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## City of Kelowna

# MEMORANDUM

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**DATE:** November 16, 2006  
**FILE:** 8500-01  
**TO:** City Manager  
**FROM:** Transportation Manager  
**RE:** **Regional Significant Role of Transit – A Case for Bus Rapid Transit**

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### **RECOMMENDATION:**

THAT Council support the implementation of a 'bus rapid-transit' (BRT) service between Westbank Town Centre and the UBC Okanagan campus as per the recommendations of the Central Okanagan Smart Transit Plan, subject to funding partnerships with the federal and provincial governments and Council's 2007 Financial Plan deliberations on December 20, 2006;

AND THAT Council recognize the proposed BRT service as 'Regionally Significant' for the purpose of applying for funding through senior governments and the Union of BC Municipalities.

### **BACKGROUND:**

In order to reduce urban sprawl, loss of agricultural lands, congestion and air pollution from auto emissions, local governments have implemented 'Smart Growth' policies to focus development in town centres. In support of this Regional Growth Strategy the local governments of the Central Okanagan have recognized the important role of public transit. However, they know that it will take a concerted effort on the part of all levels of governments to successfully implement a public transit service that reasonably rivals the private automobile.

The region is served by Kelowna Regional Transit, which is funded by the local governments, BC Transit and revenue from the fare box. Usage of the system rose sharply in the 1990s with investments in service and transit infrastructure. The usage has not grown since 2001 as a result of a lack of provincial funding for transit expansions and the lack of any real new service. The system currently has a fair box recovery of about 35% which is considered high for a system of this size.

While waiting for new provincial funding for transit, the local governments have chosen to focus their joint efforts on three key areas of interest; transit planning, integration with new development and transit-supportive infrastructure. In 2004, the local governments of the Central Okanagan (with the exception of the District of Lake Country) undertook to prepare the Central Okanagan Smart Transit Plan and the Transit-Supportive Development Guidelines. This planning initiative was completed in April, 2005.

In 2004, the City of Kelowna in partnership with BC Transit and the Ministry of Transportation made application to Transport Canada for funding to support a transit signal priority system. The system would support the proposed new higher level transit system that was being recommended in the Smart Transit Plan. Funding was received and the first phase of the new signal priority system has now been implemented.

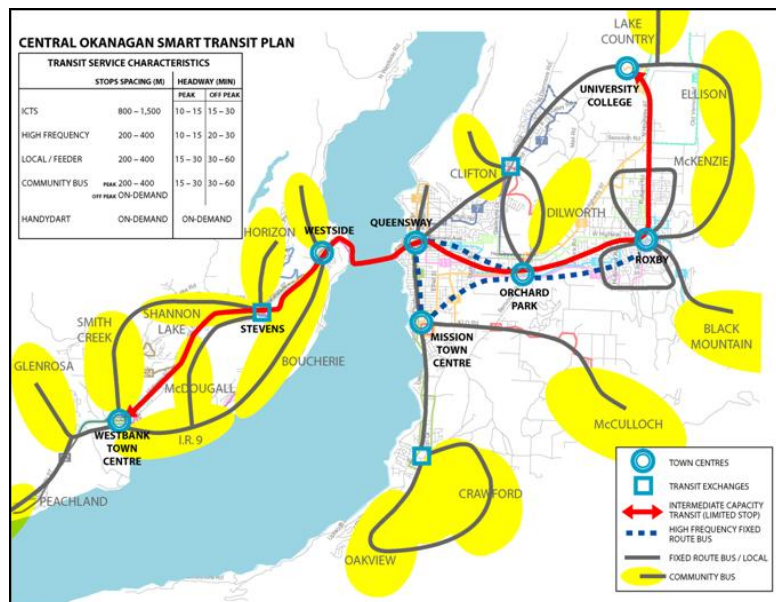
Complementary to these initiatives, the Central Okanagan local governments have worked cooperatively on regional Transportation Demand Management since 1999. A business plan was developed by the area governments also in partnership with BC Transit and the Ministry of Transportation. Today, there are three staff members that provide support in marketing alternative transportation such as public transit. The region has been recognized nationally for many years now for its leadership in this area.

