Ottawa

Office of the Auditor General: Follow-up to the 2015 Audit of Planning Process for Cancellation of Bus Trips, Tabled at Audit Committee – June 14, 2018

Follow-up to the 2015 Audit of Planning Process for
Cancellation of Bus Trips
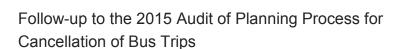
Table of Contents

Executive summary

The Follow-up to the 2015 Audit of Planning Process for Cancellation of Bus Trips was included in the Auditor General's 2015 Audit Work Plan.

The key findings of the original 2015 audit included:

- The Transit Operations Control Centre (TOCC) Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) required updating because the procedures, as documented, did not fully reflect the practices in place. The superintendents and transit supervisors of the TOCC are responsible to make operational decisions as a result of unplanned service disruptions including the cancellation and reassignment of buses. The purpose of the SOP is to guide the superintendents and transit supervisors in making these decisions. Although the superintendents and transit supervisors demonstrated a consistent understanding of priority routes (i.e. routes that cannot be cancelled such as school or rural routes) and routes with frequent service that can be cancelled when necessary, not all of this information was reflected in the SOP.
- Bus cancellation alerts were not issued as promptly as they could have been, and in some cases, were issued after the scheduled time of the bus. Transit Services offers riders the option to sign up for email and/or text alerts related to the cancellation of buses in order to assist riders in making alternative plans in the event of a bus cancellation. However, the usefulness of the information is diminished if it is not communicated in a timely manner.

Table 1: Summary of status of completion of recommendations

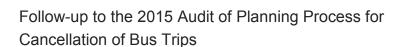| Recommendations	Total	Complete	Partially complete	Not started	No longer applicable
Number	2	2	-	-	-
Percentage	100%	100%	-	-	-

Conclusion

The SOP have been updated to clearly define all priority routes in order to support consistent handling of bus cancellations.

At the time of our follow-up work, there were approximately 1,300 riders subscribed to the email and text alerts for bus cancellations. When considering there are, on average, 340,000 riders per day, this represents a relatively small number of riders using this email and text alert service for bus cancellations. Transit Services provides a variety of other methods to communicate with riders on the status of their bus based on real-time GPS data. For example, there are a number of Apps for mobile devices available for riders to use. For a seven-day period in February 2018, there were over 10 million hits to these apps indicating riders are making use of these other methods. Based on this information, the Office of the Auditor General concludes that Transit Operations provides riders with sufficient information on the cancellation and status of buses.

Acknowledgement

We wish to express our appreciation for the cooperation and assistance afforded the audit team by management.

Detailed report – Assessment of implementation status

The following information outlines management's assessment of the implementation status of each recommendation as of March 2017 and the Office of the Auditor General's (OAG) assessment as of February 2018.

Recommendation #1

Table 2: Status

Management update	OAG assessment
Complete	Complete

Audit recommendation:

That OC Transpo update their Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) Transit Supervisor Trip Cancellation Procedure to match the current practice and clearly identify all possible priority trips that should not be cancelled and ensure consistent handling for transit supervisor.

Original management response:

Management agrees with the recommendation. It is OC Transpo's goal to initiate a review of the SOP on an annual basis. A change in process would also initiate a review of an SOP and may be completed prior to the annual review. A review of the Transit Supervisor Trip Cancellation Procedures SOP will be completed by the end of Q2 2015. Required changes, to ensure the SOP matches current practice, will be implemented.

Management update:

The Transit Supervisor Trip Cancellation Procedures SOP was updated per the auditor's recommendation and implemented and communicated to staff in August 2015. Staff in the Transit Operations Control Centre continues to follow the practices outlined in the SOP. The importance of adhering to the SOP is regularly reviewed at transit supervisor team meetings. There have been no further changes in process; therefore, as of February 6, 2017, no further revisions have been made to the SOP.

OAG assessment:

The actions as described in the management update are verified.

Transit Services communicated and updated the Standard Operating Procedure in August 2015.

Recommendation #2

Table 3: Status

Management update	OAG assessment
Complete	Complete

Audit recommendation:

That OC Transpo provide more timely notice of cancellation, especially when the waits for the next available service is lengthy.

Original management response:

Management agrees with the recommendation. Providing timely information to minimize the impact on customers is a priority for the Transit Operations Control Centre. There are operational issues, such as traffic collisions and vehicle breakdowns, which occur that are outside of OC Transpo's control that limit the ability to provide timely notification, however, for service delivery issues that are known in advance, communication to customers will be immediate. In the event that a previously scheduled trip is able to resume operation, an update will be communicated to customers.

Management update:

OC Transpo continues to communicate service delivery issues known in advance, as the information becomes available and can be processed according to established priorities. OC Transpo's Customer Services Centre also continues to communicate updates in the event that a previously scheduled trip that was cancelled is able to resume operation. OC Transpo's text and email alert service is one of the many ways we notify customers about unforeseen changes to service. OC Transpo has a number of automated and GPS-based services that are more reliable and beneficial to customers as they provide timely, real-time information. This information allows customers to have the most updated and real-time information about when the next bus is arriving, allowing them to make decisions or alternate plans while on the go and gives them confidence to catch a scheduled bus and navigate the system more easily.

OAG assessment:

When weather-related events occur, a bus breaks down or an operator is absent, Transit Operations is responsible to address this situation, usually through a replacement bus and/or operator. When the cancellation of a bus route is unavoidable, Transit Operations Control Centre works to minimize the impact to riders by taking into consideration the nature of the route itself. For example, a bus operator and/or bus may be switched from a route with frequent service to a route with less frequent service or a last run of the day route. Decisions on bus cancellations are often required to be made with little notice in a dynamic environment. When a cancellation is made, the Transit Operations Control Centre works to resume the route, when possible.

The OAG performed testing on a small sample of bus cancellations in order to assess if the notice of cancellation through email and text alerts was more timely, however, based on the information available, we were unable to conclude on this. While the OAG was provided with data on bus cancellations, not all of the factors that are considered in a decision, which may impact manual methods of notification to cancel a bus are with this data. Although we could not conclude specifically on the timeliness of the bus cancellations through email and text alerts, it is important to note that this method of receiving information on cancellations is now used by a small portion of riders. At the time of our follow-up work, there were approximately 1,300 riders subscribed to receive email and text cancellation alerts. This is a relatively small number when considering there are, on average, 340,000 riders each day. It is also important to note Transit Services provides a number of other, and arguably better, methods of communicating bus information to riders. For example, there are a number of Apps for mobile devices available for riders to use that provide information on time of the next bus based on real-time GPS data. For a seven-day period in February 2018, there were over 10 million hits to these Apps. Riders can also call 560-1000, text 560-560 or view the OC Transpo website to obtain next bus information. As of October 2017, Transit Services has started to install large TV screens at a number of transit stations with real-time bus information. Based on the above, the OAG concludes that Transit Operations' management provides riders with sufficient information on the cancellation and status of buses.

Table 4: Status legend

Status	Definition
Not started	No significant progress has been made. Generating informal plans is regarded as insignificant progress.
Partially complete	The City has begun implementation; however, it is not yet complete.
Complete	Action is complete, and/or structures and processes are operating as intended and implemented fully in all intended areas of the City.
No longer applicable	The recommendation is obsolete due to time lapses, new policies, etc.