Minutes – Standing Policy Committee on Public Works – September 10, 2026

REPORTS

Item No. 1 Request for Approval to Pilot Zero-Emission Buses for On-Request Transit Service

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Standing Policy Committee on Public Works concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service and recommended to Council:

1. That the Public Service be granted a one-time exception to the January 29, 2025, direction of Council to only purchase diesel buses starting in 2027, in order to pilot the use of battery-electric buses for On-Request service using funding from the 2027 Transit Buses capital program.

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

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DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

Moved by Councillor Eadie,

That the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service be concurred in and forwarded to the Executive Policy Committee and Council.

Carried

STANDING COMMITTEE DECISION:

On July 3, 2025, the Standing Policy Committee on Public works received a report as information on the Impact of Diesel bus Procurement Beyond the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) as information, which stated that any new information on the benefits of buying ZEBs over diesel buses would be presented to Council for review.

COUNCIL DECISION:

On January 29, 2025, Council adopted the following:

1.AA. That Winnipeg Transit be directed to

i. use approved funding, starting in the 2027 Transit Buses capital program, for the purchase of diesel buses. This will not impact the funding dedicated for Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP);

ii. report back to Standing Policy Committee on Public Works within 180 days regarding the use of diesel buses, operational impact to the mix of diesel and zero-emission buses, bus fleet complement requirements, resourcing including FTEs, impact to the Winnipeg Transit Master Plan and the City's climate action initiative and targets.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Title: Request for Approval to Pilot Zero-Emission Buses for On-Request Transit Service

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

AUTHORIZATION

Author	Department Head	CFO	CAO
E. Cooke	G. Ewankiw	T. Graham	J. Dunford

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past year, On-Request service has expanded from 2 zones to 12 while operating hours have been increased based on rider feedback. As a result, the number of riders using on-request has been increasing, with nearly 4,000 On-Request riders per week at times. The ideal number of buses for this service is 35 with a bus size under 30 feet. Transit doesn't have a bus that small so they use eight 30-foot buses and twenty-two 40-foot buses.

Winnipeg Transit's current 30-foot buses are 26 years old and won't last much past 2028. The 40-foot buses are heavier and noisier. They struggle with tight turns, which means they can't always get close to pick-up and drop off spots. This forces people to walk longer distances when using On-Request service. It goes against the accessibility goals in the Winnipeg Transit Master Plan. A smaller bus would serve communities better. It would bring buses closer to people and reduce road damage, noise, vibration, and complaints from residents.

In 2025, Council directed Transit to buy only diesel buses from 2027 onward. A small battery-electric bus costs much less than a 40-ft diesel bus. These battery-electric buses could also receive shared funding from the Canada Public Transit Fund. This would make them even cheaper. They help cut costs, improve air quality, and boost On-Request service Winnipeg residents. Transit is asking for an exception to Council's 2025 direction. Transit plans to buy up to seven battery-electric buses for a pilot program in On-Request service. The tender would be done through a Request for Proposal.

Buying new battery-electric buses helps grow Transit services by adding to the fleet. It also helps reduce environmental impacts and supports health and safety objectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Public Service be granted a one-time exception to the January 29, 2025, direction of Council to only purchase diesel buses starting in 2027, in order to pilot the use of battery-electric buses for On-Request service using funding from the 2027 Transit Buses capital program.

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

On January 29, 2025, Council directed the Public Service to use approved funding, starting in the 2027 Transit Buses capital program, for the purchase of diesel buses.

On July 3, 2025, the Standing Policy Committee on Public works received a report as information on the Impact of Diesel bus Procurement Beyond the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) as information, which stated that any new information on the benefits of buying ZEBs over diesel buses would be presented to Council for review.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no direct financial implications with this report.

Council approved first charges of $23 million for Transit Buses against the 2027 capital forecast, a portion of which would be used for this pilot. No new funding is required.

HISTORY/DISCUSSION

Winnipeg Transit requires annual replacement of buses to maintain safe, efficient, and reliable service. Replacing diesel buses with zero-emission buses eliminates vehicle tailpipe emissions, improves air quality for people who live, work, or travel near the transit network, and directly improves the health and safety of transit employees.

Transit's target fleet size is approximately 642 buses. The City must purchase 35-40 buses annually to maintain its fleet size.

On January 29, 2025, Council directed the Public Service to use approved funding, starting in the 2027 Transit Buses capital program, for the purchase of diesel buses.

Inflation and a reduction of federal and provincial funding for buses will result in the City purchasing fewer than 20 heavy-duty diesel buses annually starting in 2027, which falls short of the minimum number needed to maintain the existing bus fleet, and does not allow for any service increases.

Transit On-Request service operates in select areas of Winnipeg when feeder bus routes are not in service. In response to strong public demand for broader On-request service, Transit expanded the number of on-request zones from 2 to 12 last year. Further, based on feedback from riders following this expansion, On-request hours have been extended. One can travel anywhere within an On-Request Zone, provided buses can fit. Walking distances to and from pick up and drop off locations will vary. Transit Plus customers booking On-Request service will get picked up right in front of their home, while conventional transit users may be picked up at the nearest intersection. Because of this flexibility, there has been a steady increase in demand

for On-Request service. During some weeks in the winter and spring, nearly 4,000 riders have used the On-Request service every week.

