

Transit Report Card - Executive Summary

Introduction

In 2014, the City of Whitehorse invested \$3,417,867 to provide 29,878 hours of bus service to its residents. After taking into account passenger fares paid and other revenues, the net cost to taxpayers was \$2,400,450. This is significant for the 2014 population of 27,962 reported in the same year. Like other municipal services provided by the City, budgets are developed each year for approval and Council must make difficult decisions in setting municipal priorities based on the information brought forward by staff.

In advance of the 2016 budget submission, staff of Whitehorse Transit set out to answer two questions, namely, “How well is transit doing?” and “Are we receiving value from our investment?” To answer these two questions, a review of the Whitehorse Transit service performance over the last five years (2010-2014) was undertaken. To provide additional perspective, Transit Consulting Network (TCN) then looked at the Whitehorse Transit peer group and the transit industry in general across Canada, comparing 2014 with 2010 statistics. Collectively, the end result is presented in the form of a “report card” to better enable members of Council to ascertain their opinions on “value for money” relative to transit expenditures.

Summary of Findings

Whitehorse Transit has significantly improved its service and financial performance between 2010 and 2014:

- 23% more residents have access to Transit
- On a per capita basis, service increased by over 50%
- Transit ridership increased by 72% since 2010 and is expected to almost double by the end of 2015
- The transit system cost per hour has dropped and is less than the peer group
- The average transit fare paid decreased by 16% due to expanded transit pass programs

Since 2010, the City of Whitehorse investment in transit through expanded service coverage, hours of operation, more direct routing, and introduction of the U-Pass program with Yukon College has increased the competitiveness of transit to a level that has resulted in a service that was 40% more effective in 2014 than in 2010. This is considered incredible given that the peer group across Canada had experienced an average 7% decline. Transit has grown quickly as a travel mode of choice in a very short time period.

The increased effectiveness of public transit in Whitehorse means that:

- Residents that have no other means of transport can travel more often at an affordable cost;
- More people have affordable access to jobs, goods and services;

- Households can eventually do away with the need for a 2nd or 3rd vehicle, saving households several thousands of dollars every year. Among other benefits, this could result in more discretionary spending in the community for local goods and services;
- High school students have affordable access to attend after-school activities and part time jobs;
- College students do not have to own a vehicle, making education more affordable and potentially more attractive;
- Seniors have more affordable access to medical appointments, shopping and leisure activities;
- By reducing public reliance on private vehicles, Whitehorse is able to better meet the growing public, national and international expectations being directed at all levels of government to implement real reductions to carbon output;
- Transit has become a more integral component and driver of urban growth;
- With a good level of transit service, the City of Whitehorse becomes more competitive compared to other jurisdictions that place less emphasis on public transportation;

The Report Card developed has resulted in the following ratings given by Transit Consulting Network:

Criteria	Rating	Comments
Transit ridership growth	Excellent	Unprecedented growth since 2010
Service quantity	Excellent	Significantly higher than peer group, which indicates good local support
Service quality	Good	Continue to build on success of more direct service
Service coverage	Poor	83% of residents within 5 minute walk of bus stop versus 95% industry norm; consider increased service coverage
Transit costs	Excellent	Cost per hour and per passenger has decreased
Transit fare pricing	Good	Average fare has decreased but remains higher than peer group
Service efficiency	Good	Passengers carried per hour approximates peer group average
Service effectiveness	Excellent	Many improvements made to target specific markets
Environment	Excellent	Reduced City of Whitehorse carbon footprint

The expanded service coverage and hours of operation since 2010 provided by Whitehorse Transit has improved the quality of life for many residents. More importantly, the service better meets the needs of millennials who represent the future of transit. Improved and expanded services provide millennials the opportunity to defer getting their driver's license or purchasing a vehicle while some millennials may never need to own a vehicle as they enter the work force.

The expansion of service since 2010 combined with community outreach initiatives are paying dividends through more efficient and effective services. Whitehorse Transit should continue to build on its successes. In this regard, transit ridership in 2015 is on pace to approximate 630,000 passengers – an increase of 15% over 2014 and almost double the transit use in 2010.

Although Whitehorse Transit is a small system, it appears to have quickly grown as a mode of choice, which is difficult to accomplish in a smaller, low density urban environment. By building on recent successes and continuing with targeted marketing efforts, Whitehorse Transit can further improve efficiencies in the future.

It is the opinion of Transit Consulting Network that Whitehorse Transit has a story worth telling. Given the unprecedented growth in transit use over the last 5 years and the investment made by the City of Whitehorse to effect positive change, Whitehorse Transit appears to be an evolving success story.