



REPORT

Council

Meeting Date: October 21, 2024

FROM: Oakville Transit

DATE: October 8, 2024

SUBJECT: Oakville Transit 2025 – 2029 Five-Year Business Plan

LOCATION: Town-wide

WARD: Town-wide

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RECOMMENDATION:

That the Oakville Transit 2025-2029 Business Plan be adopted in principle and used to guide transit service planning and operations over the next five years, subject to annual budget review.

KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- Oakville Transit operates diverse transit services (Family of Services) includes fixed route conventional services and On-Demand Services.
- Oakville Transit is on a trajectory of growth and requires a plan to guide the department forward.
- A Five-Year Business Plan has been completed with the consultant HDR Corporation to guide the planning and operation of Oakville Transit over the next five years 2025-2029.
- The Five-Year Business Plan is highly responsive to the needs of customers identified through public consultation.
- The Plan is aligned with Provincial, Regional and Local planning initiatives, including the Town's Strategic Plan, and will be incorporated into the Transportation Master Plan.
- The Plan identified service and bus stop guidelines, a Frequent Transit Network (FTN), a future route network including expanded On-Demand service, programming, staffing needs and fare strategies.

- A service frequency review was completed identifying three possible service scenarios with staff recommending Scenario 1 - Base Service, that will increase service level from 60 minutes to 30 minutes.
- Implementation of staff recommendations will be considered through the Annual Planning and Budget processes.

BACKGROUND:

Oakville Transit provides a Family of Services transit system to Oakville residents.

Oakville Transit has been operating as the Town's public transit provider since 1972. The department is responsible for all aspects of transit service delivery, including transit operations, planning and support services, fleet maintenance, and On-Demand services.

The Family of Services includes fixed route conventional services and On-Demand Services. On-Demand service is a shared ride service that includes specialized transit for persons with disabilities, curb to curb, and point to hub travel within designated neighbourhoods.

Oakville Transit operates a conventional fleet of 102 buses and provides service on 22 fixed routes. On-Demand services are provided using 28 small capacity, accessible buses.

Annually, Oakville Transit reviews how the system is operating, identifies areas for improvements, reviews customer feedback, and recommends changes to transit services for the upcoming year based on operating and capital requirements. In 2024, key improvements were made in North Oakville with the implementation of fixed Route 37 – Glenorchy, increased school special services with the return to school, the introduction of Ride On-Demand services in Falgarwood, Palermo West Bronte, and Late-Night Service, and expansion of Ride On-Demand services in South East Oakville. The fixed route conventional services and Ride On-Demand maps are identified in **Appendix A: Oakville Transit 2024 System Route Maps**.

Oakville Transit is in a period of ridership growth.

Ridership on the Oakville Transit system is reported primarily using revenue ridership statistics. Revenue ridership identifies the number of passengers who initially tap to board transit vehicles, regardless of whether they are paying and does not count transfers to other routes during a trip. For the purposes of this report, it is referred to as "tap boarding".

In 2019, Oakville Transit had 3.1 million tap boardings on the system. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns significantly impacted ridership, reducing it to 1.3 million tap boardings in 2020 and 2021. Ridership began returning to the system with tap boardings reaching 2.2 million and 3 million in 2022 and 2023 respectively. Staff are estimating tap boardings in 2024 will reach 3.2 million, the highest tap boardings ever seen on Oakville Transit services. Additional information regarding current Oakville Transit ridership can be found in **Appendix B: Oakville Transit Ridership Statistics** of this report.

Coming out of the pandemic, ridership increases and changes in travel patterns from post pandemic travel behaviour changes (for example, work from home) have been realized, but ridership has also increased through the introduction of free fares for Youth and Seniors introduced in May 2023.

To help staff identify the overall impacts on the transit system based on travel pattern and fare changes, total boarding statistics are used to monitor specifically how much the system is being used. This statistic includes tap boardings and transfers to other routes during a trip. Staff use this statistic to identify the increased movements on the system and the impact it has on service. Staff are estimating total boardings in 2024 will reach 4.7 million as ridership from all fare categories continue to increase. This represents an approximate 15% increase in transit total boardings when compared to 4 million total boardings in 2023.

