



Rebooting Public Transit in a Small Alberta City

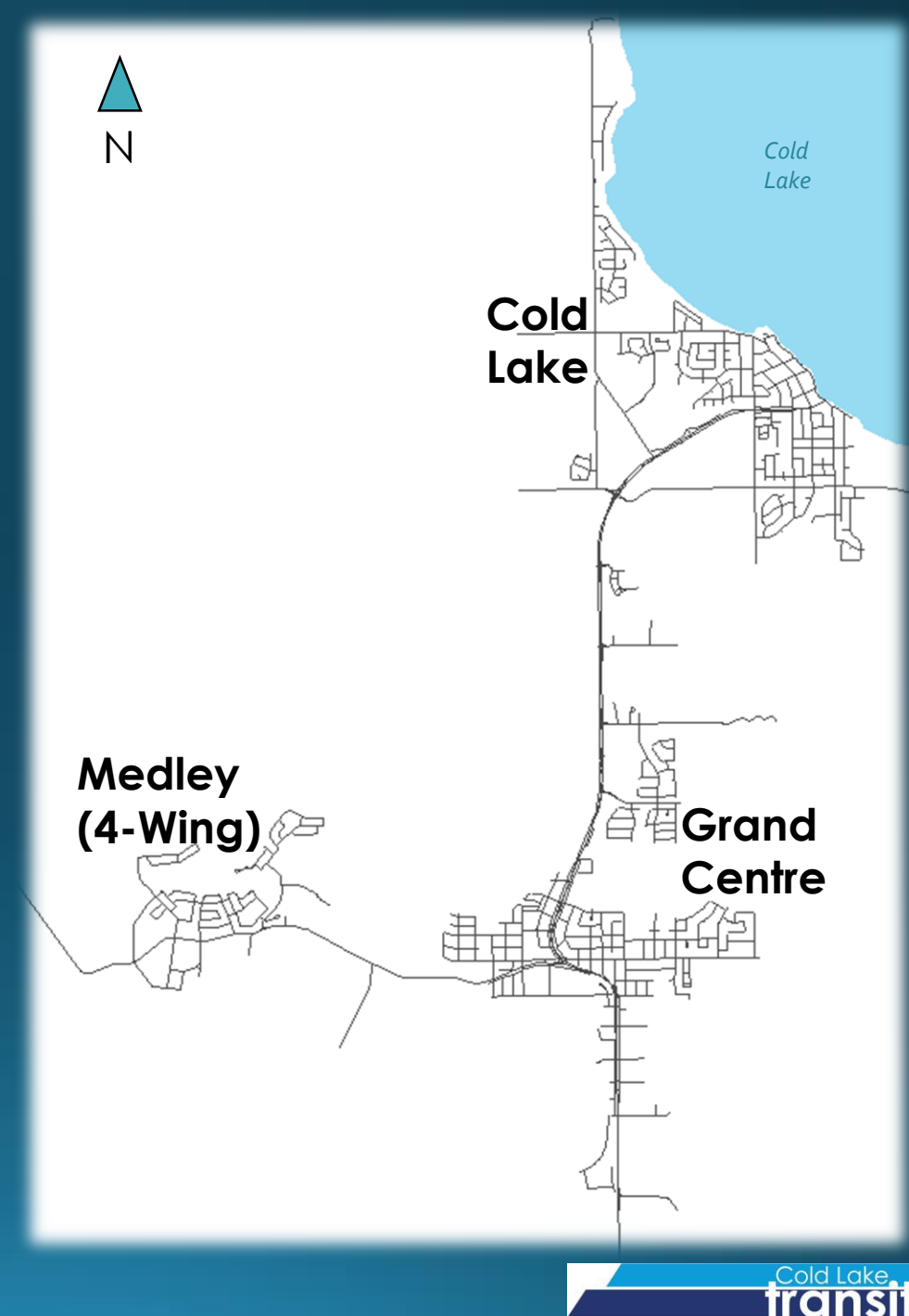
About Cold Lake

- Cold Lake is a City of 15,736 located approximately 3 hours northeast of Edmonton



About Cold Lake

- The City was formed in 1996 through the amalgamation of 3 separate towns
- The amalgamation resulted in a community with a unique shape with three distinct nodes corresponding to the three original communities



About Cold Lake

- The City has a relatively young population with a median age of 30.5 years, compared to the provincial median age of 36.5
- The main economic sectors are:
 - Oil & Gas Industry
 - Department of National Defence
 - Retail/Service Industry



