



Re: Guelph Transit Action Plan – Route Review Recommended Plan

The Transit Action Alliance of Guelph (TAAG) has been working for four years to build support for [a fast, frequent, affordable](#), and [reliable](#) transit system for our community.

TAAG has diverse voices of residents, businesses, community groups, and others interested in having a high-quality transit network and supporting our [Essential Elements of Good Transit](#) guidelines. Our ongoing goal is to encourage investment in higher frequency transit service and ensure that **when transit corridors are built, they are accessible and provide high value for transit riders.**

We are pleased to see Guelph Transit include vital elements from the [Essential Elements of Good Transit](#) document.

Guelph residents clearly stated in the Community Plan Vision that our city and our region's ability to move freely within neighbourhoods was essential. As outlined in the Navigating Our Future section of the Strategic Plan, improving the transportation system's safety, efficiency, and connectivity is a priority.

The four key priorities Guelph Transit set out were:

- more routes that take people where they need to go
- quicker travel times
- frequent service
- more service reliability

The following principles should also be considered as well:

- Increase the proportion of resources dedicated to high ridership services
- Build a simplified, transfer-based system
- Invest in service quality and reliability
- Give transit increased priority in the transportation network

These priorities and principles are usually the pillars of a Transit Master Plan scheduled for 2022. These would need to be implemented robustly in a redesigned transit network.

The proposed network is transformational for our city and will significantly improve transit for all residents across Guelph. It is an important and necessary first step toward a transit network that satisfies what people need.

In particular, TAAG supports the move to a grid structure, away from a central hub system, with higher service levels on major corridors, four crosstown routes, and expanded Sunday service hours through the implementation of on-demand service.

The benefits are substantial:

- Routes will be straighter, meaning less meander-routes to destinations
- On some routes, Buses will arrive often, and transfers will be convenient throughout the whole city mid-route and at connection points;
- The proposed base and core network model means greater access to our city via public transit.

Our suggestions and comments on the plan:

#### **What this plan does well:**

- **New crosstown routes:** Routes 96, 97, 98 will significantly help cut travel times across the city.
- **Elimination of one-way loops on routes:** The shortening and elimination of one-way loops on various routes will help make transit more attractive.
- **New and expanded suburban terminals:** The Guelph Transit Garage, West End Community Centre, and Clair Maltby Hub Terminals, plus the expansion of the SmartCentres hub, will provide enhanced facilities for transferring passengers.
- **Extended Sunday service** with fixed routes and On-Demand options will significantly increase the attractiveness of transit, especially for those who need to access jobs and for university students returning to campus via transit.

#### **What could be improved:**

- **Removal of uniform frequency:** With many routes changing to every 20 minutes on weekdays, middays, and Saturdays, some transfer times will be lengthened, and trip times will have a greater degree of variability. Ideally, routes should operate every 15 or 30 minutes to ensure that journey times are more consistent when traveling.
- **Holiday Services:** While the move to a mix of fixed routes and on-demand may be fine for most holidays, several holidays demand better transit coverage, including Boxing Day, Civic Holiday, and Canada Day. There is also a need to extend Christmas Eve services with a mix of fixed routes and on-demand.
- **Additional Express Routes:** Express Routes should target high user locations.
- **Route Numbering:** Many routes will be two-way and have one route number. Route 13/23 goes against that and industry standard and should have one number throughout.

#### **Advocacy Points**

- **Transfer time:** Given the increase in the size of the network, it is likely that a 60-minute transfer will no longer be sufficient for a greater proportion of journeys. It is critical to ensure the expanded network would not penalize riders with longer trip times. A longer transfer time should be considered as part of the Fare Strategy.
- **Downtown Crosstown:** There is an opportunity for an east-west crosstown route through Downtown Guelph by combining routes. (i.e., Routes 4 and 10 or Routes 10 and 14 to create a Route 95 City Centre

- **Interlining:** Although the network greatly expands service, there are places where additional transfers may be required, which could increase journey time. More information will need to be provided on the planned route interlining and scheduling eliminating some of these transfers.
- **Missed Connections:** While many routes have the advantage of connecting to one or more terminals, many places on the network will require on-street connections and the construction of additional driver relief points. There are also a few opportunities to extend routes a short distance to eliminate transfers and create a more connection system:
  - Route 97 extension to Clair Maltby
  - Route 17 extension to University of Guelph.

## **Service Guidelines and Service Design Standards Guidelines Recommendations**

### **Stop Spacing**

Stop prioritization integrated with safe pedestrian crossings, major trail networks, and significant cycling network connections. Transit users are generally willing to walk 400 meters to a local stop or 800 meters to more frequent and rapid route. Eliminate chock points where stops are too close together i.e. Gordon between Water and Wellington St.

### **Service Coverage**

Recommendation to ensure that 90% of people are within 400m are seven days a week. Some transit agencies have 90% of their population within 400m, but many bus stops are only serviced by a couple of trips a day.

