

Municipality of Chatham-Kent
Infrastructure and Engineering Services
Engineering Division
Information Report

To: Mayor and Members of Council
From: Jeff Hagan, P.Eng., PTOE, RSP1
Manager, Transportation
Date: May 27, 2024
Subject: RideCK Former Route S1 (Beach Bus)

This report is for the information of Council.

Background

At the April 29, 2024, meeting of Council, the following was presented in a notice of motion from Councillor Ceccacci:

Whereas due to low ridership Municipal Council removed public transit route S1, the Beach Bus, from the base budget in 2020 which provided seasonal transit service to the communities of Erieau and Mitchell's Bay.

And whereas several inquiries have been made regarding the possibility of re-establishing the service to promote affordable accessible feasible transit.

Be it resolved administration draft a report outlining the history, cost and current financial implications and the business plan feasibility to allow council to be provided current updated and accurate information.

Council approved the motion on at the May 13, 2024, meeting of Council and this report responds to the motion.

Beach Bus History

Route S1 (the Beach Bus) is a former RideCK route that provided service to Mitchell's Bay and Erieau from the Downtown Chatham Transit Terminal with stops in Blenheim, Charing Cross, St. Clair College Chatham Campus, Pain Court, and Grande Pointe. A map of Route S1, including 2021 schedule information, is attached as Appendix A.

Route S1 was established in 2010. The main purpose of the route was to provide service for tourists visiting the beaches and nearby tourism-oriented destinations in Mitchell's Bay and Erieau.

Until 2019, Route S1 operated Monday through Saturday plus statutory holidays seasonally from the Victoria Day weekend to the Labour Day weekend. In 2020, operation of the route was halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated closures of beaches and tourism-oriented businesses.

Through deliberations as part of the 2021 budget process, Council approved the elimination of Route S1. Justification for the elimination of the route was based on low ridership as well as a lack of alignment of Beach Bus service with *Driving Forward*, the 2020 transit strategy. However, following this, Council approved reinstatement of the route with limited service for a single year. The service in 2021 for Route S-1 was provided between Victoria Day and Labour Day, with the route only running on Saturdays as well as statutory holidays and the Sundays of long weekends.

The 2021 single-year re-establishment of the Beach Bus was not renewed for 2022 and has not operated since.

Since the elimination of Route S1, staff and members of Council have occasionally received requests for reinstatement of the route in some form. Most recently, the Erieau Community Association has submitted a request through Councillor Ceccacci for service on one Saturday a month during June, July, and August.

Driving Forward (2020 Transit Strategy)

Based on several factors, Driving Forward recommended a tiered route structure, with higher tiers being prioritized:

1. **Urban routes:** conventional, specialized and on-demand service in Chatham and Wallaceburg
2. **Interurban routes:** connections between Primary Urban Centres with direct connections to neighbouring Urban Centres.
3. **Community routes:** limited service with the greatest coverage to facilitate access to critical services and to reduce social isolation for residents in rural areas and hamlets.
4. **Temporary routes:** seasonal and special event service.

Under this route structure, Route S1 was classified as a temporary route, which is the lowest-priority category.

Since the adoption of Driving Forward, transit service improvements have primarily focused on urban routes (e.g., the introduction of Wallaceburg On Request service and Route 5, and the expansion of Chatham urban service hours) and interurban routes (e.g., the introduction of Route D).

Comments

In 2019, Route S1 experienced a total of 1,036 boardings over its 60 days of operation for the year, or 1.6 boardings per revenue hour.

In 2021, despite significant promotion of the restored Beach Bus service, Route S1 experienced a total of 211 boardings over 23 days of operation, or 1.0 boardings per revenue hour. For comparison, the average ridership for the other RideCK interurban routes was 1.2 boardings per revenue hour during the portion of the year when the Beach Bus operated.

For 2021, the majority of boardings on Route S1 (171 boardings, 81% of ridership) occurred on Saturdays. A total of 30 boardings (14% of ridership) occurred on statutory holidays and 10 boardings (5% of ridership) occurred on Sundays. At the time, no other RideCK routes operated on Sundays or statutory holidays, which was identified anecdotally as a significant obstacle for riders, since no other routes were available to transfer to or from to access Route S1 on those days.

To identify what the current financial implications would be for re-introducing Beach Bus service, three options were considered:

- Option 1: 2019 service (Monday to Saturday plus statutory holidays, Victoria Day to Labour Day)
- Option 2: 2021 service (Saturdays plus statutory holidays and the Sundays of long weekends, Victoria Day to Labour Day)
- Option 3: the Erieau Community Association recent proposal (one Saturday per month in June, July, and August)

For all options, 2024 contract rates were used. An allowance for fuel surcharge has estimated based on current trends for summer months.

Table 1: Cost Summary

Item	Option 1 2019 Service Level (Mon-Sat plus stat holidays, Victoria Day to Labour Day)	Option 2 2021 Service Levels (Saturdays plus stat holidays and Sundays of long weekends, Victoria Day to Labour Day)	Option 3 Erieau Community Association Request (one Saturday per month for June-August)
Lifecycle – Fleet Replacement	\$22,872	\$4,716	\$707
Operating – Contract Fees to Transit Service Provider (2024 rates)	\$50,879	\$14,044	\$1,491
Fuel Surcharge (Estimate)	\$12,222	\$2,520	\$378
Total – Annual Costs	\$85,973	\$21,280	\$2,576

Reliable fare revenue forecasts are not available for Options 1 or 2 since ridership of Route S1 in 2021 and earlier does not reflect the addition of Sunday Chatham urban service. Based on 2021 Saturday ridership and current fare rates, the estimated fare revenue for Option 3 is approximately \$200 per year, which translates to a cost of approximately \$114 per rider.

Staff are currently working on the Municipality’s Transit Asset Management Plan (AMP) which will be presented to Council this summer. This AMP is to inform investment decisions by connecting Levels of Service directly to the budget and long-term financial plan. Additionally, staff are scheduled to initiate a Transportation Mobility Master Plan this year which will review and incorporate the 2020 Transit Strategy and support the Municipality in reviewing and prioritizing transportation and mobility infrastructure, programs, and policies. It is recommended that staff continue to develop these plans to better characterize the status of transit services and undertake consultation on transit service and planning as part of the broader review through the Mobility Master Plan, to inform future decisions regarding transit service levels and routes.

Council Term Priorities

This report supports the following Council Term Priorities:

			
Deliver Excellent Service	Promote Safety & Well-Being	Grow Our Community	Ensure Environmental Sustainability
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Consultation

No consultation has been conducted for this report.

Communication

Communication is proposed to be through the inclusion of this report on the Council agenda and related communications.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ)

There are no implications related to diversity, equity, inclusion, or justice of this informational report.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications resulting from this informational report.

Prepared by: Jeff Hagan, P.Eng., PTOE, RSP1, Manager, Transportation

Reviewed by:

Marissa Mascaro, P.Eng., Director, Engineering

Edward Soldo, P.Eng., General Manager, Infrastructure and Engineering Services

Attachment: Route S1 Map

c Erieau Community Association