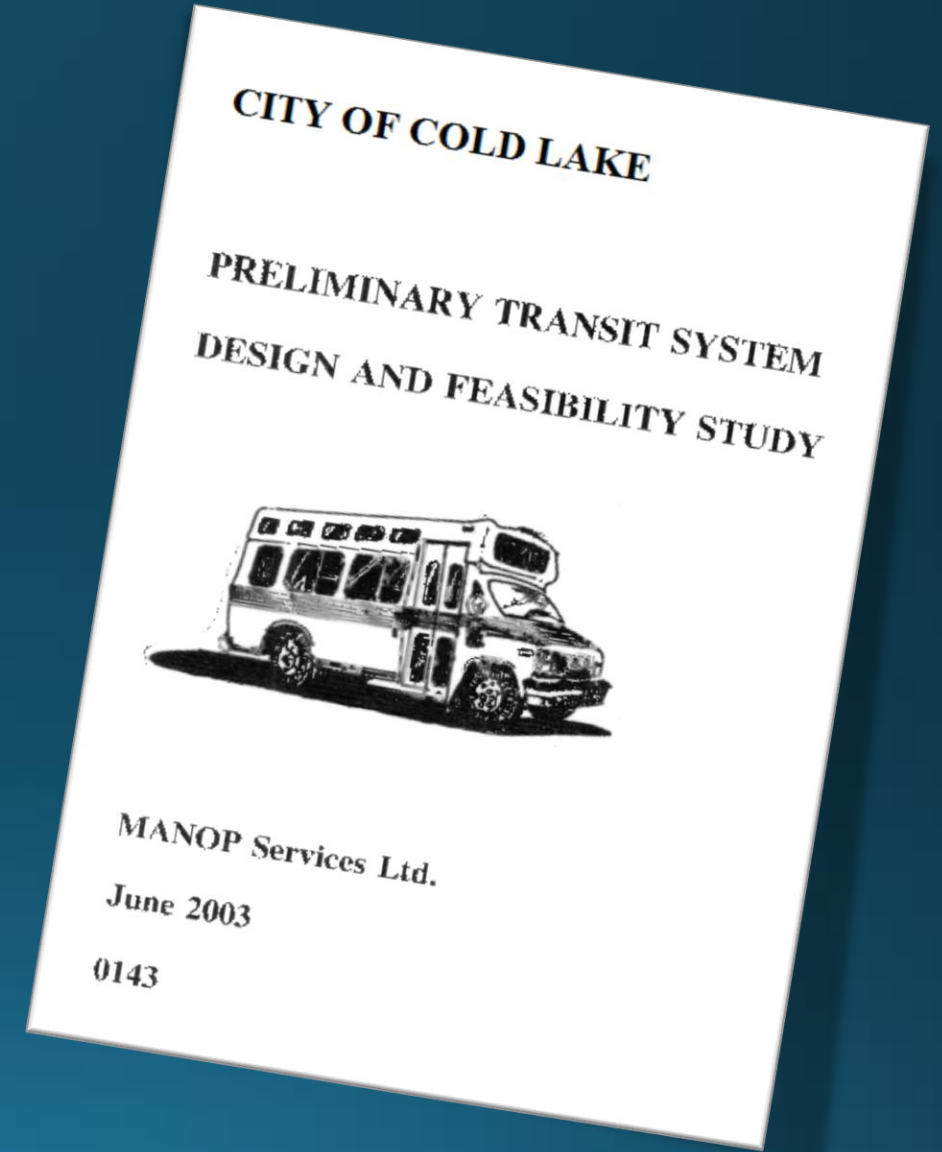
Public Transit, Take 1: 2004-2005

Public Transit, Take 1: 2004-2005

- The City initially offered public transit beginning in September 2004
- This initial attempt at providing transit was primarily a community-driven effort
- Transit operated Monday thru Friday 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., using a fleet of 3 small “handi-bus” style buses
- User fees were:
 - Adults and Youth - \$3.00
 - Senior - \$2.50
 - Children - \$2.00

Public Transit, Take 1: 2004-2005

- The service was designed based on a consultant's report that included significant engagement with the public as well as various community groups
- The routes were expanded several times to attempt to meet many different requests and provide a very high level of service - eventually 4 buses were required to cover the service
- Ridership averaged +/- 30 people per day at an estimated cost of approximately \$33 per hour to operate the service



Public Transit, Take 1: 2004-2005

- The average cost per passenger carried was \$13.20
- The service was cancelled in February 2005 due to increasing costs and low ridership
- At the time, the City's tax base was over 80% residential and it was felt that the City could not afford to continue offering transit at that time

Public Transit, Take 1: 2004-2005

Lessons Learned:

- You can't accommodate everybody
- Keep the service simple and reliable
- Both the community and politicians have to be ready to accept that the service will run at a deficit

Public Transit, Take 2: 2015-Present

Public Transit, Take 2: 2015-Present

In 2014, Council asked City Administration to take another look at transit

- The geographic layout of the community makes it challenging for people to get around if they don't have access to a vehicle
- The City was home to many Temporary Foreign Workers, many of whom did not drive
- The City also has a very young population - 22% of the City's population is below 17

