

**TRANSIT MASTER PLAN
REGINA CITY COUNCIL
WEDNESDAY JULY 29, 2020
FLORENCE STRATTON**

In preparing for this presentation, the metaphor “throwing somebody under the bus” kept coming to mind.

Please do not approve the funding of \$440,000 for the development of a Transit Master Plan. That would be the equivalent of throwing Regina Transit and its riders under the bus.

Regina already has a Transit Master Plan, published in 2017. It lays out many of the policies the city needs to adopt to improve Regina Transit.

In addition, there is the excellent staff at Regina Transit. They know what needs to be done to improve Regina Transit.

There is also the grassroots transit group, Regina Citizens Public Transit Coalition. It has plenty of helpful ideas about how Regina Transit can be improved.

Transit is the solution to many of our city’s problems, including:

- Traffic congestion
- Downtown parking
- Traffic accidents: Studies show that transit is safer than driving.
- Transit is even the solution to texting while driving. You can text to your heart’s content on the bus with no worries about accidents or distracted driving tickets.
- Transit also has public health benefits, as it reduces air pollution. According to experts, the main reason for the increase in asthma rates worldwide for both children and adults is air pollution.
- Transit is also part of the solution to the global climate emergency, as it cuts carbon emissions. One bus load of passengers takes the equivalent of 40 vehicles off the road, reducing emissions by more than 15,000 tonnes a year. Thus Transit must be a core component of Regina’s commitment to make the city 100% renewable by 2050.

The challenge is to grow transit ridership: to get people out of their cars and onto the bus. Increasing ridership means providing better transit. In other words, what Regina needs is better transit, not another expensive, almost half-a-million dollar plan!

The good news is that transit ridership in Regina is already growing: in 2017 by 2.9%; in 2018 by 3.9%; and in 2019 by a whopping 7.1%.

These increases are due to policies adopted by Regina Transit. The introduction of the U-Pass in 2016 likely accounts for the majority the 2017 and 2018 increases. The big jump in 2019,

however, is not due to the U-Pass, as some Councillors claimed at a recent meeting, but rather originates in other policies adopted by Regina Transit, including improved bus service, reduced fares, and the introduction of the Arcola Express.

How to further grow transit ridership? That is the challenge! Despite some improvement, it is still the case that, as stated in the 2017 Transit Master Plan, “most trips in Regina are made by private vehicles,” with the majority of those trips “made in single-occupant vehicles” (8).

Here are three suggestions, recommendations that are, for the most part, already incorporated into the 2017 Master Plan:

1. **More frequent service:** The 2017 Transit Master Plan recommends 15 - 30 minute intervals during peak periods for some of its routes (36). Research shows that frequencies of 15 minutes are where the biggest jumps in ridership happen.
2. **Earlier and later service:** To accommodate workers, make the start time for all routes 5 am. To accommodate workers and those enjoying an evening out, make the end time for all routes 1:30 am.
3. **Fare Free Transit:** Another recommendation of the 2017 Transit Master Plan is “Adopt fare strategies that ensure transit is cost competitive with private vehicle use” (36). Fare free transit makes transit as cost competitive as possible and is one of the most effective strategies to get people out of their cars and on to public transit.

While Regina may not be able to implement fare free transit permanently all in one go, it can set fare free transit as its ultimate goal and then embark on a plan to eliminate fares in stages over a five year period.

In 2019, Victoria BC began to offer free service to anyone under the age of 18. Perhaps this is where Regina could start. Last winter, I heard a heart-rending story about some Regina high school students who were often unable to get to high school during the winter because their families could not afford the youth bus pass, which costs \$64 a month.

Such improvements to Regina Transit will be expensive. Where will the money come from?

For starters, the \$440,000 earmarked to develop the new master plan could, instead, be invested in Regina Transit.

Another piece of good news: Earlier this month, the federal government announced it will be providing \$8 billion for municipal transit systems to be funneled through provincial governments. Regina must ensure it gets some of that money.

According to City documents, the focus of the proposed new master plan is “to align a proposed downtown transit hub with the Downtown Neighbourhood Plan and Transportation Master Plan.” Currently the downtown transit hub is 11th Avenue in the area of the Cornwall Centre. This is where it should be located, as it is where the majority of those of us who use transit are headed.

Over the past few years, there has been pressure from some quarters to move the transit hub off 11th Avenue and, depending on where it is to be relocated, to provide shuttle buses to get transit users to their 11th Avenue destination.

This too would be the equivalent of throwing Regina Transit and its riders under the bus. Please don’t make our journey longer or more inconvenient! The end result will be a decrease in ridership.

A new transit hub would also be expensive, as it would require new infrastructure. Please drop this idea and invest the money instead in improving transit.

Regina Transit is subsidized by local taxes. But so too are private vehicles. It is, after all, Regina taxpayers who foot the bill for road infrastructure and road maintenance.

As the 2017 Transit Master Plan notes: “Historically, a large portion of Regina’s transportation budget has been dedicated to roadways.” Indeed, for the period 2012 to 2016, 82% of the city’s transportation capital budget allocation, or \$35.5 million, went to roadways capital programs, while only 15%, or \$6.4 million, was allocated to public transit (12).

We can’t afford to keep subsidizing private vehicles at this rate. That too is an example of the city throwing Regina Transit and its riders under the bus.

It is also a clear indication of the need to revise the metaphor. Buses aren’t the problem. Private vehicles are. In addition to costing taxpayers huge amounts in subsidies to pay for infrastructure, they have many hidden costs, including accidents, congestion, air pollution, and climate change.

How about we start saying “throwing somebody under the private vehicle”?

Please don’t throw Regina Transit and its riders under the private vehicle! Do not approve the funding of \$440,000 for the development of a Transit Master Plan. And please commit to making a sizable investment—let’s say 50% of the 2021 transportation capital budget allocation—to Regina Transit.

Florence Stratton