### **Central Okanagan Smart Transit Plan**

The preparation of the Central Okanagan's strategy for transit improvement was done through a community engagement process. A series of stakeholder workshops and public meetings took place at important milestones to raise public interest in the initiative and receive their comments and suggestions. These milestones included:

- Visioning Workshop - January, 2004
- Transit-oriented Development Workshop & Public Meeting – April, 2004
- Existing Service Review & Bus-Rapid Transit Workshop and Public Meeting– June, 2004
- Presentation of Smart Transit Plan to Stakeholders, Elected Officials and the Public – October 2004

As an outcome of this work, community consensus was achieved to implement a bus rapid transit (BRT) system. This new service would become the backbone of the regional service linking the major town centres and the new UBC Okanagan campus. Existing transit routes would be redesigned to provide feeder service to the proposed BRT service. The vision of the proposed service is shown in the following graphic.



### Financial Considerations

A business plan was a component of the Smart Transit Plan. It identifies a number of operating and capital investments that will be required over time to implement the region's transit vision. Operating costs included service hours, revenues and new buses. Capital costs included transit exchanges, bus bays, traveler information systems, a new bus wash and transit priority systems. The business plan also demonstrates to senior levels of government that the Central Okanagan has done its part in order to move forward in partnership with them in delivering regional transit service. It's important to point out to Council the financial commitment that goes along with the proposed BRT system.

On the capital side, a Capital Investment Plan has recently been completed and presented to the Regional Transportation Committee. This work addresses the following:

- transit exchanges within the town centres
- bus stations/stops along its route
- BRT vehicles (12 buses)
- intelligent transit systems (transit priority, real time schedule updates, station security)

The estimated cost of the capital program phased in over a thirteen year period is \$32 million. Approximately \$10 million of this amount is for the buses. Although this funding is not identified within the City's capital works plans it appears that other sources are available to fund capital improvements over the short-term. The main source of funding would be the New Deal Strategic Priorities Fund. However consensus of local governments is needed to recognize this service a 'Regionally Significant' in order to qualify for this funding.

On the operating side, the annual operating cost of the Kelowna component of the BRT service has been estimated by BC Transit at \$2.055 million. Traditionally, the Province would pick up approximately 46.69% of this cost and therefore the City's net annual cost (total cost less revenue) would be about \$266,000. However, without the Province paying for their share, the City's net annual cost would be about \$1.225 million.

So the importance of senior government funding towards the BRT initiative shouldn't be ignored. Without the senior government's funding for capital investments there is currently no financial plan to support these investments. More importantly, without the provincial government's share of operating cost the ongoing funding commitment is very significant and could effect Council's ability to fund other programs or projects without a large tax increase.

### Relationship to Central Okanagan Multi-modal Corridor Project

The proposed BRT service can help to reduce congestion on Highway 97 along with strengthening the use of other bus service in the regional system. However, because it uses the highway through Kelowna it must share the road with many other users. Although transit priority will give a slight advantage to buses (while increasing delay to the side streets) this advantage will be offset in time by the growth in all traffic including cars and trucks.

Ultimately it would be desirable to provide dedicated lanes to accommodate a frequent and well used BRT service. However, to take away two lanes of traffic from other users will only increase congestion and its impact on public frustration, air quality and the local economy. So ideally, the two lanes would need to be replaced.

The Central Okanagan Multi-modal Corridor (COMC) is proposed to provide additional lanes of traffic on a parallel route to Highway 97. In fact it is proposed as a four lane road in the Official Community Plan between Hwy 33 and Downtown Kelowna. The planning of this facility further east to UBC Okanagan could also lead to a partnership with senior governments for a higher order facility to accommodate the roadway, the railway and the proposed multi-use pathway. Serving as a bypass, it can redirect some of the local traffic away from the existing highway and possibly allow for bus-only lanes to be accommodated.

So it is staff's recommendation to consider these two transportation initiatives, the proposed Bus Rapid Transit System and the Central Okanagan Multi-modal Corridor development as integrally linked.

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Ron Westlake, P.Eng.  
Transportation Manager



Approved for inclusion:  
John Vos  
Director of Works & Utilities



Approved for inclusion:  
Paul Macklem, CMA  
Director of Financial Services

RW/ms