Public Transit, Take 2: 2015-Present

- Unlike many other communities, public transit wasn't being considered as a means to reduce traffic congestion, but as a basic service that makes the community more liveable
- The City's current tax base is now approximately 55% residential to 45% commercial / industrial
- With the decreased reliance on residential property taxes, Council felt it could afford to invest in new services to the community

Service Planning Process

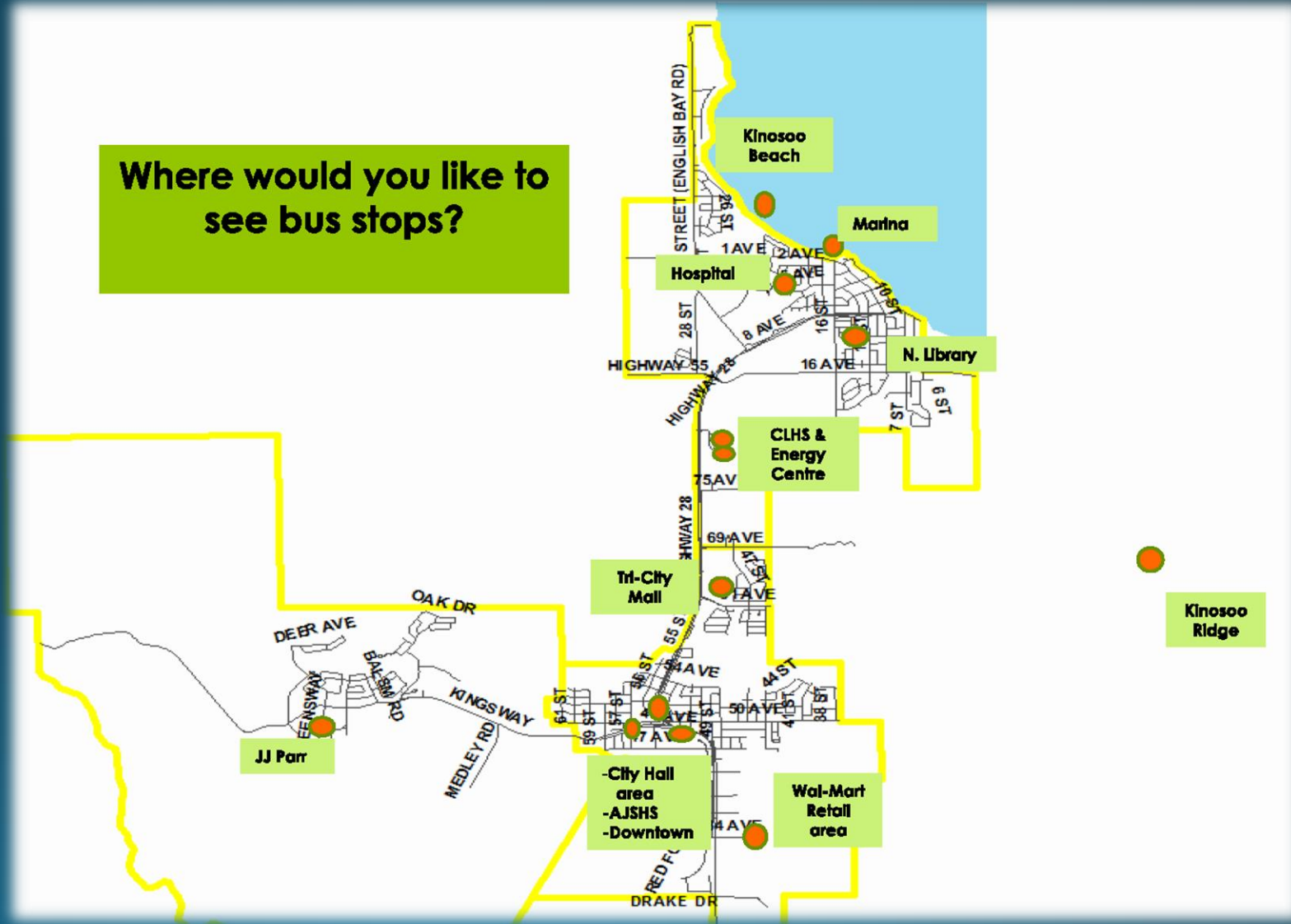
The City took a very different approach to service planning the second time around

- Rather than hiring an outside consultant, Transit routes were developed internally by City staff who knew the community well
- The process involved minimal public engagement
- The initial hand-drawn route map was presented to Council in September, 2014



