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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Durham Region Transit Executive Committee
From: General Manager, Durham Region Transit
Report: #2024-DRT-18
Date: November 6, 2024

Subject:

2024 Transit Network Status Update

Recommendation:

That the Transit Executive Committee recommends

That this report be received for information.

Report:

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Transit Executive Committee (TEC) with an update of the current performance of the transit network.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Durham Region Transit (DRT) Service Guidelines are intended to ensure services are efficient, available, comfortable and reliable. The guidelines bring clarity and consistency to the process of implementing, adjusting, and improving transit services.
- 2.2 DRT's social equity guidelines are intended to influence the planning and management of the transit system to ensure residents have access to an equitable transit network.
- 2.3 In 2024, DRT saw an approved budget increase of 57,649 growth service hours, of which 44,406 were added to scheduled services and 13,243 added to On Demand, to support new development, improve service coverage, and improve capacity and reliability throughout the network.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 3.1 In February 2016, TEC approved the implementation of the recommendations and strategy outlined in Report #2016-DRT-03. The 'service strategy' objective was to develop a transit system that was to be available, consistent, direct, frequent, and seamless, to provide Durham Region residents and visitors with an attractive alternative to the personal car
- 3.2 In September 2021, the Transit Executive Committee received report #2021-DRT-20 The Route Ahead 2022-2025 Service Strategy, which established DRT's Service Guidelines and informed the planning and implementation of transit services during the pandemic recovery period to support enhanced access to mobility that meet the needs of Durham residents and businesses
- 3.3 In October 2021, the Transit Executive Committee received report #2021-DRT-26 Social Equity in Transit Planning, which identified social equity guidelines for the equitable delivery of transit service across the region. As part of this initiative, DRT committed to regular reporting of deployments supporting social equity in the Region.
- 3.4 In December 2023, the Transit Executive Committee received report #2023-DRT-30 Transit Network Status Update, which reviewed network performance through 2023, identifying successful implementation, future priorities and budget pressures for future years to fully advance social equity guidelines, and address feedback.

4. Discussion

4.1 Network Adjustments:

- a. Between January and September 2024, the DRT network has been refined in response to customer feedback, new residential and non-residential developments, and changing travel patterns. Some of these changes were in response to the unprecedented ridership growth experienced in September 2023. As service has been restored in impacted areas following service optimization in January 2024, DRT has strived to do efficiently. Unless otherwise indicated, performance measures below are for the period between January and August 2024.
- b. Local service in western Pickering has been restructured into a combined Route 121, offering connections to Pickering Parkway Terminal, Pickering Station, and transfer points on Kingston Road. Service in peak periods is supplemented by Route 118 on Whites Road and the all-day Route 112 on Valley Farm Road.
- c. Service in southwest and southeast Ajax has been combined to facilitate intra-Ajax travel without transfers, and improved access to local employment areas.
- d. Scheduled service has replaced On Demand in southwest Bowmanville during peak periods which has improved availability of On Demand capacity.
- e. Route 915 has been extended to the Conlin Road & Townline Road area.
- f. Route 905 has been extended the Windfields Farm Drive & Bridle Road area.