On-Request service is currently operated with a mix of 30-ft and 40-ft heavy-duty diesel buses. Heavy-duty diesel buses are heavy and have larger turning radius, making them difficult to operate in suburban neighborhoods. Customer Service regularly receives complaints about tailpipe emissions, noise pollution and roadway damage caused by 40-ft buses in these neighbourhoods.

On-Request users, including Transit Plus users, often have to walk longer distances because of the accessibility limitations of 40-ft buses. Transit's eight existing 30-ft buses are 26 years old and not expected to operate beyond 2028. These buses are right sized for community routes not On-Request, but are able to access more areas of residential neighbourhoods than a 40-ft bus. Replacing 30-ft buses with 40-ft diesel buses will impact Transit's ability to co-mingle On-Request and Transit Plus services. Purchasing a smaller bus optimized for On-Request service would improve accessibility by getting buses closer to where people are, and where they want to go, aligning better with the Winnipeg Transit Master Plan goal of integrated Family of Services.

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act, coming into force January 1, 2027, mandates equitable, barrier-free transit. Smaller vehicles would improve independence for residents unable to walk long distances by providing improved access to the City's fixed transit network. Reliable, accessible neighborhood transportation ensures all citizens maintain affordable access to healthcare, employment, recreation, and essential services across Winnipeg.

On July 23, 2025, the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works accepted the report on the Impact of Diesel Bus Procurement Beyond the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) as information, which stated that any new information on the benefits of buying ZEBs over diesel buses will be presented to Council for review.

Purchasing a small (less than 30-ft) zero-emission bus for On-Request service has a significant financial benefit over diesel buses. Some small zero-emission bus models are low-cost, enabling the City to purchase approximately three of these smaller buses for every one 40-ft diesel bus.

These buses are also eligible for CPTF funding, which improves purchasing power. This would enable the City to purchase more buses using the existing Transit Bus capital budget. In order to best position the pilot for CPTF funding, the ZEB tender would be done through a Request for Proposal. Council approved first charges of $23 million for Transit Buses against the 2027 capital forecast, so funding is available for this purpose.

In addition, running on low-cost electricity rather than diesel fuel may reduce operating costs when compared to a 40-ft diesel bus.

Small zero-emission buses also are quieter, lighter, produce fewer emissions, and are aligned with the City's Climate Action Plan.

Because On-Request service operates on a schedule opposite to that of conventional service, it is expected that small zero-emission buses would be able to charge using the City's existing charging infrastructure during peak hours. This eliminates the need to install additional charging infrastructure and maximizes operational savings.

The are some potential challenges with small zero-emission buses that are recommended to be evaluated in a small pilot rather than a larger scale deployment. This includes evaluating season range variations and operator and rider feedback on the layout and performance of the vehicles.

The Public Service feels there is a good justification for a pilot purchase of small zero-emission buses for On-Request service and is proposing to issue a tender for up to seven small buses using funding from the 2027 Transit Buses capital program.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Financial Impact Statement **Date:** **Date:** July 27, 2026

Project Name:

Request for Approval to Pilot Zero-Emission Buses for On-Request Service

COMMENTS:

There is no financial impact from the recommedation in this report.

Laurie Fisher July 27, 2026

Laurie Fisher, CPA, CA
Manager of Finance & Administration

CONSULTATION

Not Applicable

OURWINNIPEG POLICY ALIGNMENT

OurWinnipeg 2045
Environmental Resilience, Objective 2: Prioritize sustainable transportation as the mobility options of choice.

> Prioritize sustainable transportation as the mobility options of choice. Transition to a sustainable transportation system that safely and efficiently moves people, goods and services, increases access to a variety of affordable mobility choices, encourages less reliance on personal vehicle travel, reduces travel time, mitigates congestion and related greenhouse gas emissions, and supports the development of denser, better-connected, healthy and complete communities.

Policy 2.9: Reduce Road Congestion

> Increase the efficiency, convenience and usage of the active and public transportation system, to improve air quality, provide a viable alternative to the automobile, and reduce current and future road congestion.

Winnipeg Transit Master Plan
Network Goals:

> Enhance Customer Experience
> Increase Ridership
> Improve Downtown Mobility
> Complement Land-Use Development
> Improve Multi-modal Mobility
> Ensure Transit is Inclusive
> Continuously Innovate
> Empower Healthy Communities
> Balance Investment with Affordability

WINNIPEG CLIMATE ACTION PLAN ALIGNMENT

This report is in accordance with the Winnipeg Climate Action Plan (WCAP) as per Directions 3.1 Increase use and efficiency of Public Transit Systems (p.46).

Relevant actions include: Deliver continuous improvement in transit service with a focus on customer service, reliability, and route connectivity, and public education (found on page 46 of the WCAP).

The purchase of zero-emission diesel buses, switching from old diesel fuel technologies, will assist with reducing emissions of our transit system.

WINNIPEG POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

Goal 5(c) Transportation System Equity is Enhanced – Increase collaboration with community partners improves access to safe and secure transportation by all residents.

SUBMITTED BY

Department: Transit
Division: Asset Management Office
Prepared by: Erin Cooke, Program Manager – Transition to Zero Emission Buses
Date: August 21, 2026
File No: N/A