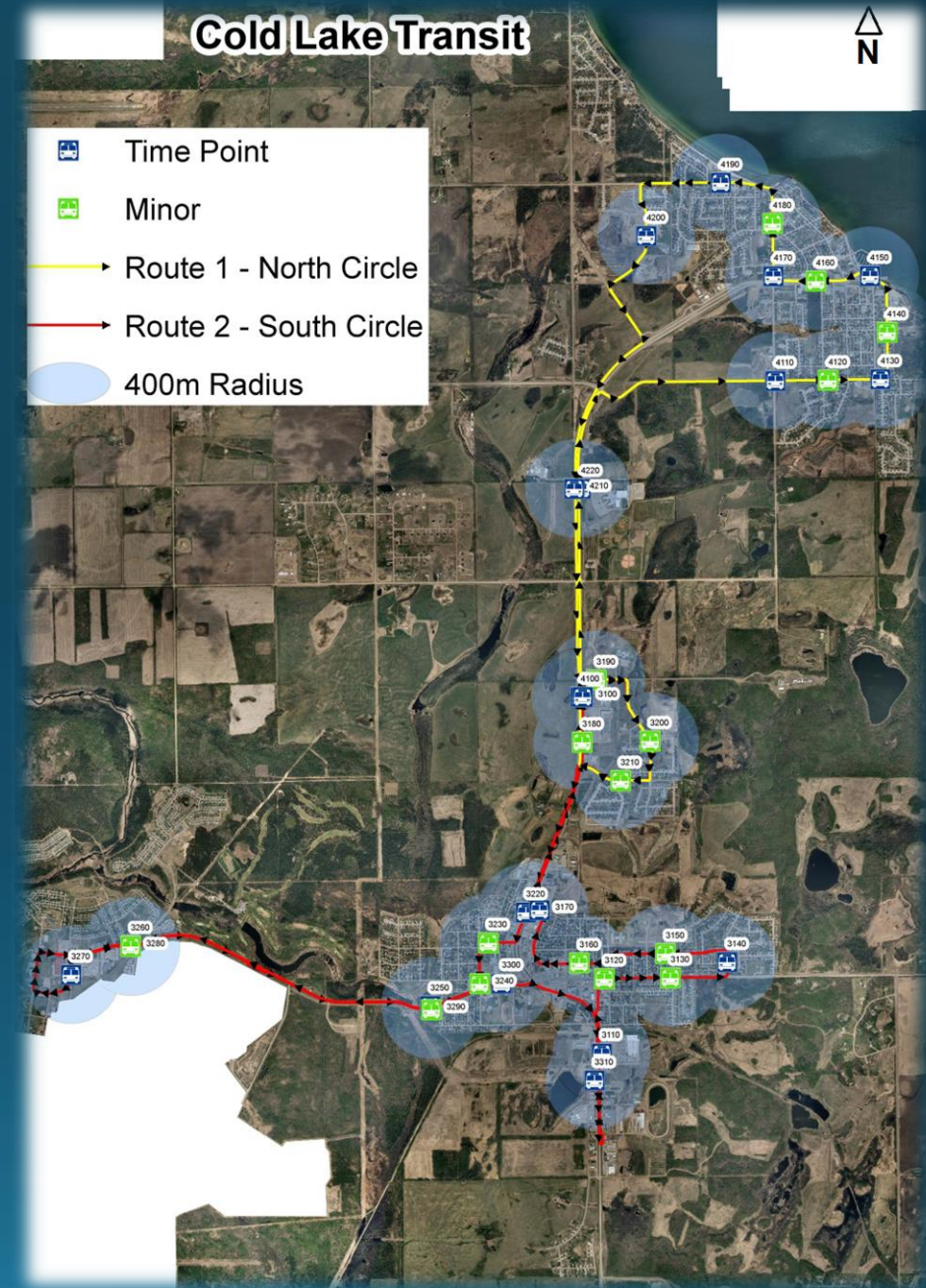
Service Planning Process

- The Cold Lake Youth Council engaged with young persons within the community and provided City Council with feedback
- All of the identified locations have transit stops



