

**RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER**

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STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: September 21, 2021
FROM: Infrastructure Services
SUBJECT: WHISTLER TRANSIT SYSTEM PROPOSED THREE YEAR EXPANSION PLAN
AND TRANSIT FUTURE ACTION PLAN REPORT

REPORT: 21-105
FILE: 536

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

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

RECOMMENDATION(S)

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.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to present the draft Whistler 2021 Transit Future Action Plan (TFAP) for the Whistler Transit System to Council and to seek Council’s authorization to work with BC Transit on the expansion of the Whistler Transit System as outlined in the TFAP and the Three-Year Whistler Transit System Expansion Plan – 2022/23 to 2024/25 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between BC Transit and the RMOW.

☐ Information Report ☒ Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

DISCUSSION

Background

The Whistler Transit System is provided through a partnership between BC Transit and the RMOW and operated by Whistler Transit Ltd (a fully owned subsidiary of PW Transit Canada which is part of the Pacific Western Group of Companies). The three partners manage the system through the Transit Management Advisory Committee (TMAC) appointed by Council.

In December 2015, RMOW Council adopted the [Sea-To-Sky Transit Future Plan](#) (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 Squamish, the RMOW, the Village Pemberton, the Lil'wat Nation and the Squamish Nation. 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 Transit Future Plan by starting the development of the Whistler TFAP, with the goal of developing a prioritized five-year action plan. 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. However, information gathered from the on-board surveys was used to revise the transit system schedules in the fall of 2020. More spring/summer/fall service was allocated to the route 10-Valley Express, some trips on routes 20 and 30 were removed, and seasonal start and end dates for winter service were modified to stay within the approved service hour budget.

In Winter 2020/2021, BC Transit was able to launch the second phase of TFAP community engagement through an interactive website and an on-line survey. BC Transit collated the information over the spring of 2021 and worked with TMAC to develop the draft Whistler 2021 Transit Future Action Plan, attached to this report as Appendix A.

The actions listed in the draft TFAP (pages 20-22) were used to develop the Three-Year Whistler Transit System Expansion Plan 2022/23-2024/25 MOU prepared by BC Transit, attached to this report as Appendix B.

Analysis

The TFAP recommends increasing transit service hours from the current 74,800 annual hours to 95,550 annual hours. This is an increase of 20,750 hours, or 28 per cent, over five years. The TFAP and the expansion memo propose that three quarters of the expansion happen in the first three years of the plan, between April 1, 2022 and March 31, 2025, at an estimated additional net cost to the RMOW of approximately \$1.3 million.

The year-one priority expansion items are related to returning the winter season to pre-pandemic service dates and adding service to the route 10-Valley Express. The year-one expansion items do not require new buses.

The proposed expansion in years two and three will require additional buses as well as supporting infrastructure. The priorities were based on feedback received from the community, the potential to attract new riders, and system performance data (especially ridership) from 2019 through 2021. The details of the proposed expansions to the transit system can be found on pages 20 through 35 of the draft TFAP.

In the MOU with BC Transit attached as Appendix B, the RMOW is being asked to support the three-year expansion, but for a financial commitment for only the year-one expansion. BC Transit uses this support to proceed with securing the funding and resources to implement service expansions with the Provincial government.

BC Transit is often faced with municipal requests for expansion that exceed the availability of either matching Provincial funds or available buses. As a result, BC Transit uses an Expansion Evaluation Process to determine which projects are prioritized. An overview of our Expansion Evaluation Process provided by BC Transit is attached as Appendix C. It outlines the process that BC Transit follows to prioritize expansion requests from communities across the province, and ensure alignment with provincial funding availability. It considers a variety of factors through a performance-based evaluation using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative criteria. Following confirmation of the provincial budget in February, BC Transit confirms the transit service implementation plan for year-one projects. Final confirmation of the year-one expansion comes to the municipality with an Annual Operating Agreement amendment.