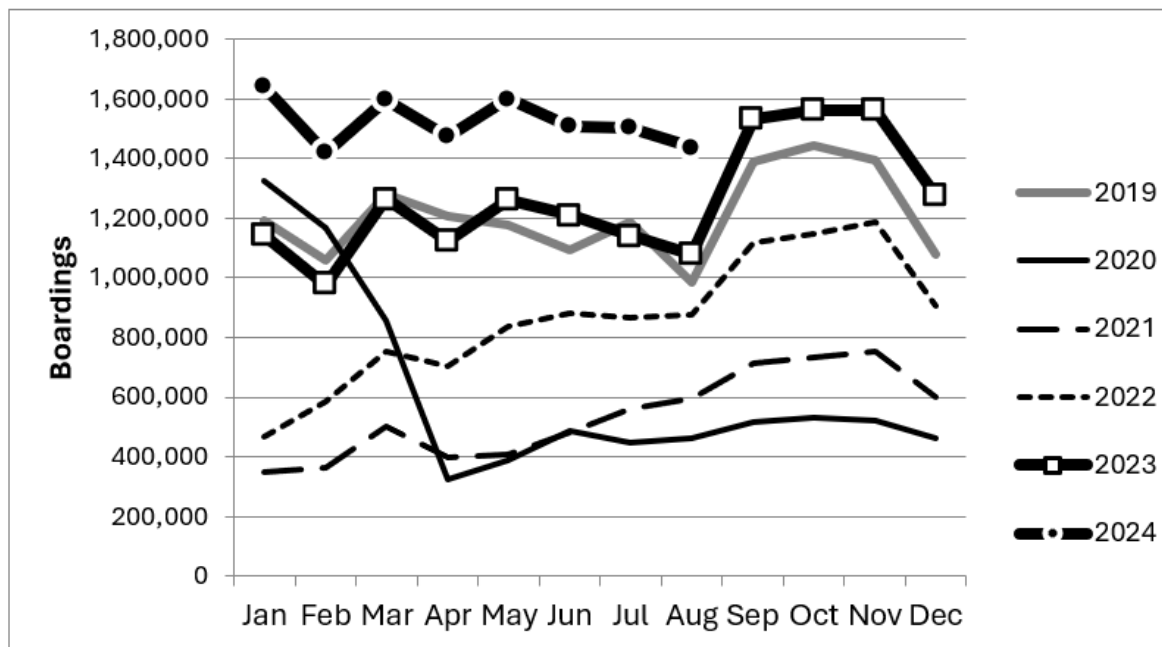
- g. Route 409 has been extended to the Windfields Farm Drive & Simcoe Street area via Conlin, providing additional connections to the Ontario Tech University/Durham College campus, employment areas, and commercial destinations.
- h. Route 306 has been introduced, providing service to the Des Newman Boulevard area of West Whitby.
- i. Route 118 has been introduced, providing service to the Seaton area of Pickering and the Whites Road corridor, and Route 112 weekend service has been introduced in Seaton.
- j. Route 605 replaced On Demand in the town of Uxbridge which improved availability of On Demand capacity.
- k. DRT continues to monitor new development areas and customer feedback, The existing DRT network is structured to meet near-term needs to serve new areas with minimal resource requirements by extending existing routes.

4.2 Route performance – boardings per hour:

- a. In 2019, DRT ridership reached a record level of 11.1 million trips with peak monthly ridership of 1.13 million boardings in September 2019, a record that held until September 2023, when DRT reached monthly boardings of 1.15 million. Ridership levels in most of 2023 were comparable to the same month in 2019. 2023 annual ridership was slightly lower than 2019; however, in September 2023 ridership increased 42% compared to August 2023 and was consistently 2-3% higher per month compared to 2019. That increase has been sustained over the subsequent 12 months and DRT projects 2024 ridership to reach 125% of 2019, with monthly ridership handily exceeding the same month in 2019.
- b. Monthly ridership totals between January and August 2024 ranged between 15-20% higher than the same month in either 2019 or 2023. While not as significant as in the rise in 2023, ridership continues to grow this September; early September 2024 ridership is approximately 6% higher in 2024 than last year compared to 2023.
- c. In response to ridership and reliability pressures, as well as available resources, service was optimized in January 2024, including some route suspensions, and reductions in the spans of service, so resources could be allocated to areas of greatest pressure across the network. As of September 2024, service has been generally restored to the affected areas and ridership on impacted routes is now in a period of recovery.

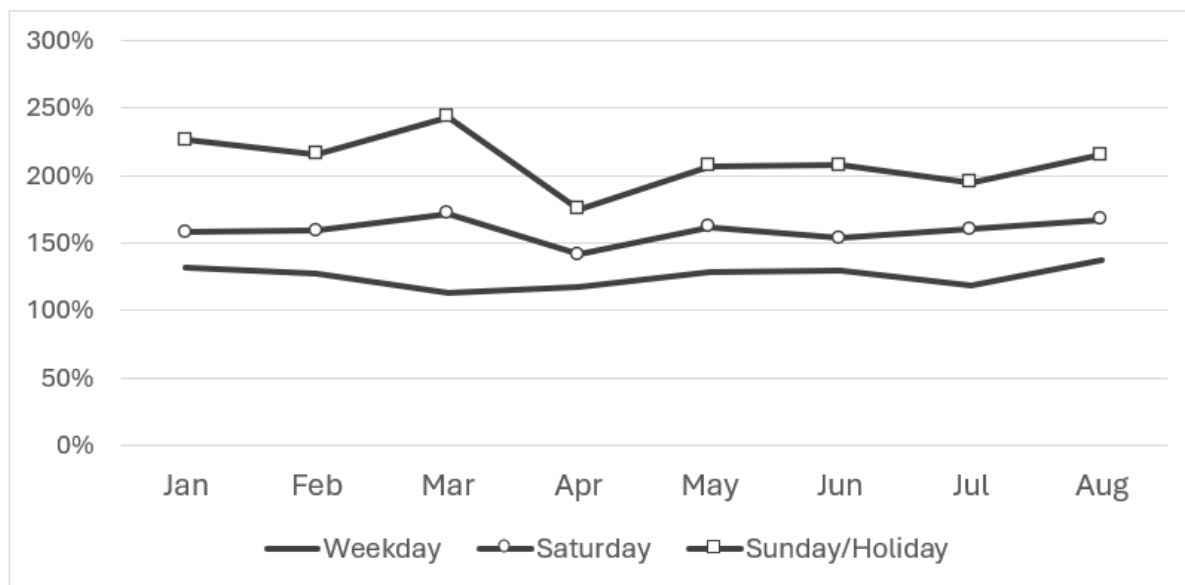
DRT generally reports ridership data, which is different than boardings. Ridership includes all one-way trips from origin to destination, regardless of transfers. Boardings includes the number of customers that boarded a bus in revenue service. Generally there is an average difference of 18 per cent between ridership and boardings data. Weekday boardings exceeded 71,000 on several days through September 2024, or ridership of approximately 58,220.