The last Five-Year plan was created in 2015.

In 2015, Oakville Transit completed a Transit Service Review which included a review of all conventional / specialized transit services, administration / support services, and identified recommendations for new transit services. A financial analysis based on ridership and revenue forecasts was also prepared for transit services from 2015 to 2019. The COVID pandemic and subsequent recovery years delayed the preparation of the next Five-Year Business Plan.

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of 2025 – 2029 Oakville Transit Five-Year Business Plan, and staff's recommendation for implementation.

COMMENT/OPTIONS:

The Town of Oakville is on a growth trajectory and requires a transit plan to support that growth.

Oakville is experiencing robust growth, with its population expanding by 13.6% between 2016 and 2021, and with projections suggesting further increases in the range of 388,000 to 442,000 by 2051. Growth nodes and urban centres such as

Midtown and North Oakville are planned to create vibrant, transit supportive urban environments and foster economic prosperity within Oakville's growing community.

To support future growth, the Oakville Transit Five-Year Business plan was developed to encourage ridership growth in an efficient manner, improving access, reliability and frequency to the town's residents, and setting the foundation of the future Frequent Transit Network (FTN).

The Oakville Transit Five-Year Business Plan is complete and provides Oakville Transit a roadmap for future implementation.

Oakville Transit hired consultant HDR Corporation to prepare the Oakville Transit Five-Year Business Plan (**Appendix C: 2025 – 2029 Oakville Transit Five-Year Business Plan**), with the following objectives:

- Align with Council's Strategic priorities, as well as other key plans and studies throughout the 2025 to 2029 period, and beyond
- Further develop the Family of Services transit network
- Support ridership growth, post pandemic
- Guide the implementation of Oakville Transit's strategies, policies, and guidelines
- Accommodate future growth
- Address the ever-changing needs of the community

To meet the above objectives, the Five-Year Business Plan provides recommendations specifically on the following throughout the 2025 to 2029 period:

- New and updated service guidelines
- Proposed future network of transit services
- Service frequency changes
- Fare and non-fare strategies
- Programming and staffing recommendations

The Business Plan recommendations will be reviewed through Oakville Transit annual service plan and town's budget processes over the 2025 to 2029 period. The implementation of this comprehensive plan is significant for Oakville Transit's future, ensuring a resilient, efficient, and adaptable system that meets the community's evolving needs and financial resources.

The Five-Year Business Plan conducted comprehensive public consultation and is customer focused.

Public transit exists for the *public*, and therefore it was critical that the plan include consultation of our customers and stakeholders. Two phases of public consultation were conducted for the Plan, including online and in-person formats at over 11 locations throughout the Town, with approximately 1,000 citizens observing the

drop-in session. A total of 110 attendees provided direct feedback and 241 completed online surveys.

Key Themes from the Consultation Process:

- Schedule frequency: a desire for increased service frequency, particularly during off-peak periods. The existing 30-minute or one-hour intervals for most routes were deemed insufficient.
- On-time performance: Service delays and poor punctuality were prominent concerns, deemed crucial for meeting customer expectations.
- Driver interactions: Interaction issues with transit drivers were raised, with friendliness below expectations.
- Bus stops and shelters: Concerns regarding the condition and functionality of stops and shelters, and access in new development areas.
- Integration with GO Trains and more direct service: Better connections with GO Trains and more direct routes to key destinations like downtown Oakville.
- Emphasis on reliability and accessibility: Emphasis on improving service reliability and enhancing accessibility for riders with disabilities.
- Supportive infrastructure and information: Improvements in supportive infrastructure, including more complete schedule and route information at bus stops.
- Specific route suggestions: Specific route suggestions reflecting residents' preferences for neighbourhood connections and access to key destinations like GO Stations and downtown Oakville.

The proposed recommendations in the 2025 – 2029 Oakville Transit Five-Year Business Plan have been developed to improve access and transit travel opportunities for customers, with the customer at the centre. Key recommendations from the Business Plan are highlighted in the sections below.

Service and Design Guidelines

Service Guidelines were developed and updated to inform network planning and service level decisions.

