



RESPONSE TO TRANSIT BUSINESS SERVICE REVIEW

January 2019

Transit Action Alliance of Guelph (TAAG)

ABOUT

TRANSIT ACTION ALLIANCE OF GUELPH (TAAG)

Established in 2018, the Transit Action Alliance of Guelph, Inc. (TAAG) is a broad based, non-profit community organization, which works cooperatively to promote better public transportation.

Our mission is the advocate for a public transportation system that is frequent, accessible and affordable.

Our vision is to educate, motivate, advocate, and activate the community on transit.

This report was prepared by a Working Group of the Transit Action Alliance of Guelph and contains contributions from various members.

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Summary

The Transit Action Alliance Guelph (TAAG) is happy to see that the Transit Business Service Review (Review) puts Guelph Transit on par or surpassing the service levels and performance of other comparable municipalities. We believe there is great opportunity, via a Transit Strategy and then later Route Review, to further improve service levels and performance even more.

There are twelve recommendations resulting from the Review. These recommendations include options around staffing and service level changes, service standards, funding and fare pricing guidelines, and investigating the viability and feasibility of new technology options.

While TAAG agrees with some of the recommendations, we do have concerns with some timelines and methods.

- TAAG feels that the scope of the Review was limited and did not allow for progressive results to guide improvement to public transit within Guelph.
- The Review analysis indicates that Guelph Transit's net cost to provide service is on par with other municipalities, but Guelph's expenses are on the rise. Rising cost is offset by some of the highest ridership and revenue compared to other municipalities. More high frequency routes will continue to drive ridership up and increase revenue via fare revenue, Gas Tax and other grants.
- The third-party engagement activity and Online survey part of the Review indicated that overall satisfaction with Guelph Transit service is at 69 per cent and is higher than most comparator systems. TAAG also points out that the survey results indicate that most users are **somewhat (satisfied) to very satisfied**. This indicates that there is room for improvement, no matter how big or small, to increase satisfaction.
- The Review's reliability of service component indicated there was an average of 3.6 per cent of all runs dropped or missed. While this number tells part of the story, TAAG has heard from many customers that sometimes their bus did not arrive, and when they contacted the Guelph Transit office, they were told that the tracking software indicated that the bus had arrived. TAAG believes that the number of missed routes is being underreported due to this possible technology failure or human error.
- TAAG is pleased that the Review did not identify any obvious advantages or savings to using alternate service delivery models compared with the approach used by Guelph. We believe there is enough evidence to show that contracting out services does not improve service or save transit systems money.

The remarks that follow explain some of our concerns. They also offer ideas, suggestions, and recommendations to taking a different approach to implementing some of the Review's twelve recommendations.

Responses to Recommendations

TRANSIT ACTION ALLIANCE OF GUELPH (TAAG)

1. SERVICE STANDARDS RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: Recommend setting a funding and fare pricing policy based on a target net revenue to cost (R/C) ratio range of between 40 and 45 per cent to support service and ongoing service improvements while reducing the potential financial impacts to customers

TAAG Response

We support the general targets presented in the report with the understanding that the variability of conditions may change. We recommend timely reviews of these targets and maintaining the municipal funding subsidy levels, while keeping in mind that any increase in fares will negatively impact ridership and, therefore, revenue.

2. SERVICE EXPANSION AND GROWTH

RECOMMENDATION 2: Recommend the expansion and rebranding of the Community Bus program from the current two-bus service to six buses by 2020. Engagement, route review and capital investment activity should occur in 2019, with operationalization in 2020. This will provide improved service levels and options for riders.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Recommend conducting an operational level route review in 2019/2020 as well as continuous route audits. Hire a contract route planning position.

The route review will look at both holistic system changes as well as individual route modifications including: a. Identifying opportunities to move to a blended network with hub and spoke, spine (grid), perimeter and express routes. b. Identifying individual route structure and frequency to best meet the needs of the ridership

RECOMMENDATION 4: Recommend updating the Transit Growth Strategy (Transit Strategic Plan) to provide direction for conventional and mobility service to 2040, supporting the Corporate Transportation Master Plan Ensure the scope of activity includes the assessment and potential impacts of the following.

- Market growth and impacts
- Inter-regional transit
- Transit priority options
- Technology developments (electric fleet)
- Light rail transit (LRT) and/or bus rapid transit (BRT)

TAAG Response

Following on the heels of this comprehensive and technically-driven Transit Review, we recommend that the city hear from citizens on how transit could best serve their needs and what choices (tradeoffs) would best reflect their values.

TAAG recognizes that recent city growth, levels of available funding, and trends in numbers of transit riders result in an increasing challenge to continue effectively delivering transit service. A new approach is needed, grounded in a community conversation about the role of transit in our future city.

TAAG feels that the order for doing these 3 recommendations, as outlined in the presentation provided by City Staff, is not technically correct.

A Transit Strategy provides a strong foundation to build a comprehensive plan for public transit, **provides the direction for Route Reviews and Community Bus program review**, and will help define the long-term vision for transit service in Guelph.

While TAAG does support the expansion and re-branding of the Community Bus, TAAG recommends proceeding with a minor route review to adjust routes where issues are present, and focus energy on developing a **Vision for Transit** first, which would provide direction for updating the Transportation Master Plan and help define where to put transit services.

TAAG agrees with the best practices outlined in the report of maintaining certain average number of passengers per vehicle hour.

