



The Corporation of the
City of Sault Ste. Marie

COUNCIL REPORT

August 12, 2024

TO: Mayor Matthew Shoemaker and Members of City Council

AUTHOR: Brent Lamming, Deputy CAO Community Development and Enterprise Services

DEPARTMENT: Community Development and Enterprise Services

RE: Transit Route Optimization Study

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Council and seek approval to reallocate funding to complete a transit route optimization study.

Background

As part of ongoing best practices, a route optimization review of services is recommended every five years with minor tweaking to occur on an ongoing basis as required by operations and to improve service delivery.

The last full route service optimization took place in 2018 after a review process that took two years to complete. The recommendations implemented resulted in the deployment of seven routes, a Community Bus route, a new Northern Transfer Point location at Sault College and the introduction of On-Demand services to address low ridership on weekend evening service.

With the changing demographics of the ridership and recent partnerships, a route optimization review is being recommended. For 2024, ridership is projected to exceed two million rides for the first time in Sault Ste. Marie's recent history. This review will include several areas of focus listed below:

1. Ridership capacity constraints where the number of riders exceed available bus seats at times;
2. Ridership utilization per route and best strategies to service;
3. Length of trips and recommended changes to optimize;
4. Transfer point review;
5. Review of On Demand service;
6. Review of service hours;
7. Address new ridership requirements from:
 - a. Increased newcomers to the community who are heavily utilizing transit services;

- b. Post secondary institutions (U-Pass Algoma University);
 - c. Expansion of high school partnerships – “Pass to Knowledge Program”;
 - d. Social Equity Transit pass.
8. Bus stop usage, consideration of traffic congestion and or future road construction.

Analysis

The scope of work for the route optimization study will include a review of current transit operations and ridership resulting in recommendations to improve service to residents. Staff are also recommending that the use of the existing Dennis Street terminal location versus the Huron Street bus bay be included as part of the study.

Several positive benefits were previously identified by staff for the relocation of the transit terminal. Given the changes in transit ridership and current cost environment, the route optimization study provides an opportunity to revisit this project with current data.

The review and recommendation for the location of the transit terminal will include analysis of:

1. Impact on transit users;
2. Impact on transit operations (operational efficiencies, budget considerations);
3. Future potential use of Dennis Street property should terminal be relocated (e.g., housing/commercial development potential, enhanced bus shelter to service riders, impact to parking).

The funding of the route optimization study is proposed to come from the ICIP-approved allocation for the transit terminal relocation project. The route optimization study is required to inform both improved transit services and the potential relocation of the transit terminal.

Given the need for a route review and confirmation of what location best services the needs of transit users, staff are recommending the study commence this summer/fall. The team has identified an approved Council funding source to reallocate from one of the approved projects. The suggested project is the Electrical Upgrades which can be deferred to a later date. As part of the study staff is recommending that a public open house be conducted.

Staff are recommending a portion of the approved ICIP funds be utilized to complete a route optimization study in 2024. This will help provide information to improve transit service and support to aid staff with a future recommendation on the transit terminal.

Financial Implications

There is no impact to the operating budget. This request will result in a cancellation of a portion of one project to facilitate moving forward with the route optimization

study – namely cancelling \$200,000 and the associated funding sources from the approved \$825,000 2024 capital project Transit Electrical Upgrades and Charging Unit. ICIP has approved a transit operational review study within the relocation of the downtown terminal project.

Strategic Plan / Policy Impact / Climate Impact

The recommendation supports the focus area of the Community Strategic Plan for 2021-2024 in several ways.

- Within the Service Delivery focus area, it continues to assist in delivering excellent customer service to citizens;
- Additionally, it supports the focus area of infrastructure, as it will assist in Maintaining Existing Infrastructure;
- It demonstrates Fiscal Responsibility in managing municipal finances in a responsible and prudent manner;
- It exemplifies communication and stakeholder consultation to create an environment that encourages engagement and the exploration of mutual goals to grow the community. Collaboration with community partners and stakeholders is essential to success.

Climate Impact:

Travelling by public transportation uses less energy and produces less emissions by encouraging group transportation, which is a key mitigation strategy to reducing the impacts of climate change.

Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that Council take the following action:

Resolved that the report of the Deputy CAO Community Development and Enterprise Services dated August 12, 2024 concerning the Transit Route Optimization Study be received and that the following be approved:

1. Reallocate \$200,000 from approved \$825,000 2024 capital project Transit Electrical Upgrades to cover the cost of the Route Optimization Study;
2. Results of the study be brought back to Council with a recommendation on
 - Route modifications to better serve the needs of transit users.
 - Location support to remain at Dennis Street or relocate to Huron Street.

Respectfully submitted,

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