Service Guidelines assist in managing performance and informing planning and operations decisions by setting minimum data requirements and facilitating efficient performance monitoring. The following service guidelines are examples of guidelines that have been updated in the Five-Year Business Plan:

- Route Guidelines – Directness / Hierarchy /Service areas
- Route Performance – Demand for service / Minimum boarding standards
- On Time Performance – Reliability of service
- System Guidelines – Hours of service per capita / Revenue to cost

A full list and description of the updated Service Guidelines can be found in Appendix C of the 2025 – 2029 Oakville Transit Business Plan. These guidelines will be used to make decisions through annual planning process regarding route changes (frequency, routing etc.) and on-demand service areas.

Bus Stop Design Guidelines were developed to ensure provision of safe and accessible space for transit riders.

The Bus Stop Design Guidelines provide a comprehensive review of best practices and recommend guidelines for Oakville Transit to enhance accessibility, safety, and comfort at transit stops. The Bus Stops Design Guidelines include references to walkway clearances and access to the active transportation network to accommodate all transit users. The following Bus Stop Design Guidelines are examples of guidelines that have been updated:

- Stop Placement – far side of intersections
- Stop Spacing – 400m for local services and 800m for School Specials and Industrial/Express Routes.

It is also recommended that Active Transportation access to and from all bus stops be considered in the bus stop planning. The principles of 5A (Always Available for All Ages & Abilities) Network Guiding Principles and Universal Design Standards are useful guides for assessing Active Transportation access.

The complete details of the Bus Stop Design Guidelines can be found in Appendix D of the 2025 – 2029 Oakville Transit Business Plan. These guidelines will be adopted through asset renewal activities (bus stop replacement program) and for new stops.

Expansion of Family of Services and Proposed Future Transit Network

To ensure Oakville Transit supports the growth of the Town of Oakville and provides transit services which are coordinated and connected within Halton Region and in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, it was imperative that the Business Plan align with the numerous local, Regional and Provincial initiatives and growth plans, in addition to aligning with Council's Strategic Plan and the currently on-going Town's Transportation Master Plan.

A proposed Frequent Transit Network (FTN) is identified to be implemented long-term and incorporated as part of the Town's Transportation Master Plan

The Frequent Transit Network, **Appendix D: Oakville Transit Frequent Transit Network**, identifies a grid network of transit routes planned to operate 10-to-15-minute frequencies all day. Routes would operate in the transit priority corridors

outlined in Provincial, Regional, and Metrolinx Transit Priority Corridors, along with major corridors and growth nodes identified in Oakville's Urban Structure Plan.

The Frequent Transit Network has been identified as a longer-term goal for Oakville Transit to achieve. The recommendation is incorporated as part of the Transportation Master Plan, as the implementation of the network is beyond the 5-year timeframe of the 2025 – 2029 Oakville Transit Five-Year Business Plan.

Realignment of routes and increased service frequencies are planned to increase ridership throughout the Oakville Transit system.

The Family of Services 2025 – 2029 route network for Oakville Transit will form a coherent, interconnected system with two FTN routes operating on Trafalgar and Dundas, operating at 10–15-minute frequencies. The recommended network incorporates two service types under the Family of Services that include:

- Fixed routes - planned to be bi-directional, straight, and direct, avoiding large one-way loops and route overlaps within corridors where possible and will anchor routes at major destinations, enhancing efficiency and reliability. Routes have been planned to operate in a grid-like manner, where possible, to allow for more transferability between transit routes in the system. The following classification of routes have been identified within the Fixed routes category:
 - FTN: Major corridor routes that operate at a frequency of 15 minutes or better every day from at least 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. and may be less frequent at other times.
 - Primary Route: Major corridor routes that operate at a frequency of 15 minutes or better during the weekday rush hours and less frequent at other times depending on demand. These routes may develop into future FTN routes.
 - Base Route: Local routes that connect with and serve the areas between the FTN and Primary Routes. These services may operate at a frequency of 15 minutes or less during weekday rush hours and less frequent at other times.
 - Special Purpose Routes: School Specials, Industrial and Express Routes. Frequency and hours of operation would vary depending on demand.
- On-Demand - Low-performing or more remote neighborhoods areas will be served by On-Demand transit services which will feed into the fixed route system.

