Minute No. 437
Report – Standing Policy Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works – May 12, 2021

Item No. 1 Initiating Transit Plus Service based on Conditions of Roads and Sidewalks

COUNCIL DECISION:

Council concurred in the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works, and adopted the following:

1. That the Winnipeg Transit Plus Policy be amended as attached in Appendix C.

2. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

Report – Standing Policy Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works – May 12, 2021

DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

Moved by Councillor Allard,

That the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works be adopted by consent.

Carried

Councillor Chambers was absent for the above vote.

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On May 18, 2021, the Executive Policy Committee concurred in the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works and submitted the matter to Council.

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On May 12, 2021, the Standing Policy Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service and submitted the matter to the Executive Policy Committee and Council.

Patrick Stewart, Independent Living Resource Centre, submitted a communication dated May 11, 2021, in support of the matter.

COUNCIL DECISION:

On November 26, 2021, Council concurred in the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works and adopted the following:

1. That the Winnipeg Public Service be directed to report back to the Standing Committee within 180 days on a policy for determining when winter Transit Plus service should be initiated based on a defined metric of "appropriate conditions of our roads and sidewalks based on ice and snow and or other conditions worthy of consideration for safety".

2. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the forgoing.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Title: Winter Only Winnipeg Transit Plus Service Policy Amendment

Critical Path: Standing Policy Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works – Executive Policy Committee – Council

AUTHORIZATION

Author	Department Head	CFO	CAO
T. Platt	G. Ewankiw	N/A	M. Ruta, Interim CAO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Public Service was directed to provide a policy for determining when "winter only" Transit Plus service should be initiated.

The Public Service is recommending that winter only service dates be specified to start on November 1, but no later, and to end on April 15, but no earlier, to reflect the established conditional eligibility criteria. The policy would authorize the Manager of Client Services to use the following metrics to initiate or continue winter only service on the first day of the seven-day forecast predicted by Environment Canada when a snow accumulation of a depth of 3 centimetres exists or is predicted and/or if the forecast is for weather conditions such as adverse snow fall, freezing rain, ice, or a windchill of minus 15 Celsius or colder.

A winter only eligibility is consistent with the categorical eligibility defined in accessibility legislation. The category of conditional eligibility is designed to accommodate individuals that can reasonably be expected to use conventional transit under some circumstances or conditions. There is no standard metric that is currently used to determine the end and start dates for activation of service.

The more than 200 winter only customers using Transit Plus have been assessed as being ambulant individuals who may face some barriers in the winter months which makes them unable to use the conventional service due to significant accumulation of snow and ice. However, the existing enhancements of accessible features on Transit buses have allowed many individuals with disabilities to use the conventional transit system during the majority of the year.

The Public Service engaged Transit Plus customers who are currently eligible for winter only service for their feedback (survey results in Appendix A attached). The majority of respondents rated their experience with winter only service as good or very good (21 of 36 respondents) and

identified the need for specific start and end dates as the single most important requirement to defining winter only service. A combination of variables including snow, ice or outdoor temperatures were the factors that influenced when customers started to use the paratransit service. There was no specific metric that was recommended to be used to initiate winter only service. The Transit Plus Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) was also engaged to provide feedback from their respective organizations and members on the concerns related to winter only service (Appendix A - Policy Advisory Committee Meeting Notes Appendix C).

The jurisdictional scan (attached as Appendix B) did not provide any information on a possible metric that could be used to determine the start and end date of winter only. All of the 27 respondent properties, except one, used defined start and end dates. The majority of the properties use November 1 as the start of winter only service and use end of March to mid-April as the end date.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Winnipeg Transit Plus Policy be amended as attached in Appendix C.

2. That the proper officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

REASON FOR THE REPORT

At its meeting on November 26, 2020, Council concurred in the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works and requested that the Public Service bring forward a report to the Standing Policy Committee on Infrastructure Renewal and Public Works in 180 days on a policy for determining when winter Transit Plus service should be initiated based on a defined metric of “appropriate conditions of our roads and sidewalks based on ice and snow and or other conditions worthy of consideration for safety.”

