

RCPTC submission for Dec 9, 2019

Your honour, City Council Members and audience members,

My name is Terri Sleeva and I am chair of the Regina Citizen's Public Transit Coalition (RCPTC). Our objective is to see improvement to public transit within Regina for all residents. We want to promote ridership but it is like the chicken and the egg. Until Regina City Council actively endorses it, ridership will be curtailed. The time it takes to travel via public transit is not conducive to the schedules of most people. It needs to be a competitive alternative to driving a private vehicle. The express routes that the city has installed have increased ridership significantly though. We thank you for bringing in the U-Pass and audible bus signals, etc. but we still have a ways to go.

The budget is forecasted at \$40 million for City Transit which operates 21 routes throughout the City and has increased ridership each year since 2017 and is projected to show a 6 per cent increase in 2019. This is taken from the budget summary for 2020. I would like to see greater funding for the Regina Transit System as the Transportation Master Plan has planned for our aging population and population growth. Subsidies are required for public transit just as there are subsidies for private vehicles through roadways, etc.

We have issued a Regina Transit Challenge for 2020 on November 3. The document outlines ways in which public transit is a solution to many of our city's problems, including: downtown parking, rush-hour traffic jams, traffic accidents, texting while driving, air pollution, and climate catastrophe.

The challenge is to further grow ridership by improving service. The document makes a number of recommendations, including: more frequent service (15 minute intervals), earlier and later service (5 a.m.-1:30 a.m.), and free transit for people in the following categories: Youth, Seniors, Social Assistance recipients and other low income individuals, with free transit for all as the ultimate goal.

The Regina Citizens Public Transit Coalition asks you to take into account these proposals with the others, as they are contained in the document, during your deliberations on Regina's 2021 budget and as 2020 progresses.

Thank you for providing me with an opportunity to input my concerns about our community.

REGINA TRANSIT CHALLENGE 2020: TRANSIT IS THE SOLUTION, NOT THE PROBLEM

REGINA CITIZENS PUBLIC TRANSIT COALITION (RCPTC)

BETTER TRANSIT 1.0

Over the last decade, the City of Regina, working with Regina Transit, has improved transit service in our city in a number of ways. These include:

- Better Sunday and holiday service
- Express routes to cut down on travelling time
- TransitLive, which allows transit users to track bus times and locations on their cellphones
- The U-Pass which allows post-secondary students to use Regina Transit for a once-per-semester fee
- Free transit service for K -12 students and their teachers for class field trips
- Reduced cost for some transit passes
- Making all Regina Transit buses low floor and accessible
- External route announcements
- New bus shelters

For these and other recent improvements to transit service in Regina, we thank the City of Regina and Regina Transit.

However, much more needs to be done as public transit is the solution to many of our city's problems.

8 PROBLEMS: TRANSIT IS THE SOLUTION

1. TRAFFIC CONGESTION ON 11TH AVENUE

- A Regina Transit bus holds 40 passengers.
- A regular busload of passengers takes up far less road space than 40 cars.

2. DOWNTOWN PARKING

The ever-growing number of parking lots gives downtown Regina a desolate and abandoned look. Still, people have a hard time finding parking. More people using transit is the answer to this problem.

3. RUSH-HOUR TRAFFIC CONGESTION

Even though Regina is a relatively small city, many rush-hour commutes take 30 minutes or more. Again, more people using transit is the solution.

4. TEXTING WHILE DRIVING

In 2018, Regina Police Service issued 1,800 distracted driving tickets for drivers using mobile devices. <https://globalnews.ca/news/4812841/saskatoon-cell-phone-distracted-driving/>

The fine for distracted driving is \$280. That's enough to buy 3 monthly bus passes. You can text on the bus with no safety worries.

5. TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS

Studies show that transit is safer than driving a car.

<https://torontoist.com/2016/11/how-public-transit-plays-a-role-in-traffic-safety/>

Transit drivers, unlike most of the rest of us, are professional drivers. Transit has even been dubbed by some as “chauffeuring for the masses.”

6. DISCRIMINATION

Transit addresses discrimination related to class, race, religion, age, gender, and sexuality. In theory, if not in practice, anyone and everyone can ride the bus.