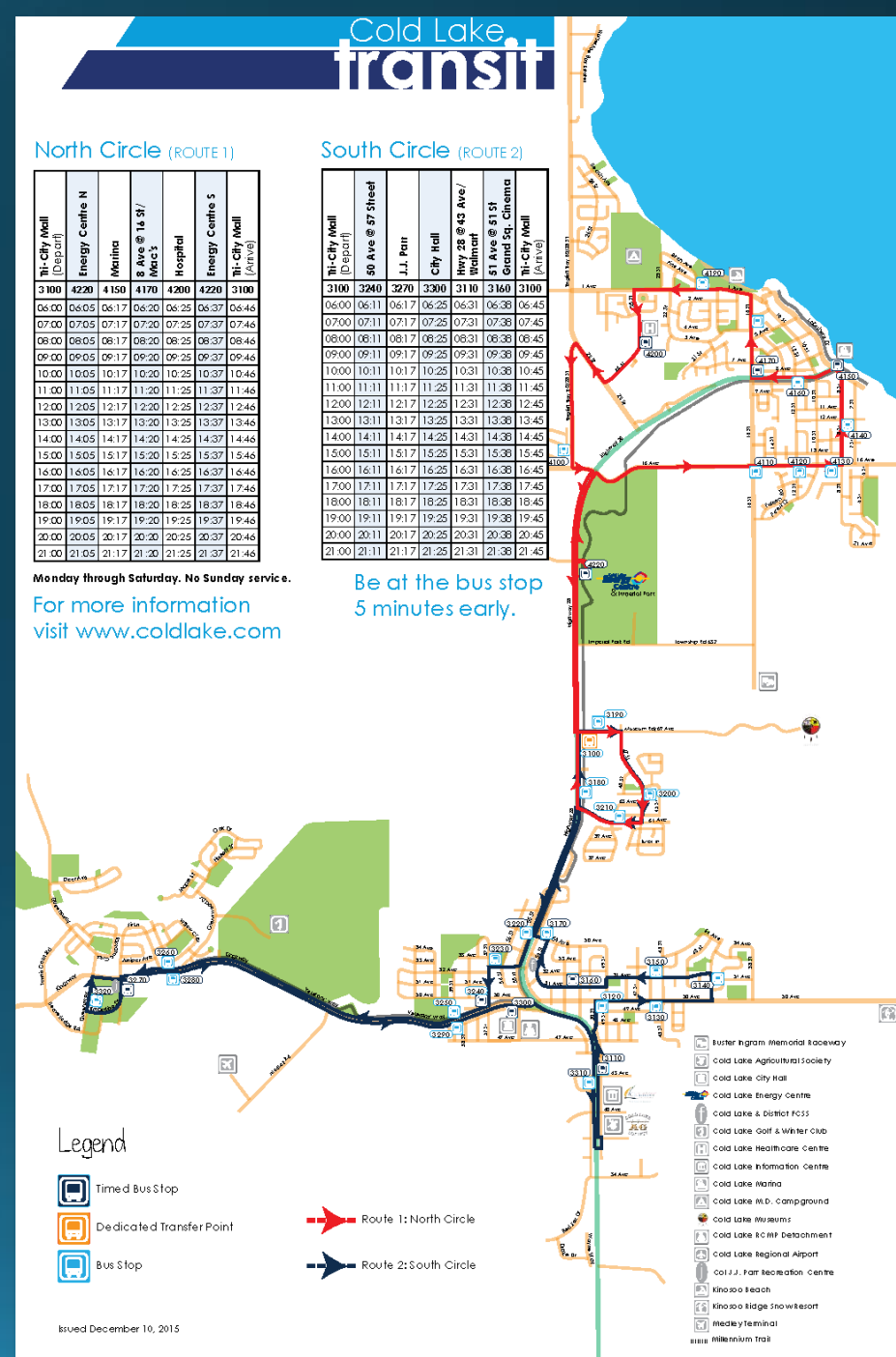
Service Planning Process

- The routes were structured to put a bus stop within a 400m radius (roughly 2 blocks) of most of the community
- The main goal was to keep the system as simple as possible, while accessing major business areas as well as most schools, recreational facilities and higher-density residential areas
- The final route structure includes two routes that meet at a transfer point near the middle of the City



Service Planning Process

- The current routes include 32 bus stops
- Each route is a one-directional loop
- Buses currently run on an hourly schedule
- With the current schedule there is typically a 10 to 15 minute layover at the central transfer point



Fleet Acquisition

- The proposed route structure would require two buses in service at any given time
- The service was planned to utilize small “Handi-Bus” style units as was done in 2004
- The City’s existing Handi-Buses would be used as a back up and to allow for maintenance rotation
- Council had budgeted to purchase two new buses for the startup service



Fleet Acquisition

- Just as the City was bus-shopping, the City of Calgary was retiring the last of its fleet of high-floor (non-accessible) buses and offering them for sale
- The non-accessible buses were not an issue as the City already offers Handi-Bus service for persons who use mobility devices
- The buses were built in 1991/1992