As the recommendations are changes to existing Council policies, changes or amendments require Council approval.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Providing established start and end dates will offer the ability for customers to book appointments and plan accordingly for the trips as they need during the eligibility period for winter service.

The opportunity for flexibility to change the start and end dates to reflect the weather conditions will ensure that barriers are addressed for Winnipeg Transit Plus customers for accessing the appropriate public transportation service to reflect the eligibility criteria.

HISTORY/DISCUSSION

Winnipeg Transit Plus service has had a seasonal category of winter only since the amendments to the eligibility criteria and registration process in 2006. A winter only eligibility is consistent with the categorical eligibility defined in accessibility legislation. As such the majority of North American transit properties have conditional eligibility categories which includes service during the winter months. The category of conditional eligibility is designed to accommodate individuals that can reasonably be expected to use conventional transit under some circumstances or conditions. However, there is no standard metric that is currently used to determine the start and end dates for activation of service.

The winter only customers using Transit Plus have been assessed as being ambulant individuals who are unable to use the conventional service due to significant accumulation of snow and ice. It is understood that barriers exist within the winter months for many individuals. As such winter only service exists to serve those who are not able to reasonably walk to the conventional service during periods of snow, ice or other conditions that may impact their safety.

The existing enhancements of accessible features on Transit buses; including kneeling to the curb, ramp access, audible stop announcements, mobility device securements and bus operator assistance have allowed many individuals with disabilities to use the conventional transit system. The conditional eligibility criteria is reflective of the fact that there is a span of time from spring to late fall or early winter that enables the use of conventional service.

There can be a total of up to approximately 250 winter only eligible customers during each season. On January 30, 2020, Council approved a revision to the dates for winter only eligibility to have winter only eligibility start no later than December 15 and end no earlier than March 31. The Manager of Client Services has the flexibility to adjust the beginning and end dates based on weather conditions and snow accumulation. This was a change to the previous start and end dates of October 15 and April 15 respectively.

This change was as a result of a review of weather conditions reported by Environment Canada that stated that in the last ten years Winnipeg has not had a significant snowfall that has stayed on the ground longer than three consecutive days in October. Significant snow accumulation has occurred in approximately mid-December. Therefore, it was assumed to be reasonable to change the eligibility period to better coincide with the colder winter weather and snow accumulation. It was anticipated that this change would also assist in decreasing the trips that the service was unable to accommodate and ensure that limited paratransit resources would be provided to those with the highest need.

This recent fall, was the first year of implementation for the new winter only start date to activate service “no later than December 15th. However, a weather event in mid-October 2020 brought a significant accumulation of snow with a rapid melt which created icy conditions due to the variation of day and evening temperatures. As such, there were several days at the end of October where snow and icy conditions generated concerns from winter only customers. In response to these concerns the public service activated the winter only service, even though higher than seasonal temperatures melted the exiting ice and snow on streets and sidewalks.

The flexibility inherent in the existing policy allowed the public service to initiate service in response to winter weather conditions.

With an effort to improve service for winter only customers, Council requested the Public Service engage in a public engagement process to receive feedback on the policy change and bring forward a revised policy based on the feedback received.

Public Engagement Results

The public service engaged Transit Plus customers, in January and February 2020, who were eligible for winter only service, for their feedback (survey results in Appendix A attached). The majority of respondents rated their experience with winter only service as good or very good (21 of 36 respondents).

When asked when they felt when winter only should start and end the majority of respondents (27 of 37) felt that winter only service should begin mid-October or middle of November and that service should end between the end of March and the end of April.

The survey results did not provide any suggestions related to the creation of a metric to determine the state of streets and sidewalks to initiate winter only service. The majority of respondents (23 of 37) did express that they felt that having a way to determine when winter only service might start based on weather conditions would improve their experience. However, based on the feedback there was no one specific element that determined when a customer needed winter only service. Many of the respondents identified a combination of variables including snow, ice or outdoor temperatures that influenced when they started to use the paratransit service during the eligibility period.

Other feedback from survey respondents included:

- The winter only period should be extended.
- Eliminate winter only categorical eligibility and provide current seasonal users service year-round.
- Found service to be timely and dependent.
- Drivers are courteous and helpful.
- Seasonal service provides valued freedom and access to services and opportunities.
- The comfort and safety provided by seasonal service is invaluable.
- There should be better communications with Transit Plus customers related to service changes.