The future proposed 2025 – 2029 Network identified in **Appendix E: 2025-2029 Family of Services Transit Map**, focuses on developing fully connected major north-south and east-west corridors, emphasizing Primary and Base routes over extensive service coverage, and number of areas complimented with On-Demand service. A few recommended route changes include increased transit services operating into the Downtown area, expanded Ride On-Demand services throughout the Town, and more gridding of transit routes throughout the network.

The proposed network could be implemented over 5-year period and includes enhancement to the service through the increase in frequencies, subject to annual budget approval.

Service Frequency Review

With the proposed network (2025-2029 Family of Services Transit Map) established and updated service guidelines recommended, the consultant reviewed opportunities to increase service frequencies to improve overall service levels. Currently, many Oakville Transit routes are operating with 30 – 60 minute frequencies throughout the day. Based on public feedback, there is a desire to have more frequent transit service available throughout the day to make transit a viable and accessible service as opposed using cars.

Service scenarios were prepared in the Five-Year Business Plan, all intended to improve the bus service frequencies.

Three service scenarios are identified in the 2025 – 2025 Oakville Transit Five – Year Business Plan and are described below:

- Scenario 1 — Base Case Scenario:
Identifies service level increases where most routes operate at a frequency of 30 minutes (from the current 30 – 60 minutes), with key routes such as Trafalgar and Dundas having more frequent service at 15 minutes.
- Scenario 2 — Mid-Range:
The Mid-Range scenario identifies modest improvements over the base case scenario. Service frequencies improve to 20 minutes for several routes, while key routes maintain a 15-minute frequency, providing more frequent service compared to service operating today.
- Scenario 3 — Recommended (by consultant):
Identifies the most significant frequency improvements across most routes, with many routes operating at 10-to-20-minute frequencies. Key routes have the most frequent service, with frequency improved to 10 minutes on routes such as Trafalgar, Third Line, and Dundas.

Table 1 below identifies the service scenarios associated impacts over the 5-year period for revenue, annual hours of operation, peak bus fleet requirements, additional annual operating costs, and includes the recommended staffing increases. Each of the service scenarios utilized the proposed future network, but with scalable levels of service (frequencies).

Table 1: Comparison of service scenarios

Service Scenario	Estimated Tap Ridership/boardings (2025-2029)	Total Operating Hours required (2025-2029)	Total Additional Vehicles required for service (2025-2029)	Total Additional Service Operating Cost (2025-2029)
Base Case (staff recommended)	20.4M	71K	19	\$10M
Mid-Range	22.4M	133K	33	\$15M
Recommended (consultant)	25.7M	216K	52	\$23M

When reviewing the service scenarios, all three scenarios identify an increase in tap boardings based on the number of operating hours required. With the increase in operating hours, the number of vehicles to implement the scenarios is also increased.

Staff recommends adoption of the Based Case Service Scenario as the roadmap to increase service over the next 5 years and implemented through the annual planning and budget process.

The three scenarios analyzed by the consultant provide Oakville Transit a range of options in providing increasing level of service. The recommended option by the consultant is a long-term vision for Oakville Transit, and staff recognize it will take many years to achieve, well beyond the 5-year time frame.

Staff recommends the adoption of the Base Case Service Scenario, which will require approximately \$10M in additional operating budget, 71K of additional service hours, and 19 additional buses to implement.

The proposed future network, along with a more moderate service enhancement strategy will meet the needs of customers, and enhance the current transit network and service by:

- Creating a FTN to support movement through the town and future growth
- Implementing a new route network including more direct and gridded routes
- Expanding On-Demand services to new neighbourhoods or areas of low transit demand
- Increasing schedule frequency from 60 to 30-minute frequencies on most routes
- Improving on-time performance and reliability

- Improving transit amenities such as bus stops and shelters to be more accessible for users
- Increasing integration with GO Trains and other municipal transit partners
- Incorporating specific route suggestions provided through public consultation making transit services more attractive

Implementation of the proposed 2025 – 2029 Family of Services network and the Scenario 1 - Base Case service frequencies will be coordinated through the Annual Transit Service Planning process. Staff, as part of the 2025 Annual Service Plan, are recommending beginning implementing service frequency changes and route restructuring, specifically on Route 5 – Dundas and Route 1 – Trafalgar. Changes to the network and service frequencies may begin in the spring 2025, pending a final review of the 2024 fall services, subject to budget approvals.