3. SERVICE REDUCTION

RECOMMENDATION 5: Recommend discontinuing morning shuttle service (pilot project) to Guelph Central Station effective Q2 2019.

TAAG Response

While any service reduction has an impact on ridership, TAAG understands that the morning shuttle service was a pilot project and it did not see the uptake as projected. However, we would like to point out that there was very little effort to inform GO Transit users and the general public of this service option. Our own research indicates many riders, when told of this service, simply did not know it existed, and many would have used it if they had known about it.

We recommend that the City reconsider the full cancellation of this service and instead considered cheaper alternative partnerships, such as a Trans-Cab service, until the Route Review and/or Transit Strategy is completed, which may recommend the extension of the start time of transit services to cover the early GO Transit trains.

4. SERVICE ADMINISTRATION

RECOMMENDATION 6: Recommend the review and renewal of the CoFare contract with Metrolinx in 2019, to be consistent with the fare management process and other transit facilities that utilize a CoFare agreement. The agreement requires revision to reflect current fare rates and include recurring renewal dates to ensure ongoing accuracy of rates.

TAAG Response

TAAG supports the review and renewal of the Co-Fare contract with Metrolinx. This allows for seamless trips between GO and Guelph Transit and makes switching between transit systems simple and hassle-free, solves the “last mile” problems many municipalities encounter, removes cars from the road to help reduce costs for the city and benefiting the environment, and potentially creates new long term regular transit users.

TAAG disagrees with how the assessment was completed and the recommendation to increase the co-fare to **as high as \$1.30 per trip**.

The average co-fare between GO Transit and other participating transit systems is **\$0.71**. The majority of these base their price off of either the lowest fare available (i.e tickets) or the cash fare.

Guelph Transit currently collects \$0.60 per trip along with a subsidy of \$1.70 provided by Metrolinx equaling \$2.30. The current Adult ticket fare is \$2.80.

For every rider Guelph Transit gets, it receives money from the Gas Tax from the Provincial and Federal Governments. With that funding, combined with the cash fare paid by the GO user and the subsidy provided by Metrolinx, the Co-Fare is **Revenue Neutral** for Guelph Transit.

TAAG recommends that a modest increase of up to \$0.20 (33%) be put into place making the co-fare \$0.80. This small increase will continue make the Co-Fare **Revenue Neutral** based on the current Cash Fare of \$3.00 and be on par with other transit systems using the co-fare program. TAAG also recommends that for any future increases, that the Co-Fare not exceed \$1.00 per trip.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Recommend the development and implementation of an operator recertification program with dedicated training hours to improve service reliability, reduce risk and ensure we are inline with industry standards.

TAAG Response

TAAG fully support the development and implementation of an operator recertification program.

RECOMMENDATION 8: Recommend adjusting the staffing structure to:

a. Better align the management structure to support efficient and effective management of the core business and be in line with industry standards, and b. provide a dedicated Human Resources staff position to better support Transit return to work and wellness initiatives as well as address ongoing recruitment and retention challenges

TAAG Response

TAAG agrees with making the management structure meet Industry standards.

We are supportive of a dedicated HR staff person, possibility not FTE (Full Time Equivalent). We recommend **dedicated Customer Service staff** that would include coverage of the morning and evening peak service periods along with the regular service. Additional Customer Support should be considered for weekends, holidays and evenings in the coming years.

RECOMMENDATION 9: Recommend that vehicle maintenance cost reporting be separated into two line items, one that reports asset specific maintenance costs and one that reports the remaining costs associated with internal fleet services.

TAAG Response

TAAG fully supports the recommendation to separate vehicle maintenance costs into two separate line items. This will assist in showing better transparency and performing a clear cost analysis of maintaining assets.

5. TECHNOLOGY GROWTH

RECOMMENDATION 10: Recommend to implement the new fare box program with the capability for reusable tap and go passes (smart cards). Utilization of smart card capable fare boxes will also validate fare box data and address inconsistency in current fare box cash fare reporting.

TAAG Response

TAAG is in support of the implementation of a new fare box program which, along with a full fare strategy review, will allow greater and easier access to transit services. We recommend that there be full consultation with various stakeholders, such as poverty groups, as there have been concerns raised in other communities regarding access via smart card technology. By researching other transit systems experiences and consulting with community groups and organizations, the city will be able to get ahead of any concerns or issues brought forward.

RECOMMENDATION 11: Recommend the development and pilot program for Intelligent On-Demand Transit software with the Mobility Service, to improve service availability and service options. This activity should also test the feasibility and potential capacity for low-density and low utilization area.

TAAG Response

While we support the use of on demand technology to assist with mobility users, we recommend that the city determine if the appropriate customer base would use it.

We are cautious of using this technology beyond mobility on low ridership routes until a Transit Strategy then Route Review is completed.

6. SERVICE RELIABILITY

RECOMMENDATION 12: Stabilization of workforce to ensure sustainable provision of current level of service through base staffing increase of 19 operators, to be achieved through annual budget increases of \$260,000 per year over six years.

TAAG Response

We support the hiring of more drivers possibly at a faster rate to help reduce overtime quicker.

Service reliability can also be improved via capital investments for such as Transit Priority Measures, changing the walking distance between stops, digital signage at busy transfer points, and increased frequency.

In conclusion, TAAG's ideas and suggestions throughout this booklet show that we agree with some recommendations but do have concerns with others and offer our ideas and suggestions to help make this report better.

We hope you will take these ideas and suggestions into consideration as you discuss and deliberate the results of the Transit Business Service Review and the next actions to take.