Next summer, BC Transit will revise the Three-Year Expansion Plan in consultation with TMAC and return to Council with updated 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 costs.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

The Whistler Transit System is provided through a partnership between BC Transit and the RMOW, and Whistler Transit Ltd is contracted to operate the system. The three partners manage the system through the 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 series of agreements.

The Sea to Sky Transit Future Plan 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 8.2 [Climate Action Big Moves Strategy Report No. 20-126 File No. 5290](#).

SEPTEMBER 21, 2021

As part of the January 19, 2021 report [Whistler Transit System 2020/21 Annual Operating Agreement – Effective April 1, 2020 Report No. 21-007 File no. 534](#) 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 13 routes: three 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 Transit Future Action Plan 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 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*

Expanding the Whistler Transit System and investing in improvements to infrastructure serving the transit system are guided by 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.

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 Transit Future Action Plan 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 guides 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 net cost to the RMOW for the initial 5,000 hours in year one (2022/23) is estimated to be \$298,278. These costs have been included in the draft 2022 municipal operating budget.

In year two (2023/24) the additional cost increases to \$411,063 for 3,000 additional service hours because three additional buses are required to meet peak winter season service. Year three (2024/25) is expected to cost an additional \$550,000 to the operating budget. As with all previous expansion MOUs, the program and costs for year two and year three will be updated and presented to Council next year as part of the approval of the 2023/24 – 2025/26 Transit Expansion Plan.

It is important to note that once BC Transit receives confirmation of support for these 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 2022/23 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 costs for the current transit system as outlined in the 2021/22 Annual Operating Agreement are summarized below:

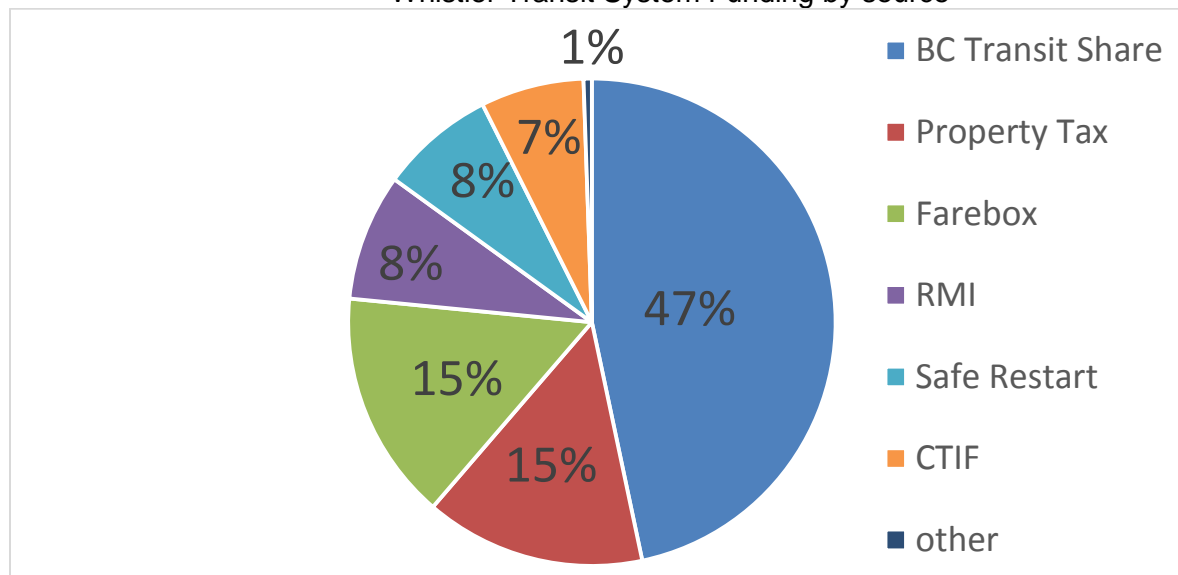
Total Whistler Transit System Cost	\$13,123,000
Provincial Share (46.69%)	\$6,126,000
BC Transit Operating Costs	\$4,831,000
BC Transit Lease Fee Costs	\$1,295,000
Local RMOW Share (53.31%)	\$6,997,000
RMOW Operating Costs	\$5,509,000
RMOW Lease Fee Costs	\$1,478,000

