



WHISTLER

REPORT | ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: January 19, 2021
FROM: INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES
SUBJECT: WHISTLER TRANSIT SYSTEM ANNUAL OPERATING AGREEMENT
- EFFECTIVE APRIL 1, 2020

REPORT: 21-007
FILE: 534

COMMENT/RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

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

RECOMMENDATION

That Council approve the “2020-2021 Whistler Transit System Annual Operating Agreement – Effective April 1, 2020” for the period April 1, 2020 through March 31, 2021 attached as Appendix “A” to Administrative Report to Council No. 21-007; and,

That Council authorize staff to work with BC Transit to seek transit service expansion hours for 2021 and 2022.

REFERENCES

Appendix “A” – Whistler Annual Operating Agreement Effective April 1, 2020
Appendix “B” – Term Sheet

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this Report is to present and seek Council approval for the attached *2020-2021 Annual Operating Agreement* between British Columbia (BC) Transit, and the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) for the operation of the Whistler Transit System from April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021.

DISCUSSION

Background

The Whistler Transit System is operated under agreements between BC Transit and the RMOW, and a separate agreement between BC Transit and the contracted operating company, Whistler Transit Ltd. (a wholly owned subsidiary of Pacific Western Transportation) through the BC Transit Regional Transit Systems program. The Whistler Transit System Annual Operating Agreement (AOA) formalizes the contract between BC Transit and the local government from April 1 through March 31 annually. It establishes the projected budget for the local Whistler Transit System, as summarized in Appendix “B”, as well as defines hours of operation, revenues, costs, leasing payments, and BC Transit’s financial contribution for the defined term.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Timeline

Normally the Annual Operating Agreement is sent by BC Transit to the local government partner in late winter and is expected to be executed early in the spring. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, transit service levels and operation requirements were revised in the spring, summer and again in the fall. BC Transit also worked in partnership with TransLink and BC Ferries seeking funding relief from senior levels of government to support the continued operation of the transit and transportation systems in BC, despite the increased cost of operations and a severe reduction in passenger revenue due to reduced ridership.

It is also important to note that the Whistler Transit Future Action Plan that started in early 2020 was also delayed.

BC Restart Plan and Safe Restart Contribution

The Province has initiated its “BC Restart Plan”, which lays out a series of steps intended to protect people and help ensure that BC can recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Province, BC Transit and the RMOW recognise that transit is an essential service, critical for providing public mobility during the acute phases of COVID-19 and for supporting the social and economic recovery of the community and the province as part of the BC Restart Plan.

Under the federal “Safe Restart” program, the federal and provincial governments have committed to provide joint contributions in support of transit services. BC Transit has entered into a Contribution Agreement to receive \$86 million to provide relief to Local Government Partners to help meet their share of costs to maintain affordable Essential Transit Service Levels during the COVID-19 pandemic recovery period.

The Safe Restart Contribution of \$86 million was based on forecasted fare revenue losses and COVID-19 related expenses between April 1, 2020 and March 31, 2022. Local Government Partners have been allocated a share of the Safe Restart Contribution based on their share of total fare revenues (for fare losses) and share of operating expenses (for COVID-19 related expenses). Under this Contribution Agreement, which needs to be executed by January 31, 2021, a total of \$3,092,015 has been allocated to the Whistler Conventional Transit System.

While service levels and fares are set by the Local Government Partner, the Contribution is intended to assist in maintaining affordable transit fares and targeted essential transit service levels for the Whistler Transit System as follows:

- 72,900 Annual Service Hours for 2020/2021
- 74,750 Annual Service Hours Target for 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24

It is expected that by receiving this Contribution the RMOW will work with BC Transit to maintain targeted essential transit service levels and affordable fares. Maintaining affordability of transit services is defined as limiting average annual public fare increases to 2.3% or less in each of BC Transit’s 2021/22 – 2023/24 fiscal years.

