Improving Public Transit in Saskatoon
A Research-Based Approach

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University of Saskatchewan
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Introduction

SEAC
Saskatoon Environmental Advisory Committee

City of Saskatoon
Saskatoon Transit
Report Descriptions

Report 1 (SEAC report):

1. Literature search on the effects on ridership from a reduced- or zero-fare structure

Report 2 (Transit report):

1. A study of transit in smaller cities that have high ridership per capita
2. Literature search on best practices for transit marketing
3. Literature search on best practices for getting youth using transit
Why Should You Care?

✓ I got noticed...
Convenience trumps price: report

Providing free transit would not be the best way to get everyone using the system, says a recent report by the Saskatchewan Urban and Rural Transportation Board.

"Transit is not the best way to get everyone using the system," said Lee Smith, the student who authored the report.

"It's been shown that if you charge a fee - it's really not a big deal," Smith said.

"It's been shown that if you charge a fee - it's really not a big deal," Smith said. "If it's not easy, people aren't going to use it - that's just the bottom line."
Why Should You Care?

✓ I got noticed...

✓ I actually helped to make real changes...
  - Report recommendations proposed to City Council
  - Pilot projects and test programs for almost all major recommendations were undertaken immediately
Why Should You Care?

✓ I got noticed...
✓ I actually helped to make real changes...
✓ It was fun, engaging, and incredibly rewarding...
  ▪ You don’t need a paycheque to do something similar yourself!
  ▪ The rewards are immense, and can be realized both personally and in the community at large
✓ Literature review
Journal of Public Transportation, Transportation Research Record, Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA), American Public Transportation Association (APTA), and many more

✓ Statistical data
CUTA/APTA, government censuses, Saskatoon Transit, and others

Both Reports 1 & 2
Report 1 (SEAC)
Report 2 (Transit)
Established theories and models in economics

- Price elasticity of demand
- The microeconomics of urban transportation started by Simpson & Curtin, 1968

Methodology

Both Reports 1 & 2

Report 1 (SEAC)
Report 2 (Transit)
Qualitative-to-quantitative data conversion

- Telephone interviews conducted with managers and planners at successful transit agencies
- Interview responses coded into quantitative, category-based data and indexed

Both Reports 1 & 2
- Report 1 (SEAC)
- Report 2 (Transit)
A Confession...
Report #1 (SEAC):
The Effects of a Reduced- or Zero-Fare Structure on Ridership
Fare Reduction

- Price elasticity of demand (Fare elasticity of ridership)
- Simpson-Curtin rule: Ridership changes by $-\frac{1}{3}$ of the original fare change (in %)
- However, many new theories predict more responsive elasticity values, from -0.4 to -0.9.
Figure 2-4: Annual ridership vs. fare reduction under the Litman model (pg. 11)
Fare Removal

- Similar economic analysis would be useless
- Case studies and historical precedent were used to investigate zero-fare
- Zero-fare transit systems have essentially failed across the board over the past few decades
  - With the exception of geographically-limited zero-fare sub-networks within a regular fare-paying network
Other Significant Findings

- There are many other factors that have a much more significant impact on ridership than fare, such as:
  - Service frequency, coverage, availability, convenience, travel time, ease of use...

- These factors can all be referred to as “end-user utility,” and together they are **by far** the most important factor for determining ridership

- A better value for money > saving money
Report #2 (Saskatoon Transit): Transit Ridership and System Improvement
PART III

BEST PRACTICES FOR BUILDING YOUTH RIDERSHIP

Young people are an important demographic for transit agencies to focus on. Those youths who cannot or do not drive are often "left out to dry" without independent transportation or transportation at all, and because of this, they are a prime transit market. Furthermore, recent data has shown that youth today are less attracted to automobiles and prefer public transit (as well as active transportation) more now than in previous years (Neff, 2010). This spells a major opportunity for transit agencies to hook the next generation early on and try to ensure that they become life-long riders.

As an additional thought, certain young people may be dependent on transit, but in many cases, transit is also dependent on youth. A third of Canada’s entire transit ridership are young people, and in small-to-mid sized cities, youth can make up over half of the ridership–as high as 65% in Moose Jaw and Red Deer, for example (CUTA, 2004).

Clearly, there is a significant relationship between young people and transit. Transit agencies are faced with the challenge of attracting youth (who are traditionally very sensitive to branding and marketing) to riding the bus, which—until very recently, as data might suggest—has typically not been seen as very "cool." If successful, however, such an endeavour can prove to be very rewarding for all parties involved.
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Gatineau, Quebec
Victoria, British Columbia
Halifax, Nova Scotia
London, Ontario
Sherbrooke, Quebec
Champaign-Urbana, Illinois
Durham, North Carolina
Gainesville, Florida
Eugene, Oregon
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Table 2: High ridership response types of all ten cities

![Explanations for High Ridership](image)

Figure 3: Explanations for high ridership by number of cities with response type
**PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Create & Strengthen Aggressive Partnerships
- Go Digital & Tech-Savvy
- Review & Improve End-User Utility

**SECONDARY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Universal “Smart” Go-Pass Card
- Develop a Ubiquitous Brand
- Develop Partnerships with Community Groups/Businesses
- More & Better Market Research

**TERTIARY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Go Technologically Advanced
- Consider Signal Priority, Bus Lanes, & Park-and-Ride
What can you improve in your city with a little research?

Thanks for listening.