The funding formula for the Whistler Transit System is legislated through the [British Columbia Transit Act](#) with 46.69% total funding from the Province through BC Transit and 53.31% from the RMOW. The RMOW share is comprised of farebox revenue, Safe Restart Fund, other third party revenues, contributions from the Resort Municipality Initiative (RMI) fund to offset the free Village Shuttle costs, contributions from the Community Transportation Initiative Fund (CTIF), and finally Whistler property taxes. The Whistler Transit System funding sources for 2021/22 (current) are:

Whistler Transit System Funding	\$13,123,000
BC Transit Share (46.69%)	\$6,126,000
RMOW Share (53.31%)	\$6,997,000
Property Tax	\$1,920,000
Farebox Revenue	\$2,200,000
RMI	\$1,105,000
Safe Restart	\$1,000,000
CTIF	\$900,000
Other	\$72,000

SEPTEMBER 21, 2021

Whistler Transit System Funding by source



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.

The Sea to Sky Transit Future Plan adopted in 2015 was developed in conjunction with the Lil'wat and Squamish People. Individuals from these communities may also have participated in the on-board surveys in 2020 or the on-line engagement in 2021.

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 will be circulating the draft plan to stakeholders for review in September and October, 2021, with the goal of presenting the final plan to Council by the end of 2021. Stakeholders include the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, the Transportation Advisory Group, the Measuring Up Select Committee of Council, AWARE, Whistler Community Services Society, and stakeholders who were involved in developing the Sea to Sky Transit Future Action Plan.

REFERENCES

Appendix A – Transit Future Action Plan, Draft September 14, 2021

Appendix B – Three-Year Whistler Transit System Expansion Plan – 2022/23 to 2024/25

Appendix C – BC Transit Expansion Evaluation Process Overview

SUMMARY

In 2015, Council adopted the Sea-to-Sky Transit TFP and staff worked with BC Transit and TMAC to implement the recommendations. The TFP recommended a refresh of the plan every five years. In winter 2019/2020, BC Transit initiated the TFP review with an on-board passenger survey that was completed in February 2020. Due to the pandemic and the provincial election, further development of the Whistler TFAP was delayed by almost a year. The draft Whistler 2021 TFAP, attached as Appendix A, includes information on how the pandemic affected the Whistler Transit System performance and has used this information to develop the annual expansion actions for the next five years.

In order to move forward with Climate Action Big Move 1: Move Beyond the Car, and its 2030 goal to have 50% of all trips in Whistler by transit and active transportation, Whistler needs to increase transit service levels. The TFAP vision for the Whistler Transit System is to ensure it is the preferred choice for residents and tourists, attracting riders through comfortable, safe, accessible, convenient, and reliable service. The prioritized actions in the TFAP focus on moving the community toward this vision and also move the community toward Big Move 1: Move Beyond the Car.

The TFAP proposes a 28% increase in transit service hours, or approximately 20,750 hours in addition to the existing 74,800 annual hours, by 2027. The TFAP proposes that three quarters of the expansion happen in the first three years of the plan between April 1, 2022 and March 31, 2025, at an estimated additional net cost to the RMOW of approximately \$1.3 million. The recommendations from the Whistler 2021 TFAP were used to develop the Three-Year Whistler Transit System Expansion Plan 2022/23-2024/25 MOU between BC Transit and the RMOW attached as Appendix B.

Council is being asked to receive the draft Whistler 2021 TFAP, direct staff to share the draft TFAP with stakeholders for review, and return to Council with the final TFAP and municipal operating budget implications. Council is also being requested to authorize the execution of the first year of the Three-Year Whistler Transit System Expansion Plan – 2022/23 - 2024/25, which will allow BC Transit to request matching funding from the province for the 5,000 service hour expansion proposed for 2022/23.

SIGN-OFFS

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