This Safe Restart Contribution is in addition to the six-month vehicle lease fee payment exemption for the period of July 1 to December 31, 2020 that BC Transit announced in June 2020.

Annual Operating Agreement (AOA)

The 2020/2021 AOA is for up to 72,900 annual service hours which includes the first phase of the 2020/2021 expansion hours for improvements to the spring-summer-fall Route 10-Valley Express that were outlined and presented to Council at the May 14, 2019 Council meeting when the Expansion Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) 2020-2023 was endorsed. These expansions were scheduled

prior to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Various regular services such as late winter extra buses and summer free weekend extra buses were suspended for 2020 and are not included in the 72,900 annual service hours. Also not included, was the second phase of the planned expansion, free summer Fridays and off-peak core network improvements during the winter.

The hours associated with the phase two 2020/2021 planned expansions were not implemented in 2020 and are not considered part of the Whistler Transit Service core hours. Therefore, those service hours must be re-applied for through the BC Transit expansion process. Staff are requesting that Council authorize staff to request up to 2,000 expansion hours in 2021 and for 2,500 annual service hours and one vehicle expansion in 2022/23.

Next Steps

Once the 2020/2021 AOA is executed, BC Transit will work with the RMOW to prepare the 2021/2022 Annual Operating Agreement. BC Transit and RMOW staff are also in the process of conducting an on-line public engagement which started on January 7 and will close on February 5, 2021. The results of this engagement will be used to complete the Transit Future Action Plan update lead by BC Transit staff in consultation with Whistler Transit Management Advisory Committee. The results will be used to guide expansion and modifications to the Whistler Transit System over the next five years.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Official Community Plan

Community Vision

- We protect the land – the forests, the lakes and the rivers, and all that they sustain.
- We value our relationships and work together as partners and community members.

These two statements in our Community Vision relate to the Transportation Advisory Group and the Transportation Action Plan. The first statement “we protect the land” needs to be kept in mind when considering expanding our infrastructure and using the existing transportation infrastructure to optimize the movement of people. The Whistler Transit System is a key component of our transportation infrastructure. The RMOW values our relationship with our partners such as BC Transit and Whistler Transit Ltd. demonstrated by our commitment to our local transit system.

Goals, Objectives and Policies

The goals, objectives and policies in Whistler’s OCP transportation chapter were developed in conjunction with the Whistler Transportation Action Plan and input from the Transportation Advisory Group and are directly relevant to the recommended winter 2020/2021 transportation actions.

10.2. Goal

Substantially reduce GHG emissions from vehicles and transportation.

10.2.2. Objective

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

10.2.2.1. Policy

Use every reasonable opportunity to further the use of preferred modes of transportation.

11.1. Goal

Provide a quality travel experience for all visitors, employees and residents, and promote a culture of safety and accessibility for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.

11.1.3. Objective

Improve the physical environment for everyone using the transportation system.

11.1.3.1. Policy

Prioritize the preferred modes of transportation in the following order to achieve a balanced transportation system:

- (a) walking;
- (b) cycling;
- (c) mass transit (local transit, highway coaches, smaller shuttle buses) and the movement of goods;
- (d) publicly accessible transportation (ridesharing, shared vehicles, etc.);
- (e) private automobile (high occupancy motor vehicles and leading low-environmental-impact technologies); and
- (f) private automobile (single occupancy motor vehicles, traditional technology).

11.4. Goal Support the increased use of preferred modes of transportation for all travel purposes to reduce dependence on private motor vehicles.

11.4.1. Objective

Give priority to walking, cycling, transit and other preferred modes over the single occupant vehicle and private automobile.

11.4.1.2. Policy

Strive to make preferred modes of transportation affordable, convenient, safe and enjoyable throughout the year.

11.4.2. Objective

Make public transit affordable, convenient, safe and enjoyable throughout the year.

11.4.2.6. Policy

Work with the provincial government and local stakeholders to improve transit frequency and affordability.

