 additional hours of expanded service and increased operational costs.

RMOW's budgeted net share of costs for this 12-month period is \$5,545,497, a nine per cent increase from the previous AOA. The RMOW's funding obligation contained within this AOA is not fully accommodated within the approved 2025 Five-Year Financial Plan. An additional \$230,000 needs to be added to the 2025 base transit budget from the 2025 Operating Reserves.

Staff are committed to delivering efficient transportation services and identifying cost-saving opportunities where possible. If Council approves the recommendation, staff will conduct a detailed analysis of the free summer weekend and statutory holiday transit initiative and report back on potential savings and impacts of discontinuing this program in 2026.

Staff are requesting Council to authorize the execution of the 2025-2026 WTS AOA, effective April 1, 2025, and to direct staff to include the associated increases in WTS operating costs into the next amendment of the "Five-Year Financial Plan 2025 - 2029 Bylaw No. 2465, 2025", which will be considered by Council later this year.

SIGN-OFFS

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