

REPORT

Engineering Services

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: July 8, 2024

From: Lisa Leblanc
Director, Engineering Services
File: 05.1035.10
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Item #: 2024-410

Subject: Bus Speed and Reliability Study

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council endorse the implementation of the proposed transit priority measures within the Bus Speed and Reliability Study, as outlined in this report.

PURPOSE

To provide Council with an overview of the Bus Speed and Reliability Study, as provided in Attachment #1, and to seek Council's endorsement to implement the proposed transit priority measures.

BACKGROUND

Parsons Corporation was retained in late 2022 to conduct a detailed technical review of the City's bus route network, to identify key areas of recurring transit delay and unreliability, and to identify potential transit priority measures that could be implemented to address these locations over the course of a 5-year implementation plan.

In addition to working closely with City and TransLink staff, the project team presented the study to the former Sustainable Transportation Advisory Committee (STAC) and Sustainable Transportation Task Force (STTF) in early 2023 for feedback to identify areas of concern and refine the work plan.

The study was completed late in 2023 and funded with 50% cost-sharing from TransLink's Bus Speed and Reliability (BSR) Program.

DISCUSSION

As outlined in the study report (Attachment #1), bus transit is experiencing recurring delays and reliability challenges at a number of 'hotspots' across New Westminster, with the critical locations being:

- At the north and south ends of the Queensborough Bridge (including Ewen Ave, Howes St, Sixth Ave at Twentieth St, Seventh Ave at Twentieth St);
- Along Sixth St;
- Along Eighth St;
- Along Sixth Ave between Fifth St and Twelfth St; and,
- Downtown (generally along Carnarvon St).

The study identifies potential transit priority measures to address each of these locations, and considers their prioritization in the context of bus hours of delay, person hours of delay, and an equity index (considering certain demographic factors). The measures vary from signal upgrades to roadway geometric changes, potentially requiring operational trade-offs for general purpose vehicles and/or road space re-allocation to implement.

Potential projects are outlined in a 5-year implementation plan comprising 12 projects. Staff will tailor the implementation of these projects to the capital funding available, and may request additional budget through the annual review process for the 5-year capital plan to shift priorities as needed, particularly for larger projects that are estimated to cost beyond the existing annual budgets. Some of these larger projects may also be coordinated with related capital projects, such as signal replacement and/or Active Transportation Network Plan initiatives (e.g., Sixth St and Fifth Ave intersection modifications), and many will also require further technical development and outreach to residents and businesses.

Staff will also seek to coordinate with development opportunities where possible and will utilize external funding programs, particularly TransLink's BSR program, to offset the costs of delivering these projects. TransLink has a strong interest in advancing transit priority projects region-wide and the BSR program funds up to 100% of project costs, noting the significant operating costs incurred when buses are delayed in general traffic. It should be noted that, although coordinating with re-developments provides crucial implementation opportunities, it also requires adaptable budgets and staff work plans to accommodate designs on a timely basis.

Proposed modifications within close proximity of the north and south ends of the Queensborough Bridge (e.g. Twentieth Street at Sixth Avenue) are within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI), and will require significant lead time and coordination. Based on initial discussions with MoTI staff regarding planned active transportation upgrades along Howes Street, no further adjustments to the roadway to accommodate transit priority measures are currently planned, so further engagement with MoTI will likely be necessary to emphasize the importance of this project to the City and TransLink. Advancement of the proposed transit priority upgrades

will likely require some City-led work, with design concepts and analysis results presented to MoTI for consideration and implementation.

Also to note are the projects along Twentieth Street, which are currently undergoing interdepartmental coordination given the work on the 22nd Street SkyTrain Station Area Plan and nearby developments.

As an immediate outcome of the BSR study, staff have initiated work to deliver three projects in the near term:

- Twentieth Street and Seventh Avenue intersection upgrades – currently being designed and planned for implementation later this year in coordination with the Crosstown Greenway upgrades, which in turn is being completed as part of the Active Transportation Network Plan (ATNP) Year 1 projects. The design and construction components of this project have approved funding from TransLink’s 2024 BSR program.
- Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street intersection upgrades – planned for design later this year and implementation in 2025, in coordination with Eighth Street sidewalk upgrades. The design component of this project has approved funding from TransLink’s 2024 BSR program, and staff plan to submit a subsequent application for funding the construction component via the 2025 program.
- Carnarvon Street at Sixth Street and Eighth Street signal changes – currently planned for design later this year and implementation in 2025. The design component of this project has approved funding from TransLink’s 2024 BSR program, and staff plan to submit a subsequent application for funding the construction component via the 2025 program.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

In addition to helping achieve the City’s sustainability goals outlined in the Master Transportation Plan and Bold Steps toward Climate Action, the study’s proposed transit priority measures will also promote low-impact transportation modes and the reduction in trips by motor vehicles, which is a key direction of Envision 2032, the Community Energy and Emissions Plan. The projects also support economic development objectives, providing commuters with sustainable travel options, and social and cultural objectives, including supporting healthy transportation options, and providing more convenient access to services and recreation facilities.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Implementation of the proposed transit priority projects outlined in the study is estimated at approximately \$2,655,000, noting the approved 2024-2028 capital plan currently includes \$1,250,100 of funding for transit priority. Projects are planned to be delivered and managed through annual capital budgets and staff may seek additional budget through the annual 5-year capital plan review process and shift priorities as needed.

Additionally, staff will seek to coordinate projects with development opportunities and utilize external funding programs, including TransLink’s BSR program, to offset the capital costs to deliver these projects.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Interdepartmental liaison to date has included coordination with Planning and Development staff.

OPTIONS

The following options are presented for Council's consideration:

- 1. That Council endorse the implementation of the proposed transit priority measures within the Bus Speed and Reliability Study, as outlined in this report; and,
- 2. That Council provide staff with other direction.

Staff recommend Option 1.

CONCLUSION

The Bus Speed and Reliability Study presents a roadmap for transit priority projects to help the City improve bus transit, in alignment with the City’s Master Transportation Plan and Bold Steps for Climate Action goals.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – New Westminster Bus Speed and Reliability Study

APPROVALS

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