### **Family of services**

**Industrial expresses:** it might be a worthwhile idea. However, Guelph Transit will need to ensure that the vehicles used do not impact service availability for other routes. Some businesses and councillors may see it as "double-dipping". These businesses already pay property taxes and expect transit services to have predictive service to their business area.

Example: YRT (York Region Transit) operates a few of these for employers like Aviva, who pay to run a direct YRT shuttle from their office to the subway at Finch. We encourage Guelph Transit to work with the Guelph Chamber of Commerce to connect with the top major employers to see if this idea is feasible.

**On-Demand Transit:** An old idea made new by technology. It should be used strategically. It is not a replacement for fixed routes that carry more people per hour and cost less per person to operate.

### **On-Time performance**

It appears to be industry-standard, if not better. Implementing a wide range of transit priority measures will give transit a path around traffic and improve on-time performance, thus making transit more attractive.

### **Passenger loads**

We recommend clarifying the wording to say additional frequency rather than additional trips and would make it precise that additional frequency would lead to additional riders and revenue.

### **Service Hours & Frequency**

For service hour and frequency adjustments, we strongly stress that these measurements need to be taken on an annual basis or greater, not by board period. It would ensure that temporary, seasonal reductions in ridership do not impact service span. This step is critical to getting a fair and encodable transit system for all. We should be looking to add service as early as 5:00 a.m. and as late as 1:00 a.m. to cover shift workers.

The numbers presented did meet the mark for our city's size and growth; however, new information has changed our perspective. Due to the tight deadline, you will find that information in our Factsheets to be shared later today and over the weekend.

Research says people are willing to walk a little further to frequent transit. For example, Route 3 could run on a 30-minute all-day schedule while 98 Speedvale runs on a 15-minute all-day schedule. The Community bus would offer additional coverage to Route 3 customers, including St. Joseph's Hospital.

In 2012, Guelph Transit had all routes run on a [15-minute service](#) Mondays to Fridays **during peak hours** and **30-minute service** at all **other times of the week**. It then switched to all-day 20-minute service until 6:20 pm, before returning to 30-minute service at all other times of the week. The failure of this system can be attributed to a few things. The design of the route network has routes that were slow, with too many turns and loops, along with the lack of Transit Priority Measures and communication.

### **Other Areas of Concern:**

**Public Engagement:** This is the most significant proposed change in Guelph Transit's history, and it has the least amount of feedback compared to previous proposals and plans over the last 15 years.

In 2020-2021, with 20 months, Guelph Transit received:

- 11 employers answered back;
- 38 of 555 mailed surveys to individuals;
- The same three questions from the individual survey were asked individually using Twitter and Facebook;
- 169 survey responses via Haveyoursay;
- 25+ town hall participants between 2 online town halls;
- 7 email responses

Compared to 2015 proposal with a 3-month window, Guelph Transit received;

- 1,487 surveys completed;
- 3 public information sessions with 400 participants;
- MindMixer web portal had 188 participants, 592 interactions;
- Over 200 written responses from the public information sessions and emails.

COVID was defiantly an obstacle in gathering input; however, there appeared to be few opportunities advertised to participate, only 1 Twitter poll seen, and even fewer online events, posters on buses, and ads on social media asking for participation.

Your **Transit Advisory Committee** (TAC) was consulted earlier this year on the proposal and gave great feedback. However, TAC did not see the document at the last meeting in October, thus could not comment on this as a group. As this was only released to the public on November 4<sup>th</sup>, we are concerned that TAC's voice is not adequately being heard on the topic.

Giving people only seven full days to respond to an over 200-page complex document is not fair to the public. In the past, significant reports like this have been given at least 14 days for comment. We understand that Staff wanted this before budget; however, this is a disservice to the community.

### **Factsheets**

Due to the complexity of this document; the time to do research and prepare a response; you will receive additional information and factsheets over the weekend on:

- How Improving Frequency makes Transit an attractive option;
- How COVID19 is an opportunity to build back better;
- Economic, Environment, and Health impacts and ways to improve them;
- Climate impacts and opportunities for a more significant mode shift and;
- Why this plan falls short and what we can do to move forward together.

Our group will also post this information on our website, [www.taaguelph.com](http://www.taaguelph.com) for the public to see.

We all agree Transit can be the first choice for everyone. It is the first move. It is an investment in changing the way we see ourselves, the perception of our city, our quality of life, and our economic prospects. Our buses need to be faster, come more frequently and be more reliable. Buses need to quickly and easily connect more people to more destinations. Building a radically better bus system will help people who already use the bus, encourage more people to take the bus, and build ridership to support other transit projects.

The Guelph Transit Action Plan Route Review is a great starting point, but it is not ambitious enough and falls short in the Council's direction for utilization. We can work together to improve its execution, modal share, and rebuild ridership after COVID19.

Let's work together to take transit to the next level for our community, the climate, the business community, and each other.

We appreciate your consideration.



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