7. AIR POLLUTION

Transit also has public-health benefits. According to experts, the main reason for the increase in asthma rates worldwide for both children and adults is air pollution and, more explicitly, exposure to nitrogen dioxide, which comes mainly from vehicle exhaust. To experience the full effect of air pollution in Regina, try standing on a busy Regina street during rush hour.

8. CLIMATE CATASTROPHE

Public transit not only provides solutions to local problems. It is also part of the answer to a major global problem: climate change.

We have just 11 years left before climate catastrophe This is the grim warning issued by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

In response to the climate emergency, in 2018, Regina City Council unanimously passed a motion committing to make Regina a 100% renewable city by 2050. Better transit is a key way to meet that commitment.

Facts

- Transit 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.

TRANSIT CHALLENGE 2020: GROWING RIDERSHIP

If transit is the solution to these and other problems, why are more people not using transit? The good news is that transit use in Regina is, in fact, growing. In 2018, there were nearly 6.9 million rides, representing a 7% increase in ridership over 2016.

The challenge is to further grow transit ridership. There are three major impediments:

A. REGINA IS A CAR-CENTRIC CITY

Regina's *Transportation Master Plan (TMP)*, published in 2017, reports that "currently, most trips in Regina are made by private vehicles":

- 85% of all peak period trips are made by car.
- 67% of those trips are made in single-occupant vehicles (8).

The question is, then, how to make transit a competitive alternative to driving. Improving transit service in terms of frequency and areas of the city is part of the answer to this question.

B. COST OF TRANSIT

Current transit fares—\$3.25 for an adult for a single ride and \$88 for a monthly adult pass—make transit a less attractive alternative to driving.

Transit is also prohibitively expensive for many people who don't own a private vehicle. For example, for a parent to take two children age five and older on an outing using transit would cost \$7.75 each way.

C. WINTER SNOW CLEARANCE PRACTICES

For about five months of the year, snow and ice on city sidewalks in residential areas prevent many Reginaans from getting to a bus stop.

Moreover, outside the downtown area, it is the regular practice of city workers doing snow removal either to not clear bus stops or to pile up the snow around bus stops, making it difficult and often dangerous to get on and off the bus. Snow is also regularly piled up around the poles with pedestrian cross-walk buttons.

Regarding bus stops, City policy, according to a February 7 2019 message from the City of Regina, is as follows: "Transit stops are checked and cleared within 7 days of the plow to ensure they are clear." This is not good enough.

BETTER TRANSIT 2.0

Below are a number of recommendations for further improving transit service in Regina. These recommendations are, for the most part, already incorporated into the *TMP*.

We hope that the City of Regina will one day soon be able to implement all of the *TMP*'s many recommendations. In the meantime, because of the urgency of the matter, we have given priority to recommendations likely to have the greatest positive impact on ridership.

Our selection is based on our experience as transit users, as well as on research into public transit. The proposals are listed in order of significance.

A. MORE FREQUENT SERVICE

Regarding frequency of service, the *TMP* recommends the following:

Neighbourhood Transit	Peak periods: 15 - 30 minutes. Off-peak periods: 30 - 60 minutes
Primary Transit	Peak periods: 15 minutes or better. Off-peak periods: 15 - 30 minutes
Express Transit	Peak periods: 30 minutes or better. Off-peak periods: 30 minutes or better

RCPTC likes the every 15 minutes recommendations, but finds the frequency time spread (15 – 30 minutes) unhelpful, as it provides planners with an easy out. Between 6 am and 8:45 pm, many transit routes already run at 30 minute intervals.

Research shows that frequencies of 15 minutes are where the biggest jumps in ridership happen:

<https://getpocket.com/explore/item/why-did-america-give-up-on-mass-transit-don-t-blame-cars>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/regina-transit-bus-in-your-shoes-1.5027200>

RCPTC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2020

- 1. Monday – Saturday, first bus (currently around 5:30 am) – 8:45 pm: All transit routes operate at 15 minute intervals**
- 2. Monday – Saturday, 8:45 pm – last bus (currently around midnight): All transit routes operate at 30 minute intervals**

B. FREE TRANSIT

One of the recommendations of the *TMP* is “Adopt fare strategies that ensure transit is cost competitive with private vehicle use” (36). 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 onto public transit.