Figure 1: Monthly Boardings, 2019 to 2024:



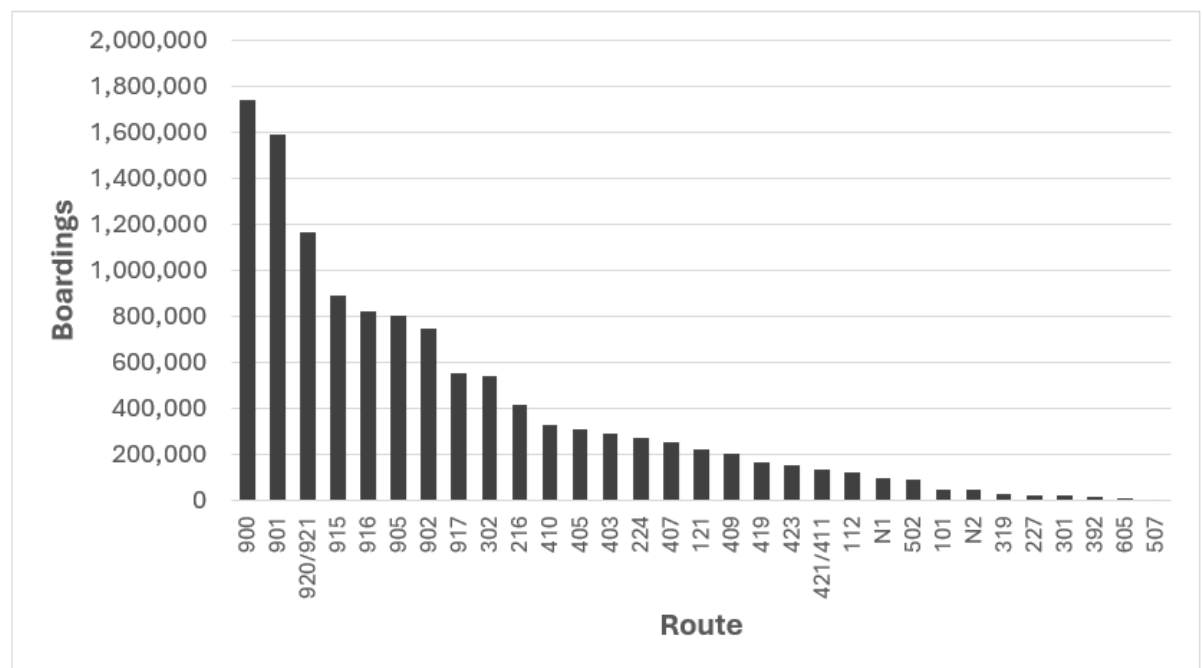
Monthly boardings and ridership throughout 2024 has exceeded the same-month figures from 2019 on all day types (weekday, Saturday, Sunday). Sunday ridership has more than doubled since 2019 and is now on-par with Saturday ridership. Since June 2023, DRT no longer operates a separate Sunday schedule, running the same “Weekend” service on both Saturday and Sunday.