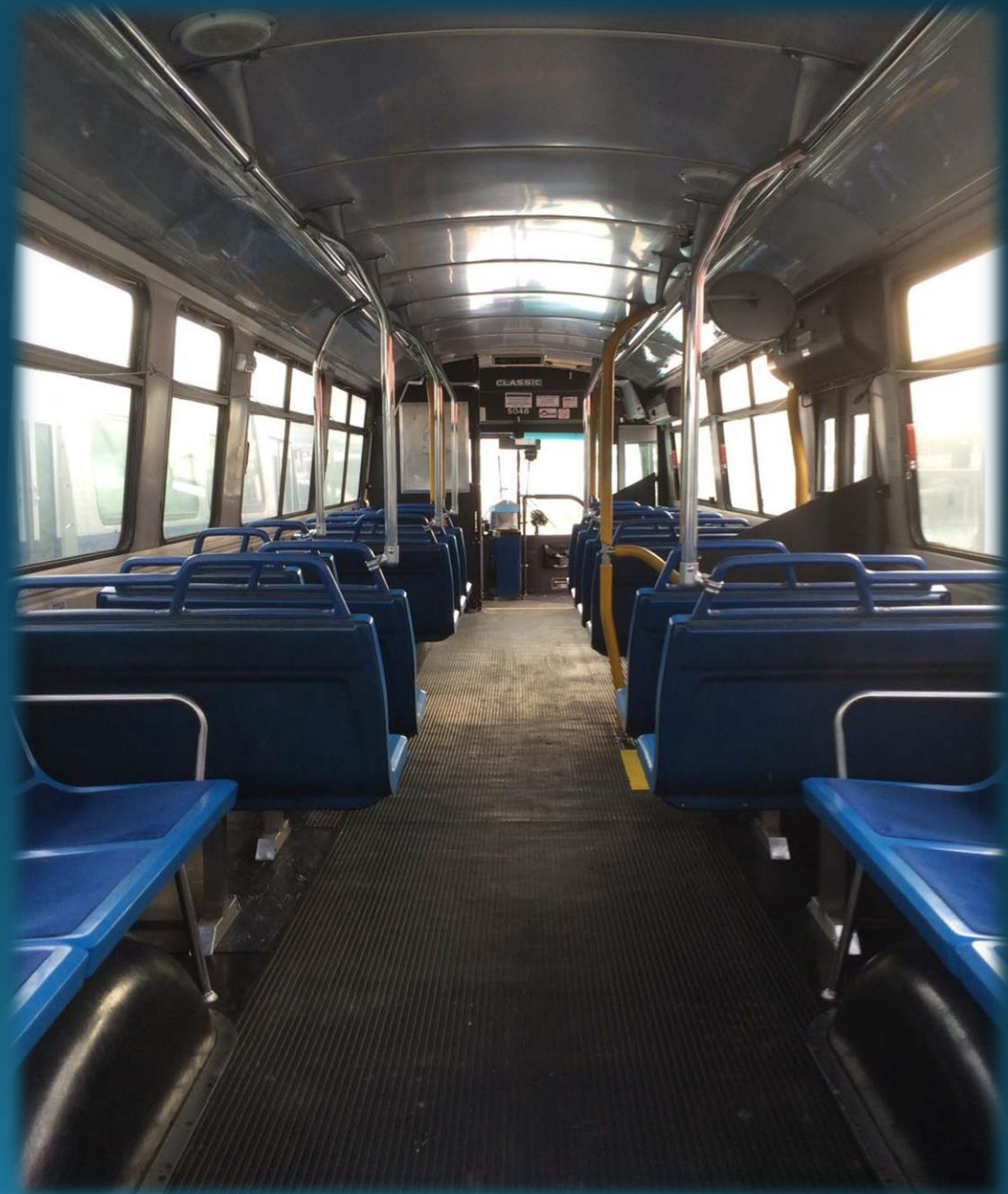
Fleet Acquisition



- Purchasing used buses for a startup service allowed the City to save significant capital costs
- The City was able to acquire 6 fully-equipped buses plus a 3-year inventory of spare parts for a fraction of the cost of one new bus

Fleet Acquisition

- The extra buses were purchased to provide spares and to allow for potential future service expansion
- Three additional buses were eventually purchased from Calgary
- The use of “real” transit buses has enhanced the visibility and public perception of the service



Transit Infrastructure



- Savings on the bus fleet allowed the City to invest in upgraded amenities at the bus stops
- Benches are now provided at most stops
- 6 Stops near main attractions feature full shelters with solar-powered lighting

Transit Infrastructure

- A dedicated transfer point was also constructed where the two routes meet



Operations



- Extensive testing and timing of the transit routes was done prior to the official start of service
- This was critical step and resulted in a virtually problem-free launch
- Only minor operational changes have been made since the service commenced

Operations

- Operation of the service is contracted to Southland Transportation
- Contracting the service delivery allowed the City to leverage the contractor's existing pool of drivers, experience, and training resources (again keeping startup costs low)
- Through a separate contract, Southland also does daily maintenance on the fleet, with heavy repairs done by the City's own garage
- The maintenance contract also gives the City the flexibility to have Southland do heavy repairs if needed
- The secondhand bus fleet has been performing very well with minimal downtime

Service Delivery

- Transit service officially began on August 26, 2015
- Transit operates from 6:00am to 10:00pm Monday through Saturday
- No service is offered on Sundays or Statutory Holidays
- Current cost to operate the service is approximately \$65 per hour