- A number of European cities already offer free transit. These include Dunkirk, France, which has about the same population size as Regina.
- Other cities offer free service in their downtown area. Canadian examples include Calgary and Winnipeg.
- In 2019, Victoria BC began to offer free service to anyone under the age of 18.

There are a number of other reasons, in addition to growing ridership, for making public transit free.

- ▶ The right to freedom of movement is enshrined in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). It should be noted that current Regina Transit policy is that no one is to be refused service because of an inability to pay. In practice, however, drivers sometimes refuse service because of an inability to pay. It should also be noted that social equity is one of the guiding principles of the *TMP*: “Transportation strategies will aim to promote equitable access to mobility...and maximize opportunities for all residents in Regina” (7).
- ▶ People need easy access to work and to essential services to live decent, independent lives.
- ▶ High school students need easy access to school. Some Regina high school students are unable to get to school because their families cannot afford the youth (5 -14 years of age or attending high school) bus pass, which costs \$64 a month.
- ▶ Public transit is, like libraries and parks, a public service. Like libraries and parks, transit should be free.
- ▶ Free transit would create good jobs.
- ▶ Free Transit would help stop catastrophic climate change.
- ▶ Free transit would eliminate the cost of collecting and policing fare collection.

How to get there? RCPTC is not asking for the immediate elimination of all transit fares. Rather, we are calling on the City of Regina to do two things:

- a) To set Free Transit as the ultimate goal.
- b) To embark on a plan to eliminate fares in stages over a five year period.

RCPTC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2020

- 3. Eliminate fares, making transit free, for people in the following categories: Social Assistance recipients, Youth, and Senior.**
- 4. Enforce transit policy that no one is to be refused service because of an inability to pay.**

C. SNOW REMOVAL

TMP recommends the following: “Greater enforcement of snow removal on sidewalks, especially in core areas of the city and near bus stops” (14).

RCPTC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2020

- 5. Enforce snow and ice removal on all city sidewalks within 24 hours of a snowfall.**

6. **Require clearing of snow from around bus stops and pedestrian crosswalk buttons within 24 hours of a snowfall.**
7. **Instruct snow removal workers not to pile up snow at transit stops or by pedestrian crosswalk buttons.**

D. EXTEND TRANSIT SERVICE

TMP recommends the following: “Extend transit service to all major employment and residential areas in the city that currently do not have transit service” (38).

RCPTC RECOMMENDATION FOR 2020

8. **Extend transit service to the Regina Airport and to Aurora in East Regina.**

E. BETTER SUNDAY AND HOLIDAY SERVICE

RCPTC RECOMMENDATION FOR 2020

9. **Operate every 30 minutes all day to midnight:** Just like folks who own cars, transit users have things to do and people to see on Sundays and holidays and at all hours of the day and night.

F. EARLIER AND LATER SERVICE

RCPTC RECOMMENDATION FOR 2020

10. **To accommodate workers, make the start time for all routes 5 am.**
11. **To accommodate workers and those enjoying an evening out, make the end time for all routes 1:30 am.**

G. SAFER TRANSIT

RCPTC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2020

12. **Eliminate the side seats on buses that snap up and won't stay down unless someone is sitting on them:** They pose a huge safety risk, as passengers find it difficult to hold the seat down so they can sit on it, while at the same time holding onto a strap or pole or packages, especially if the bus is moving.
13. **Instruct drivers not to start the bus until everyone is safely seated or, if standing, until everyone has found something to hold on to.**

H. ELECTRIC BUS

One second-last RCPTC Recommendation for 2020—to help save the planet from climate disaster:

14. Begin the process of replacing diesel buses with electric buses.

I. GET ON THE BUS

Our final recommendation is addressed to Mayor Michael Fougere and Regina City Councillors:

15. Take up the transit union challenge and rely on transit for a week: You will, among other things, discover the joys and woes of Regina Transit.

PAYING FOR BETTER TRANSIT

Regina Transit is subsidized by local taxes. If free transit becomes a reality, that subsidy will increase.

However, it should be noted that private vehicles are also subsidized. It is, after all, Regina taxpayers who foot the bill for road infrastructure and road maintenance.

As the *TMP* 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, allocated to public transit (12).

Private vehicles also have many hidden costs, including air pollution, climate change, accidents, congestion, and even noise pollution.

We cannot afford to keep subsidizing private vehicles.