Jurisdictional Scan

There were a total of 27 Canadian transit properties that responded to the CUTA survey (attached as Appendix B). The scan did not provide any information on a possible metric that could be used to determine the start and end date of winter only. All the properties except one used a defined start and end date. The majority of the properties use November 1 as the start of winter only service and use end of March to mid-April as the end date.

Calgary Access Transit was the only property that used weather conditions to start and end their seasonal service. Calgary uses "*present or predicted weather conditions*" that include a

temperature of minus 15 C and/or the presence of predicted accumulation of ice and snow for the winter months and plus 20 C for the summer months.

Calgary has no specific start or end date and will start and end the program as the weather changes. As an example, if the weather is currently above minus 15 Celsius but it is predicted to go to minus 15 or below within the next seven days, then a customer booking a trip can access the service if they wish to travel during the seven-day period where the temperature is predicted to be at minus 15 or lower. Once the temperature goes above minus 15 and there is no accumulation of ice or snow then the seasonal customers no longer have access to the service. During the fall and spring season the service for these Calgary seasonal customers is very sporadic and uncertain.

Unlike Calgary, Transit Plus does not have the system functionality to continuously start and end service solely based on weather conditions. However, to add a level of certainty and transparency to the policy a hybrid of Calgary and Winnipeg's policy is recommended for Winnipeg.

While the majority of survey respondents said they wanted to know the specific dates of when they could access the service to plan for events, especially doctor appointments, there will be times where adverse winter weather conditions will dictate the need for an earlier start or a later end date to the winter only service.

Similar to the Public Works snow clearing policy that aims to ensure safe and accessible operating conditions of city streets and sidewalks, a snow accumulation of a depth of 3 centimetres or more will trigger the start of winter only service. Additionally, there will be adverse weather events that will make it prudent to initiate or continue winter only service. Therefore, it is recommended that an additional metric be defined to account for unpredictable winter weather. If the seven-day forecast predicted by Environment Canada is for weather conditions such as adverse snow fall, freezing rain, ice, or a windchill of minus 15 Celsius or colder winter only will service will be initiated or continued on the first day of the predicted adverse forecast.

Considering all factors outlined in the report the Public Service is recommending that winter only service dates be specified to start on November 1, but no later, and to end on April 15, but no earlier, to reflect the established conditional eligibility criteria. With a further recommendation to authorize the Manager of Client Services to use the following metrics to initiate or continue winter only service on the first day of the seven-day forecast predicted by Environment Canada when a snow accumulation of a depth of 3 centimetres or exists or is predicted and/or if the forecast is for weather conditions such as adverse snow fall, freezing rain, ice, or a windchill of minus 15 Celsius or colder.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Financial Impact Statement Date: April 15, 2021

Project Name:
Winter Only Winnipeg Transit Plus Service Policy Amendment

COMMENTS:

As the existing operating budget for these contracted services currently accommodates the ability to amend the effective winter only service start and/or end dates as is deemed necessary by the Manager of Client Services, there is no additional financial impact from the recommendations in this report.

Original signed by:
Laurie Fisher, CPA, CA
Manager of Finance & Administration

CONSULTATION

This Report has been prepared in consultation with:

N/A

OURWINNIPEG POLICY ALIGNMENT

01-01b: Key Directions for the Entire City – Key directions for connecting and expanding our sustainable transportation and infrastructure network.

WINNIPEG CLIMATE ACTION PLAN ALIGNMENT

This report is in accordance with the Winnipeg Climate Action Plan (WCAP) as per Direction 3.1 *Increase Use and Efficiency of Public Transit Systems* (page 37).

SUBMITTED BY

Department: Transit
Division: Client Services
Prepared by: Teresa Platt, Acting Manager of Client Services
Date: April 16, 2021

Attachments:

Appendix A – Winnipeg Transit Plus – Winter Only Service Review
Stakeholder Engagement Summary

Appendix B – Jurisdictional Scan

Appendix C – Amendment to Policy No. TR-002