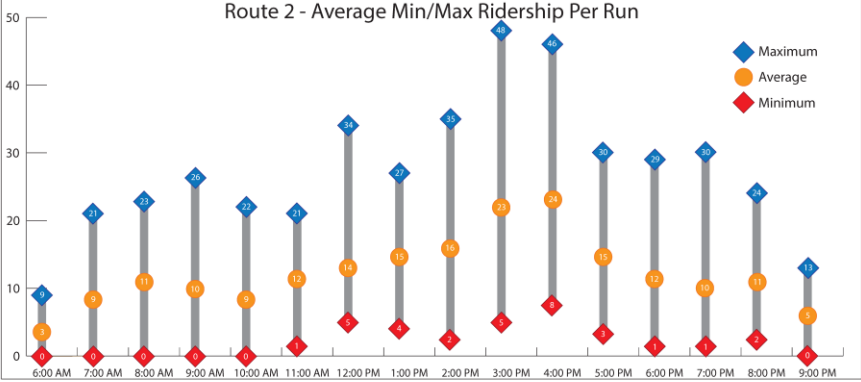
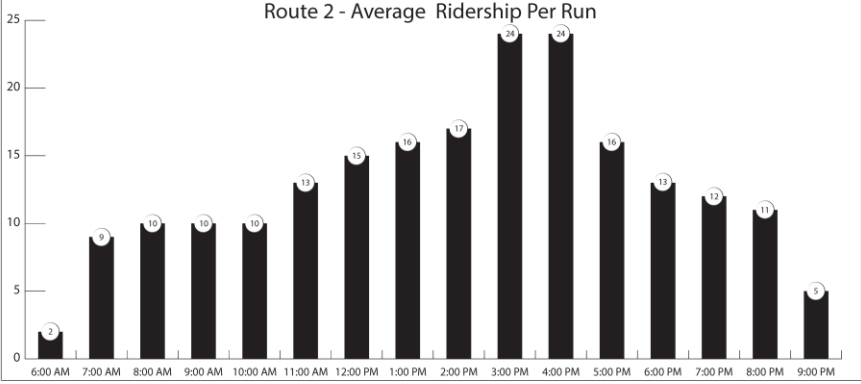
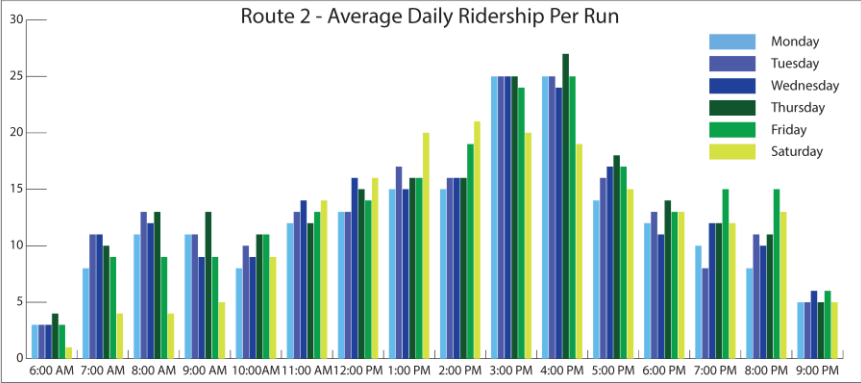
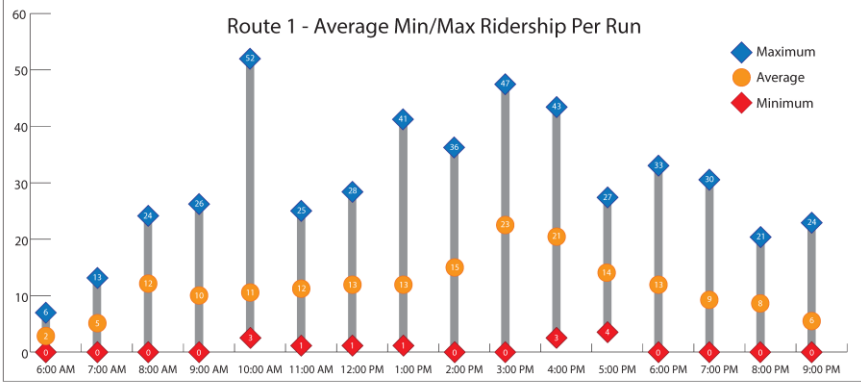
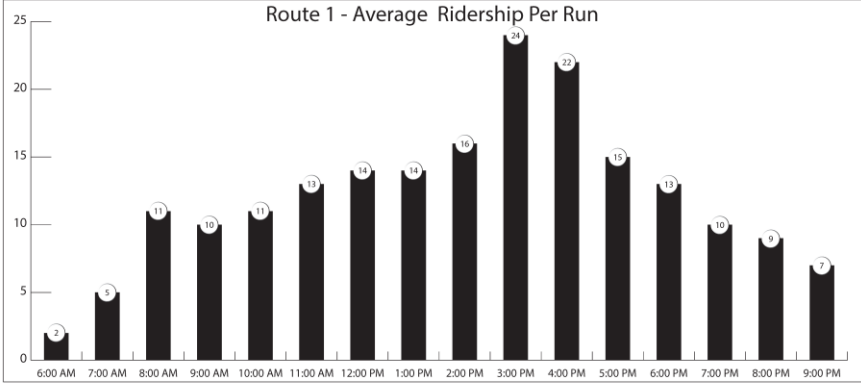
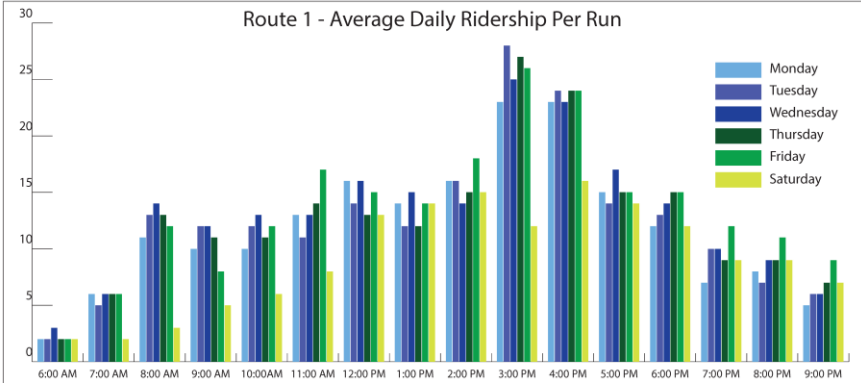