Fare and non-fare strategies

Fare and non-fare revenue opportunities were explored to enhance the financial sustainability of Oakville Transit.

During the preparation of the Oakville Transit Five-Year Business Plan, both fare and non-fare revenue strategies were explored to enhance the financial sustainability and support the expansion of transit services.

The consultant suggested fare revenue strategies for consideration that included:

- Explore the Town covering the remaining 50% of SPLIT fares for eligible low-income individuals.
- Re-evaluate the provision of free transit for Youth and Seniors to ensure that investments in transit deliver maximum community benefit.
- Review the implementation of the Monthly Fare Cap program to remove the up-front cost of monthly transit passes.
- Explore future opportunities to implement a U-Pass program for post-secondary students at Sheridan College, as well as considering similar transit pass programs for employees through discounted monthly pass programs with major employers within the Town.
- Phase out the current PRESTO Discount over three years, with a \$0.40 discount in 2025, \$0.20 discount in 2026 and no discount in 2027.
- Evolve into a Flat Fare System wherein all fares, with the exception of Child fares, are the same and there are no discounts

Non-fare revenue strategies focus on leveraging alternative sources of funding to augment traditional fare revenue and government subsidies. The traditional initiatives of advertising on transit vehicles and property, vehicle charters, and sponsorships of transit property or events should continue to be developed.

The following initiatives are examples of revenue streams which may assist to increase non-fare revenue at the Town:

- Expanded additional on-street digital advertising (Oakville Transit began implementing digital advertising at bus shelters in 2024).
- Sale of on-bus digital advertising
- Retail at terminal locations
- Sponsorship opportunities
- Monetizing benefits of electrification

Staff will further review the applicability of the fare and non-fare revenue strategies proposed by the consultant and bring forward the opportunities to council as required.

Programming and staffing recommendations

Programming such as travel training and education/marketing of transit further enhances town's strategic goal of enhancing mobility through improvements to diverse and more sustainable modes of travel.

To support the overall operation of Oakville Transit, the department consists of four sections: Transit Operations, Planning and Administrative services, Fleet Maintenance, and On-Demand services. Apart from operating transit buses, program support in a number of areas is recommended which include:

- Increased promotion and education activities such as implementing travel training to students and creating partnership with school boards
- Utilization of technology to increase on-time performance
- Modernization of transit fleet maintenance activities

These recommendations will be implemented by the department through a continuous improvement process with the objective to gain operational efficiencies and enhance customer experience.

A staffing plan was prepared to support Oakville Transit Five Year Transit Plan

Higher customer expectations for service performance and infrastructure maintenance increases the requirements for systems support, additional transit programming such as travel training and marketing, and a more robust transit staffing presence in the community. It should be noted that some positions (bus operators, mechanics, utility service persons for example) are required as the transit fleet size increases.

To achieve the Business Plan at Base Case Service, Oakville Transit would need to add staff over the next five years as identified in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Recommended staff FTEs for 2025-2029

Staffing identified in the 2025 – 2029 Five-Year Business Plan (Base Case)*						
Position	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	Total
Operational Planner	1.0					1.0
Revenue Clerk Analyst	0.5					0.5
Transit Supervisor (On-Demand)		1.0			1.0	2.0
Transit Supervisor (Operations)		1.0	1.0	1.0		3.0
Marketing and Communications		1.0				1.0
Electronics Technician		1.0				1.0
Electrification Program Manager			1.0			1.0
Infrastructure Coordinator		1.0				1.0
Travel Trainer		1.0				1.0
Dispatch/Administrative Clerk			1.0			1.0
Mechanic		1.0		1.0		2.0
Control Room Supervisor			1.0		1.0	2.0
Transit Driver Trainer			1.0			1.0
Utility Service Person		1.0	1.0			2.0
On-Demand Call Centre Supervisor				1.0		1.0
Transit Operators		6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	24.0
Total FTE's	1.5	14.0	12.0	9.0	8.0	44.5

*Staffing to be requested by year during the budget planning process.

