

Date: 2023-11-23

Subject: **Brampton Transit - Approval to Increase the Transit Operator Complement by 50 Full Time Equivalent (FTEs)**

Contact: Heidi Dempster, General Manager, Transit

Report Number: Brampton Transit-2023-1040

Recommendations:

1. That the report from Heidi Dempster, General Manager, Transit to the Special Council Meeting of December 5, 2023, re: **Brampton Transit – Approval to Increase the Transit Operator Complement by 50 Full Time Equivalent (FTEs)**, be received;
2. That Council approve the increase of complement for Transit Operators by 50 FTEs, at a \$0 budget impact, to be funded through operational savings, as a measure to address service demand, operator absenteeism and long-term absences.

Overview:

- Brampton Transit is the fastest growing large transit agency in the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area (GTHA), and likely the country, having fully recovered from the pandemic and now exceeding pre-COVID ridership levels by almost 30%.
- As ridership continues to significantly exceed projections outlined within the approved budget, additional demands above regular service requirements are being experienced.
- In order to meet these unprecedented operational and service demands, there is an urgent need for more transit operators. This report seeks approval from Council to increase the current complement for full-time Transit Operators by 50 FTEs.
- This measure is required in order to meet operational and service demands as a result of operators not being available to drive based on the following circumstances:

- long-term absences, greater than 6 months, with no prospect of returning to work in the foreseeable future; and/or
 - permanent medical restrictions resulting in the inability to return to work as an operator; and
 - increased employee absenteeism.
- Operator absences, while contributing to labour savings, are creating the need for additional overtime utilization.
 - Transit is seeking Council approval to add 50 Operator FTEs at a \$0 budget impact, to be funded through operational savings.
 - Approval of the 50 Operator FTEs will allow for the more efficient utilization of Council approved labour dollars.

Background:

Brampton Transit is the fastest growing large transit agency in the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area (GTHA), and likely the country, having fully recovered from the pandemic and now exceeding pre-COVID ridership levels by almost 30%. The last eight months have seen well over 3 million rides per month.

When ridership demands exceed projections outlined within the approved budget, additional demands above regular service requirements are experienced and pressures on available staff resources occur.

Brampton Transit is limited in the amount of operators they can hire based on the Council approved FTE complement. Transit operators off on long-term absences, permanent medical restrictions or general absenteeism, while unable to drive, remain included in the overall operator complement.

Pursuant to Corporate Policy 3.1.0, staffing complement is established annually as part of the business planning and budget process to meet the service and program needs of the City, as approved by City Council.

Current Situation:

Brampton Transit, within its current transit operator complement, is being challenged to meet Council approved service, as a result of transit operators not being available to drive based on the following categories:

- a) Long-term absences, greater than 6 months, with no prospect of returning to work in the foreseeable future; and/or

- b) Permanent medical restrictions resulting in the inability to return to work as an operator; and
- c) Increased employee absenteeism.

In order to deliver Council approved service and meet unprecedented operational and service demands, there is an urgent need to increase the current complement for full-time transit operators by 50 FTEs.

This measure will specifically address operators who have been off from active employment due to long term illness/injury (greater than 6 months) and those who have permanent medical restrictions that prevent them from driving a bus. It will also help address overtime hours and costs associated with current rates of absenteeism.

The proposed 50 operators will also support managing regular employee absenteeism (vacation, statutory holiday and short-term sick leave, etc.) which has significantly increased in the past few years.

As ridership continues to significantly exceed projections outlined within the approved budget, the following operational factors are occurring:

1. Service cancellations due to insufficient operator staffing levels related to absenteeism.

- Transit is experiencing instances of cancelled service due to a shortage of operators.
- Cancellations negatively impact services provided to the community and increase travel time for residents.

2. Overtime (OT) hours are being assigned to maintain scheduled service where possible, which increases the OT budget.

- Transit is having to utilize OT in an attempt to meet service demands.
- Ministry of Labour permits members of the ATU bargaining unit to voluntarily work overtime, up to a maximum of sixty (60) hours in a week (including regular time).
 - By the end of week, filling assigned OT can be problematic as some operators have maxed out their hours, and therefore cannot be utilized for OT.

3. Increased Absenteeism:

- Transit has seen an increase in operator absenteeism since COVID-19, with the average operators not driving increasing almost 3 times.

- Transit restarted the Attendance Assistance Program for ATU employees on July 1, 2022 which was paused during the pandemic.
 - This program follows semi-annual reviews of attendance data and progresses employees through various stages of the program to achieve improvements in overall attendance.
 - Transit is working with Human Resources in exploring absenteeism factors, potential improvements and disability management.
- Operators are provided annual sick credits by the City. Once all credits have been exhausted there is no cost impact to the City.
- The Long-Term Disability (LTD) program for operators is administered by the ATU Union and their insurance provider. With the exception of the continuation of City paid benefits, the City does not incur labour costs for staff on LTD.

Since Brampton Transit has reached the maximum number of operators permitted, based on Council approvals, additional approval is required to increase the complement for full-time transit operators. This will improve the City's ability to avoid service cancellations, due to staffing shortages, and will result in a reduction of overtime hours and associated costs. This will allow for the more efficient utilization of Council approved labour dollars.

Corporate Implications:

Financial Implications:

The recommendation to increase the complement for full-time transit operators, by 50, would come at no additional cost to the City, as the costs associated with these additional operators would be funded through operational savings.

HR Implications:

There continues to be higher levels of operators on long-term absences (greater than 6 months), operators with medical restrictions preventing them from returning to driving a bus and operators off due to general absenteeism.

Increasing the full-time complement by 50 operators will allow Transit to fill positions where employees are off work or unable to perform the duties of an operator for extended periods of time, due to medical restriction/illness and combat current absenteeism rates.

Transit will continue to review absenteeism levels, and if operators return to driving and the additional 50 FTES are no longer operationally required, Transit will make

adjustments through attrition and new service positions. Over the previous years, 35 to 50 operators per year have left the City for various reasons (attrition, internal movement, retirement, etc.). Additional growth positions also continue to be added to the full-time operator complement on an annual basis through the budget process.

Strategic Focus Area:

This report supports the Brampton 2040 Vision: Living the Mosaic, by achieving the following enhanced strategic priorities:

- **Transit & Connectivity:** Focusing on transportation and a connected infrastructure that is safe, convenient, efficient, and sustainable by enhancing transit services.
- **Environmental Resilience & Sustainability:** Focusing on nurturing and protecting our environment for a sustainable future by enhancing energy and climate resilience.
- **Growing Urban Centres & Neighbourhoods:** Focusing on an economy that thrives with communities that are strong and connected by investing in Strategic Growth Areas

Conclusion:

In this report, staff have developed a strategy and recommendation for Council's consideration and approval, which reflect the unique situation Transit is facing and will allow the City to continue providing critical transit service that Brampton residents depend on.

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