Ridership

- Ridership has far exceeded expectations - averaging over 400 riders per day
- There have also been occasions where the buses have been filled to capacity
- The City has been offering free transit service since the startup
- Average cost per passenger is approximately \$2.50



Ridership Statistics



Service Delivery - Why Offer Free Service?

Since the startup, the City has been offering free transit service. Why?

- Offering free service removes one of the main barriers for people to try transit and allows time to observe ridership patterns in all 4 seasons
- Safety – if the buses are not carrying money it minimizes the chance of drivers becoming targets for theft



Service Delivery - Why Offer Free Service?

- Less administrative overhead required
- Council has budgeted to keep the service free throughout 2016 and will revisit whether to charge fares in the 2017 budget.



Advertising



- The City currently manages all advertising on the transit system itself, rather than contracting out
- The City wanted to fully understand both the inputs and revenue generation before considering contracting out
- The local business community has shown great interest in utilizing transit advertising
- There is currently a waiting list to advertise on the transit system

Kinosoo Ridge Ski Shuttle: Winter 2015-2016

Kinosoo Ridge Ski Shuttle – Winter 2015-2016

- During the winter of 2015-2016, the City offered a shuttle bus service on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays to the Kinosoo Ridge Snow Resort located 15 km east of the City



Kinosoo Ridge Ski Shuttle – Winter 2015-2016

- The shuttle bus ran 4 times daily with a \$5 fare (round trip)
- The shuttle ran at:
 - 9:00am
 - 1:00pm
 - 5:00pm
 - 8:40pm (Closing)



Kinosoo Ridge Ski Shuttle – Winter 2015-2016

- Administration was considering various options to outfit one of the spare buses with ski racks for this service:



Kinosoo Ridge Ski Shuttle – Winter 2015-2016

- Estimated cost to operate the service was approximately \$25,000 for the ski season (approximately 12 weekends)
- Unfortunately ridership was lower than expected:
 - December – 9
 - January – 4
 - February – 6
 - March – 1 (Season ended on the 19th of March)
- Council will debate whether to offer the shuttle service during the 2016-2017 ski season

Future Developments

Transit Survey

To help inform future decisions, the City conducted a transit survey between January 14-29 2016

- Overall public opinion of the transit service was very positive
- 68.5% of respondents who had taken transit stated that not owning, or having limited access to a vehicle was their reason for using transit
- 37% of respondents said the cost of driving was a reason for them taking transit.

Transit Survey

The three top priorities the community identified for transit were:

- Keeping the Service Affordable
- Running a reliable, punctual service
- Running buses more often

Surprisingly, 62% of respondents felt that the City should begin charging a fee for transit

Future Developments

- The City is currently considering an accelerated 45-minute schedule during peak hours
- Regional service to the neighbouring town of Bonnyville (approximately 40km away) is also being considered for the future
- Use of the transit fleet to offer shuttle service for special events

Conclusion

To date, the City's second experience with transit has been very successful

- Ridership has far exceeded expectations
- Service has been consistent and reliable
- Public response has been very positive
- Political response has been very positive

Conclusion

What advice could we offer for other communities looking to introduce transit service?

- Need to have the political will to offer the service
- Keep it simple – avoid complex routing / schedules
- Keep it reliable – people will use the service if they are confident that the bus will be on time
- Look at secondhand fleet opportunities to keep startup costs low
- Take as much time as necessary to test the routes/schedule before “going live” to avoid hiccups