Additional staff support enhances customer service by implementing transit specific programs, maintaining existing operational service level legislative requirements, and support the operation of on-street customers and transit services. Future request for staffing will be based on the pace of the 2025-2029 Oakville Transit Five-Year Business plan implementation, annual service review, and subject to the annual budget process.

CONCLUSION

The 2025 – 2029 Oakville Transit Five-Year Business plan provides a road map to guide future Oakville Transit decisions

The 2025 – 2029 Oakville Transit Five-Year Business Plan aligns with and supports Council's Strategic goals, as well as the planned transportation, transit and growth plans at the local, Regional and Provincial levels.

Staff recommends the following:

- Adoption of the Transit Five-Year Business Plan in principle
- Adoption of the service and design guidelines

- Incorporation of the Frequent Transit Network into the Transportation Master Plan
- Adoption of the 2025-2029 Family of Services Transit Map
- Implementing Scenario 1- Base Case Scenario to enhance service levels
- Continue to improve programming and support efficient operations of Oakville Transit through the staffing plan
- Further review of fare and non-fare revenue strategies to help increase the revenues to the Town offsetting the cost to operate transit services

The above will establish a foundation for enhancing the transit Family of Services provided by Oakville Transit. The realignment of transit routes, the increases in service frequency, the focus on programming such as travel training, and the adoption of service and bus stop design guidelines will all bring tangible improvements and enhancements to transit riders and Town residents. Further, the implementation of this Business Plan will encourage ridership growth in an efficient manner, improving access, reliability and frequency to the town's residents, and setting foundation of the future FTN.

The implementation of staff recommendations will require the full five years to implement and is planned to be phased in through the Annual Planning and Budget process.

CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) PUBLIC

Oakville residents and transit customers will realize several benefits associated with an improved transit network and subsequent increased use of transit as a viable mobility option. These include:

- A reduction in vehicular congestion
- Improved air quality
- Improved social connectivity and sense of community and belonging
- Improved road safety
- Greater access to employment opportunities
- Improved ability to attract new businesses

(B) FINANCIAL

The recommendations contained in the Oakville Transit Five-Year Business Plan have financial impacts and will need to be considered through the Annual Planning and Budget processes and weighed against other corporate priorities.

Some components of the Base Case identified in this staff report are already included in the 10-year capital forecast, while other components increase the town's level of service and will result in additional budget pressures. The

annual budget process will consider these pressures, along with other corporate priorities.

(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS

The Oakville Transit Five-Year Business Plan has been developed in coordination with the Finance and Transportation and Engineering teams as ensuring transit services can be implemented efficiently, and in coordination with future transportation planning initiatives.

(D) COUNCIL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

This report addresses the corporate strategic goal(s) to:

- Manage growth for a vibrant local economy, meeting infrastructure needs and ensuring we have complete communities and efficient mobility across the town
- Enhance community belonging, by providing a mechanism for residents to stay connected to employment, recreation and social activities in the town.
- Ensure environmental sustainability to meet future needs related to greenspaces and natural areas, and act on climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Be accountable, by recommending a transit network that promotes efficiency and fiscal responsibility of assets and services.

(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION

The implementation of the staff recommendations identified in the Oakville Transit Five-Year Business Plan have a direct effect on our climate by encouraging transit usage and reducing the reliance on vehicles and promoting active transportation, as all transit customers begin their journeys as pedestrians.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A: Oakville Transit 2024 System Route Maps

Appendix B: Oakville Transit Ridership Statistics

Appendix C: 2025 – 2029 Oakville Transit Five-Year Business Plan

Appendix D: Oakville Transit Frequent Transit Network

Appendix E: 2025-2029 Family of Services Transit Map

Prepared by:

Joanne Phoenix, Manager, Service Planning and Administration, Oakville Transit
Adrian Kawun, Director, Oakville Transit

Submitted by:

Adrian Kawun, Director, Oakville Transit