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# Bus stop positive

## Selkirk public transit open house educational

Posted By Mark T. Buss

Posted 2 months ago

The City of Selkirk made the next stop on its way to providing public transit with an open house to release information on the project and gain public feedback last week.

Approximately 40 people braved harsh winter conditions Jan. 20 to take in the presentation at the Selkirk Rec Complex that provided a series of recommendations and preferred options while giving those in attendance an opportunity to ask questions.

"Ironically, the weather prevented people from being there, which is the very reason why we need public transit," said Selkirk Coun. Duane Nicol, chair of Selkirk's transit committee. "Generally it was a very positive and educational evening for everyone involved."

Wally Beck of iTrans Consulting Inc. – the company hired to review business plans for other transit systems about the same size as the one required for Selkirk – presented his report reviewing everything from start-up costs to a route that would take riders across the city in one hour.

Beck said he has done numerous studies for communities with varying populations. He said 40 people may not seem like much to someone uninvolved but he said he's worked with centres of 100,000 people and had 15 turn out for the open house.

"For a community of less than 10,000 people, having (40) turn out is remarkable," Beck said.

The iTrans report recommends Selkirk purchase a 9.2-metre conventional transit bus (\$300,000) plus a handi-bus van (\$100,000) as a spare vehicle, and commit the appropriate funds to initiate service in 2009 – an estimated start-up cost of \$626,000 and a first year operating cost of \$211,000 for a total of over \$837,000.

Nicol said although the money needed to run public transit may look imposing, it has to be looked upon as a necessary service like policing or fire protection.

"Public transit is do-able and certainly affordable but it's not designed to be profitable, not anywhere in Canada," Nicol said. "The city doesn't make money on garbage pick-up, but it is a service that's provided."

### Selkirk Transit Committee

Transit has been on the agenda at Selkirk council for more than four years with the original Selkirk transit committee task force struck in March 2005. The task force consulted with the public for months, including an open house meeting as well as paper and on-line surveys.

In September 2006, the contract to develop a transit business plan was awarded to iTrans.

Consultations with business and community groups to determine possible options for the system came one year later.

Feedback from the recent meeting identified community concerns with the hours of operation and the route.

The report suggested the service run Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Nicol believes that may be revamped to better deal with shift workers and the large segment of Selkirk's population that require bus service after normal working hours to do shopping and other tasks.

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# Bus stop positive - Selkirk Journal - Manitoba, CA

The route was designed to cross the city in a 60-minute time frame with maximum coverage but did not go to some identified work destinations like Black Cat Blades.

"The street layout in Selkirk is good and allows for a very balanced route that takes us past community anchors like the hospital and schools," Beck said. "If there are more concerns we'll need to hear from employers, seniors groups..."

The issue of transit service management also came forward. Nicol said reps from Selkirk and District Handi-Bus has made it known they would be more than willing to step up and pair their operation with a bus service.

"Having done this for 25 years, handi-bus is definitely a frontrunner," Nicol said. "Hopefully we can connect the transit system and handi-bus in some way."

Because the draft business plan was not in time for the 2008 budget process, Nicol believes the next step involves city council passing a resolution to find 2009 budget money for a business plan.

He said the city must also start negotiations with the province for transit deficit funding – a provincial program already in place to cover 50 per cent of transit shortfalls in Winnipeg, Brandon, Thompson and Flin Flon.

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