Other Relevant Policies

Sea to Sky Transit Future Plan – Reducing the cost of local transit is one of the policies included in the plan along with local and regional transit service and infrastructure recommendations.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The Whistler Transit System AOA costs from April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021 are summarized in Appendix “B” and are accommodated in the 2020 RMOW budget for transit service. January, February and March 2021 costs are included in the 2021 municipal transit operating budget. BC Transit’s fiscal year starts on April 1, while the municipality’s starts on January 1, so there is a difference between the municipal annual budget and the AOA budget summarized in Appendix “B”.

The Whistler Transit System is a 13 million dollar per year system where the RMOW is responsible for 53.31 percent of the cost. The RMOW generates its share from a mixture of:

- farebox/pass/tickets sales
- interior bus advertising
- contribution from the Resort Municipality Initiative (RMI)
- contribution from parking fees in Day Lots 1-5 through the Community Transportation Initiative Fund (CTIF)
- contributions from third parties, and
- general revenue through property taxes.

All of these revenue sources have been impacted due to the pandemic. Meanwhile costs have increased due to increased cleaning, driver personal protective equipment, vehicle modifications, and temporary driver washrooms. Therefore, in 2020 staff have reduced costs by suspending underutilized portions of the transit service as well as looked at efficiencies.

\$3,092,015 has been allocated to the Whistler Conventional Transit System for the period of 2020 through 2022 through the Federal Safe Restart program as explained above. \$250,000 is allocated to be used in the 2020/2021 AOA. The remainder will be held by BC Transit in the Whistler Local Transit Fund to be used in the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 AOA's.

The 2020/2021 AOA has also used \$1,105,495 of the Whistler Transit System Shared Operating Reserve to ease the cost impact of the Whistler Transit System in 2020/2021. In June 2020, BC Transit received approval from the provincial government to reduce the RMOW cost obligation by approximately \$595,500 between July and December 2020 by not charging local governments the monthly lease fee (called a "lease fee holiday").

The RMOW's net funding obligation for the 2020/2021 AOA is \$4,265,405. This amount is accommodated within the approved 2020 and 2021 municipal budgets.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

The transit service expansion accommodated in the 2020/2021 Whistler Transit System AOA reflects the implementation of the Transportation Advisory Group Whistler Transportation Action Plan 2018-2028 (endorsed by Council on October 2, 2018). This plan was developed through an extensive open process involving the Transportation Advisory Group (TAG) working through materials and potential actions and bringing forward potential ideas to the community through surveys, the Transportation Forums, many presentations to Council and to stakeholders from 2016 to 2018. All material related to the TAG's work is posted on www.whistler.ca/MovingWhistler.

The development, implementation and refinement of the Route 10-Valley Express schedule was conducted in a parallel process led by BC Transit and summarized in Council Report No. 17-085, No. 18-096 and No. 19-069 endorsed by Council on July 18, 2017, July 24, 2018 and May 14, 2019 respectively.

SUMMARY

The Whistler Transit System AOA between the RMOW and BC Transit Effective April 1, 2020 attached as Appendix "A" establishes the projected budget for the local Whistler Transit System, as summarized in Appendix "B", as well as defines hours of operation, revenues, costs, leasing costs, and BC Transit's financial contribution for the defined term. The 2020/2021 AOA includes a Safe Restart Allocation of \$3,092,015 over three years from the Provincial and Federal governments, a lease fee holiday of \$595,500 and an allocation of the Shared Operating Reserve of \$1,105,494. The RMOW's funding

obligation contained within this AOA is accommodated within the approved 2020 and 2021 municipal budgets.

Council is requested to authorize the Mayor and Municipal Clerk to execute the 2020-2021 Whistler Transit System AOA Effective April 1, 2020 and to authorize staff to request that BC Transit consider allocating up to 2,000 additional annual service hours to the Whistler Transit System in 2021/2022 should they become available.

Respectfully submitted,

Emma Dal Santo
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for
James Hallisey
GENERAL MANAGER OF INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES