

Wood Buffalo Transit Master Plan Recommendations

February 2021

Agenda

1. Transit Routes & Services
2. Transit Accessibility and Comfort
3. SMART Bus
4. Affordability
5. Trip Planning



Transit Routes & Services

Transit Routes & Services

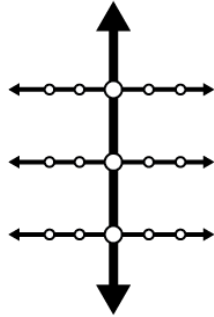
A key element of the Wood Buffalo Transit Master Plan is the ***conceptual*** transit network. Your input will inform this guiding document; any specific service changes will be made following subsequent community consultation.

The proposed network is based on feedback received during the first round of engagement:

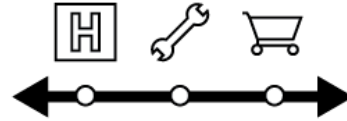
- Services don't run late or early enough
- Journey times are too slow
- Wait times are too long
- Consider On Demand services



Principles of the Transit Network



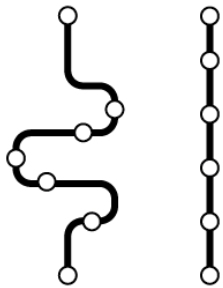
High Frequency
as the Anchor



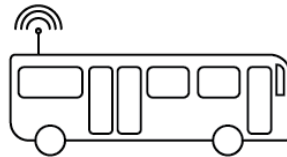
Serve Major Destinations



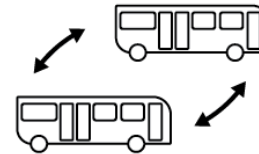
Connectivity to Schools



Improve Directness



Integration
with On-Demand



Reduce Transfers



Ridership

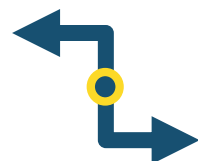
Proposed Service Types

Core



- High frequency core services
- Spine of network

Neighbourhood



- Fill gaps between Core routes
- Connects local destinations

On Demand



- Serves low-density and emerging areas
- Connects to Core and Local routes

SMART Bus



- Door-to-door service
- Available to eligible riders with barriers to mobility

School



- Dedicated or modified services that operate directly to or from high schools at relevant times



Rural

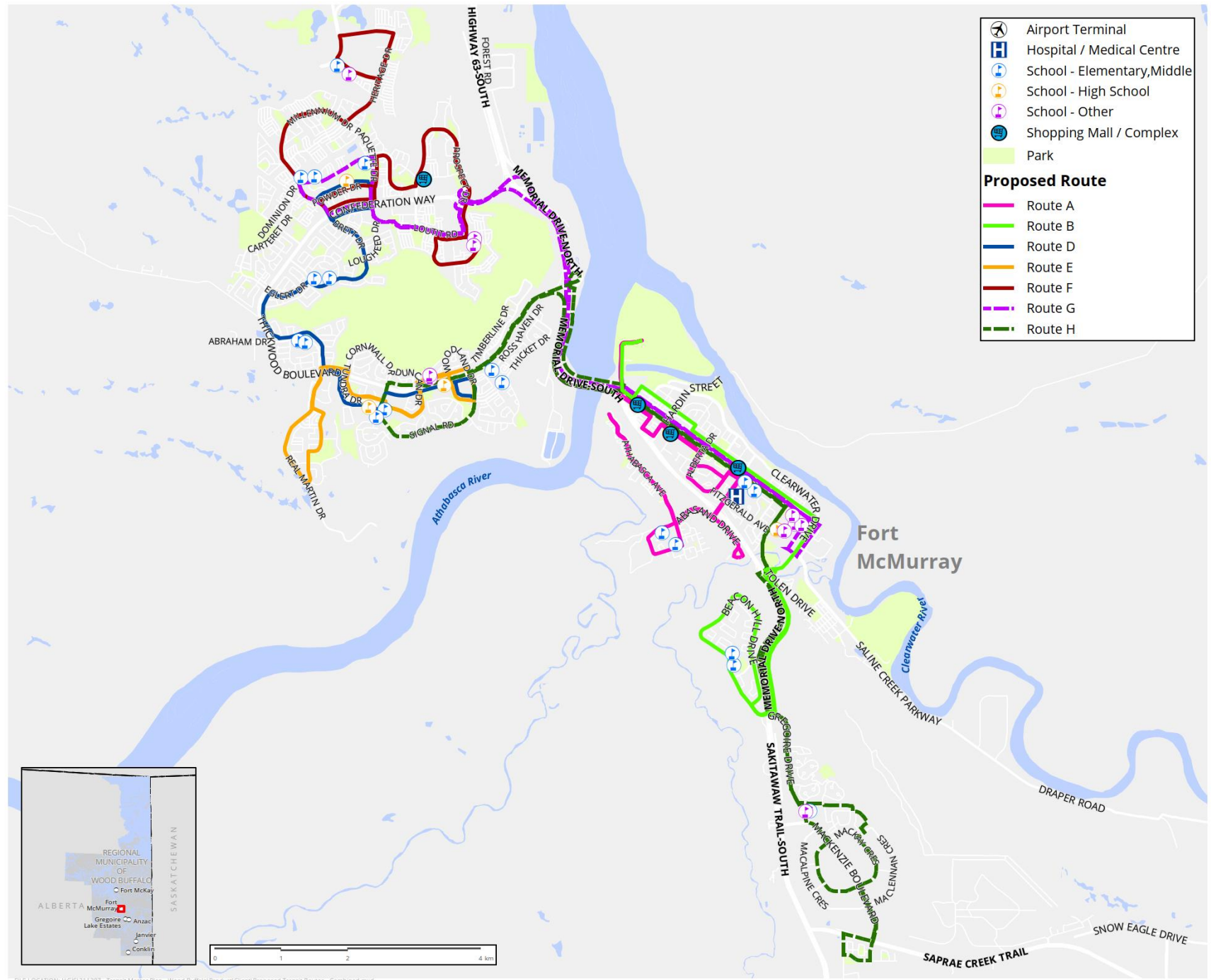


- Regular service between Fort McMurray and nearby rural communities

Proposed Network (in 5 years)



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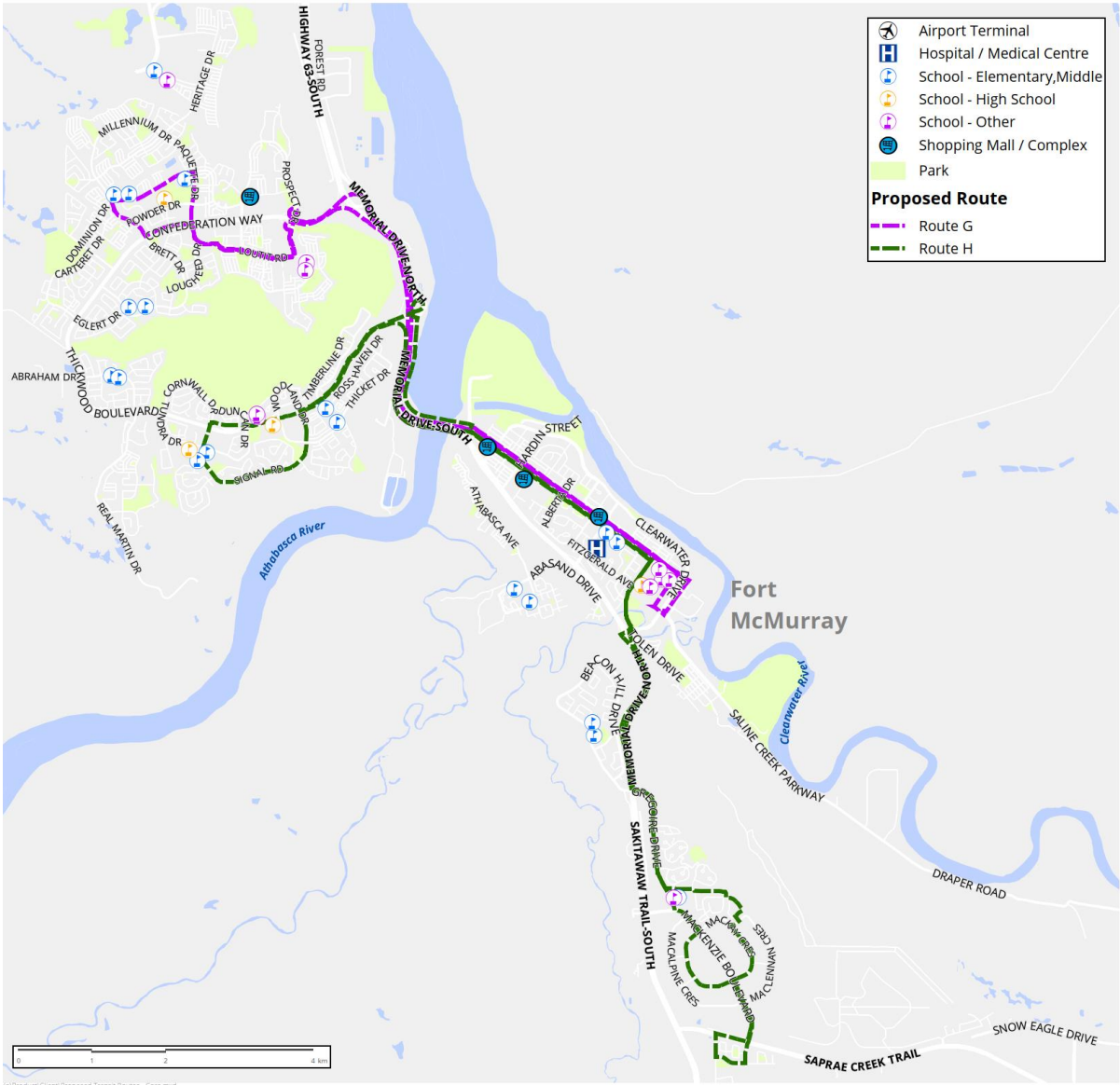
Core Routes



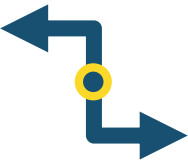
- High frequency spine of the network
- Direct routes on main corridors
- Link key destinations
 - Timberlea to Downtown and Keyano Main
 - Thickwood to Downtown, Keyano Main, and Keyano South

Proposed Frequencies		
Weekdays		Weekends & Holidays
AM & PM Peak	Midday & Evenings	All Day
15 mins	25 mins	25 mins

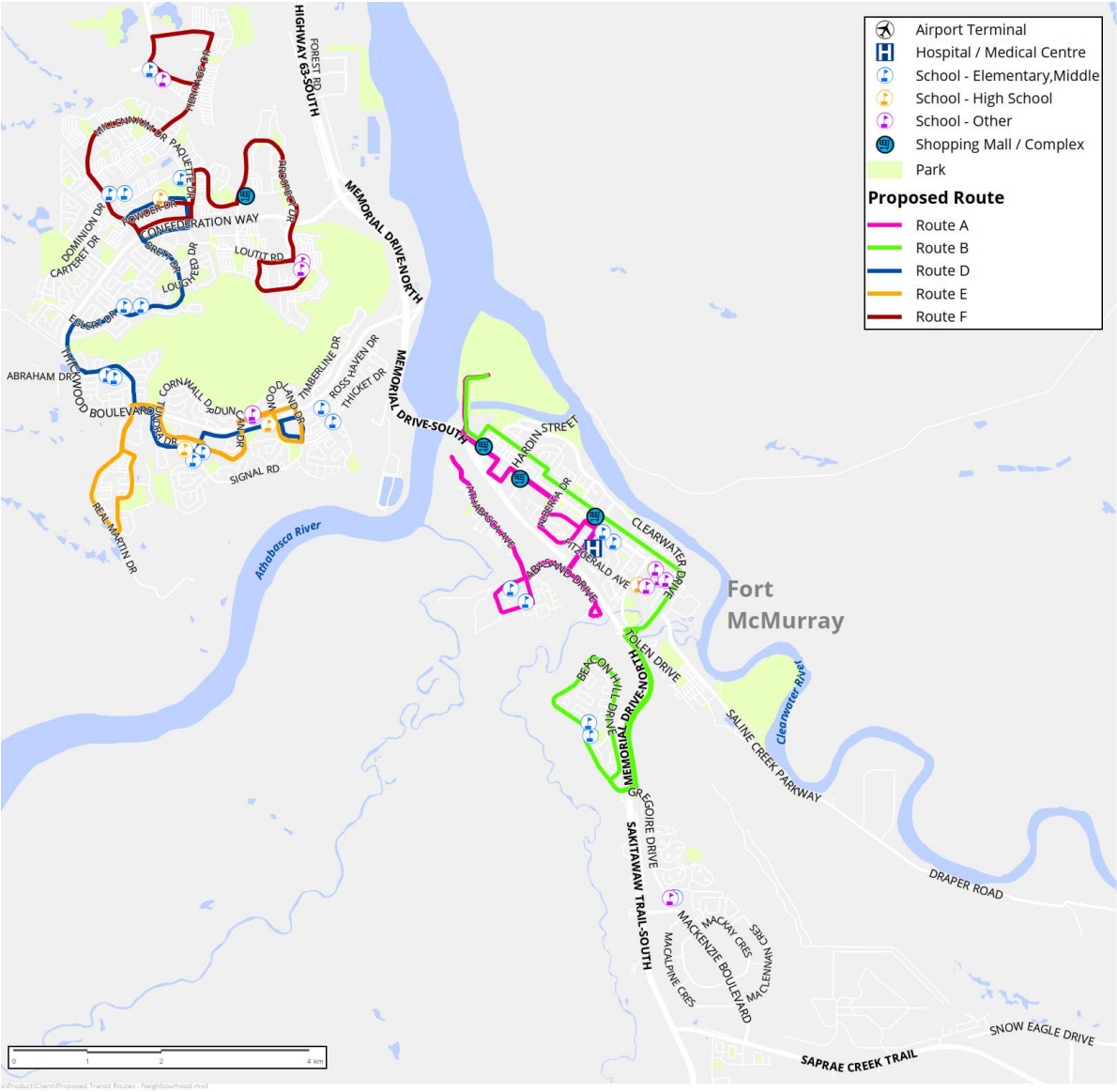
AM Peak: 06:00-09:00, PM Peak 15:00-18:00



Neighbourhood Routes



- Fill gaps between Core network
- Connect to local destinations and Core routes
- Operates predominantly on weekdays
 - Weekend service provided by On Demand
- Phased in over time based on ridership, and with input from the public



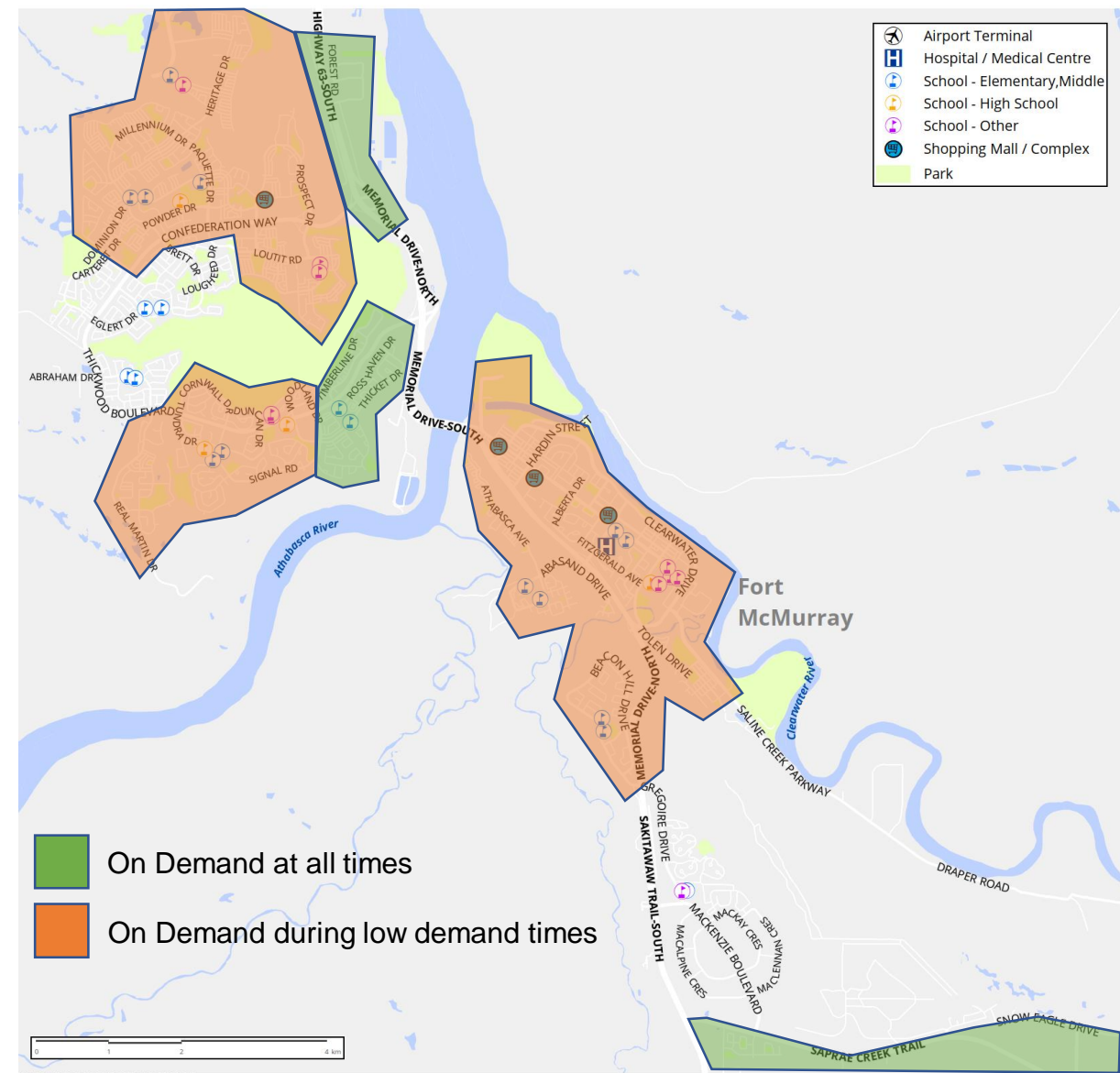
Typical Frequencies		
Weekdays		Weekends & Holidays
AM & PM Peak	Midday & Evenings	See On Demand Services
30 mins	30-60 mins	

AM Peak: 06:00-09:00, PM Peak 15:00-18:00

On Demand



- Serves lower-density and emerging ridership areas at select times of the day
 - At low ridership times of the day on weekdays
 - In select zones on weekdays
 - All day on weekends and holidays, replacing all Neighbourhood Routes
- Allows you to request the service using an app or by calling Wood Buffalo Transit
- Wait times will be no longer than frequencies on Neighbourhood routes



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On Demand



- Takes you to nearest hub, or other bus stops within the area
- Helps you take longer journeys by connecting with Core or Neighbourhood routes
- Phased in over time based on ridership on Neighbourhood Routes and trial On Demand services
- Will provide a greater level of access across Fort McMurray by using its resources more effectively



SMART Bus

- Demand-responsive service for seniors without a drivers' licence and persons with disabilities that are unable to use Core and Neighbourhood routes
- Provides door-to-door service within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo
- The amount of SMART Bus service will grow as demand increases over time



School Services

- Limited trips that operate at high school start and end times only, offered in partnership with Fort McMurray school boards
- Dedicated services that operate directly to or from high schools
 - These follow a unique route and are available to riders travelling from destination schools only
- No significant changes to the school route network
- School services should only be offered where Core and Neighbourhood Routes do not directly serve a school
 - Students will be encouraged to use the Core and Neighbourhood Routes, where available



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Rural Services



- Limited services on select days of week
- Continue to operate to Fort McMurray from:
 - Fort McKay
 - Conklin
 - Janvier
 - Anzac
 - Gregoire Lake Estates
- Opportunities to change trip days and times, subject to future community input
- Options to trial additional pre-booked special event services



Transit Accessibility and Comfort

Transit Infrastructure

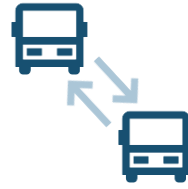


To attract more people to take transit, Wood Buffalo Transit must continually improve the transit infrastructure. This includes stops and shelters, transit vehicles, sidewalk connections, signage, and lighting. The recommendations are based on what we heard from the previous round of engagement, including:

- Improve sidewalk connections
- Upgrade and maintain bus stops to improve accessibility
- Create more direct routes between terminals



Transit Terminals



Thickwood Terminal and Timberlea Terminal are on-street terminals. Buses can only approach the terminals from one direction, severely restricting the routing options and making trips longer and less efficient.

Recommendation:

- Develop transit priority measures to improve bus access to the terminals and allow to more direct services
 - Measures would be defined by future design studies, and could include bus-only lanes, bus-only traffic lights, and/or bus-only turn movements



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Stop Connectivity & New Neighbourhoods



Transit riders are pedestrians for a portion of their trip. Facilitating safe and direct connections between throughout neighbourhoods can make transit more attractive to riders.



Recommendations:

- Continue coordination with RMWB Active Transportation to improve walking access to transit
 - Consider measuring progress by conducting a stop accessibility audit, including paths
- Upgrade stops to improve accessibility
- Engage transit in the subdivision planning process to improve connectivity

Winter Transit

Winter weather brings a variety of accessibility challenges - timely snow clearing is imperative to ensuring everyone has access to transit. Additionally, heated shelters at bus stops can help to keep passengers comfortable while waiting on cold days. Shelters in predictable locations which are regularly maintained makes transit more appealing to riders.

Recommendations:

- Continue annual review of snow clearing policy for priorities and timeliness
 - Take steps towards reducing time to remove snow from terminals and Core Route stops
- Terminals and high ridership stops should continue to be prioritized for sidewalk clearing, including paths leading to and from these stops
- Develop a policy for heated shelters
 - When and where are they appropriate to be installed
 - When they should be relocated
 - Maintenance standards

SMART Bus

SMART Bus

The following recommendations are based on what we heard from our previous round of engagement, including:

- Make the application process more accessible
- Provide a more flexible service by reducing how far ahead customers must book trips.
- Allow non-attendant companions to travel with SMART Bus passengers



SMART Bus Eligibility and Registration



The SMART Bus application form helps staff evaluate who is eligible for the service. A thorough application form makes sure that SMART Bus service is provided for people who have significant barriers to conventional transit, increasing the availability and reliability of the service for those who are eligible.

The application should not be a barrier to transit and should be as simple and accessible as possible while collecting necessary information.

Recommendations:

- Develop additional questions about the applicant's ability to use conventional transit
- Simplify application form and ensure it meets accessibility standards
- Provide options for filling out the form online

Attendant/Companion Policy

Individuals who provide support to SMART Bus passengers during their trips are **mandatory or non-mandatory attendants**.

There is currently no policy allowing a companion (friend or family) to travel with a SMART Bus passenger that is not an attendant.

Companions would be able to accompany a registered SMART Bus user and allow them to travel together.

Recommendations:

- Introduce Companion Policy
 - Allow 1 companion to travel with a registered SMART Bus passenger
 - Allow 1 additional companion to be requested on the day of subject to space availability
 - Companions must be over the age of 5



Technology

Scheduling/Booking System

Flexibility in booking trips is important to provide convenient mobility for SMART Bus passengers.

Scheduling Software can increase efficiencies and identify more opportunities to book same-day trips.

Scheduling software has an option for online trip booking, which would allow passengers to book and cancel trips for themselves

On Demand Integration

The On Demand service should use accessible vehicles so that it provides another mobility option for passengers who live in an On Demand zone.

The software used for On Demand should be able to recognize a SMART Bus passenger's credentials and provide them a trip directly between a transit hub and their home if they reside in an On Demand zone

Technology

Recommendations:

- Identify and implement new scheduling software platform for automated scheduling of SMART Bus trips and online booking
- When introducing On Demand service, ensure it has the ability to integrate with SMART Bus



Affordability

Affordability

Wood Buffalo currently has some of the lowest transit fares in Canada. These low fares impact the RMWB's ability to provide more frequent transit service to more areas. The **Transit Master Plan** proposes to improve route frequencies and improve the overall passenger experience. In line with this, fares may need to increase, with measures put in place to provide affordable access to lower income riders.

The feedback from the first engagement session about fares included:

- Fares are generally affordable but may still present barriers to accessing transit for some community members
- Opportunities to buy fares and reload passes online and at additional in-person location would improve convenience for passengers



Fare System



As transit service in Wood Buffalo improves and ridership increases, an increase in fares will help operations to be fiscally responsible. Specifically targeted fare subsidies and passes can help make sure individuals who may have challenges paying higher fares are not faced with extra barriers to using transit.

Recommendations:

- Modernize the fare system and structure to facilitate different fares for different passenger types
 - Potential fare types include Adults, Seniors, Low-Income, Students, and/or Youth
- Increase fares over time for adult riders, with the potential to keep fares lower for groups, such as youth and low-income individuals



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Buying Fares



Developing different fare options can improve the rider experience and encourage new riders to take transit. Current options for buying transit fares are limited, requiring riders to purchase passes in advance at a kiosk, or provide exact change onboard the bus. By providing better options, transit will be easier to use and more accessible.

It is recommended that Wood Buffalo investigate several new ways to administer fares:

- **Mobile ticketing:** riders buy and validate tickets using a mobile smartphone app
- **Contactless payment:** riders pay for their rides by tapping a contactless debit card, credit card, or smartphone onto a reader onboard the bus
- **Self-serve ticket machines:** located at transit hubs, these machines would allow riders to buy paper tickets using a variety of payment methods before boarding the bus
- **Frequent riders:** riders who use the same account (mobile or contactless) to ride frequently could have their fares automatically capped at a daily, weekly, or monthly price

Trip Planning

Trip Planning

The transit system should be planned in such a way that provides service to in an equitable and accessible manner.

Feedback from the first engagement session included the following:

- Trip planning should be available to those whose first language is not English or are unable to read
- Add a travel training program to assist new riders in understanding how to plan a trip and use the bus
- Enhance driver training to deliver a higher level of customer service for all passengers
- Wayfinding and advertising should be available physically for those without digital literacy



Trip Planning

Recommendations:

- Investigate or improve the following trip planning tools:
 - **Digital bus stop information:** including timetables, live times, and route information at busier transit stops
 - **Implementation of a trip planning app:** On Demand and SMART Bus trip booking, as well as fare purchase
 - **Newcomers/ESL:** Written materials in commonly-spoken languages apart from English, and using international symbols
- Develop Travel Training program that supports all potential passengers in using RMWB conventional services. This should include SMART Bus customers and registrants, newcomers, seniors, students, rural residents, etc.
- Hire additional staff to support operator management & training