Figure 2: 2024 Monthly Boardings compared to 2019 (January through August):



- d. Observed ridership on transit routes generally reflect land use planning principles that support transit: the presence of residential density, a variety of commercial, work and school destinations, and connectivity among them. Longer, more frequent routes tend to generate higher ridership because of the number of connections they enable. This in turn necessitates more frequent service, which in turn facilitates more connections when customers can afford to spend more time riding since they spend less time waiting. Higher, concentrated, ridership makes infrastructure enhancements more economical on a per-rider basis, as evidenced by forthcoming construction of median BRT stations on Kingston Road.
- e. In Durham Region, seven transit routes (see Figure 3) account for half of daily ridership: PULSE 900, PULSE 901, PULSE 915, PULSE 916 and Route 920/921. Except for the high-ridership Simcoe Street corridor all these routes travel long distances across multiple local municipalities and are the seven most frequent routes in the network. These routes are a major focus for future service growth.

Figure 3: Boardings by Route, January-August 2024:



- f. When service frequency is too high compared to observed ridership, the route is said to be underproductive, which is to say that the cost per rider is higher than service guidelines prescribe. DRT measures route productivity by boardings per revenue service hour. Routes are reviewed regularly to ensure services are operating where and when sufficient demand exists. Routes consistently underperforming may see adjustments to routing or span of service. Considerations are made for new routes recognizing that it can take 1-3 years for a route to reach its ridership potential since the choice to take transit is often impacted by long-term decisions including whether to use a car or how many cars a household requires. Considerations are also made for

routes that service a social equity factor such as those operating in Health Neighbourhoods or connecting to health care facilities. In addition to measuring peak service period performance, DRT's Service Guidelines also account for off-peak service and services operating in a rural area according to a lower standard for boardings per hour.

4.3 Weekday Route Performance, Boardings per Hour:

- a. During weekday morning and afternoon peak periods in 2024, all routes met or exceeded the productivity guidelines, except the routes that have been reinstated from the temporary service reductions earlier in the year). These routes, and routes newly introduced in September 2024, are expected to go through a period of ridership growth as customers return to the system.
- b. The assessment of network performance in 2024 to-date, coupled with higher Fall ridership, highlights opportunities to further drive ridership growth and to reduce crowding:
- c. PULSE 901 – the most productive all-day route in the system. During certain periods, service could almost triple and still meet the productivity guidelines without the additional ridership this would generate. The deployment of articulated buses on this route in September 2024 supports increased productivity given the improved ratio between passenger capacity and vehicle hours provided by the larger vehicles.
- d. Route 101 – the most productive local peak-period route, serving the Pickering industrial area and Bay Ridges neighbourhood. Based on ridership productivity, higher frequency and a wider span of service are warranted and will be explored as part of future service plans.
- e. PULSE 900, and Route 920, which operate every 10 and 15 minutes respectively during peak periods, are productive and busy cross-regional routes that warrant additional peak period service to meet rising demand and will be explored as part of future service plans.
- f. Routes 216, 403, and 902, which already operate every 15 minutes during peak periods warrant additional service, operating every 10 minutes at peak.
- g. Routes 224, 405, 409, and 410 which currently operate every 30 minutes, warrant additional service to operate every 15 minutes at peak and will be explored as part of future service plans.
- h. The following routes are not currently meeting the minimum service standards of: 30 boardings per hour on PULSE rapid bus routes, 20 boardings per hour on base routes, or 8 boardings per hour on routes operating in rural areas:
- i. Routes 301 and 319 – These routes' midday service was temporarily suspended between January and August 2024. Monitoring will continue as ridership on the routes returns.
- j. Route 227 – This route has been modified to meet customers' travel needs and encourage ridership growth in September 2024. The route now better serves employment destinations in the Ajax industrial area and serves southwest Ajax which saw service suspended in January 2024. The impact of those changes will be monitored.

- k. Route 502 – This route has been modified in September 2024 including restoring two-way service during most times of the day and a peak-period extension to Southwest Bowmanville. The impact of those changes will be monitored.
- l. Route 421 – This route has been modified to improve reliability and train connections at Oshawa Station. The impact of those changes will be monitored.
- m. Route 392 – This is a short route connecting employment and health care destinations to Whitby Station. Its performance will continue to be monitored and service adjusted to best need customer needs, as warranted.
- n. Route 605 – This route serves local travel in Uxbridge. Some of the customer trips on this route are nominally captured as boardings on Route 905, understating the utility and performance of the route.
- o. Mid-day service meets or exceeds the applicable boardings per hour standard, except Route 392. Preliminary performance data from September 2024 shows improvement on all these routes. Some now exceed the thresholds and others are expected to continue improving as new customers are accommodated by service that previously did not meet their travel needs.

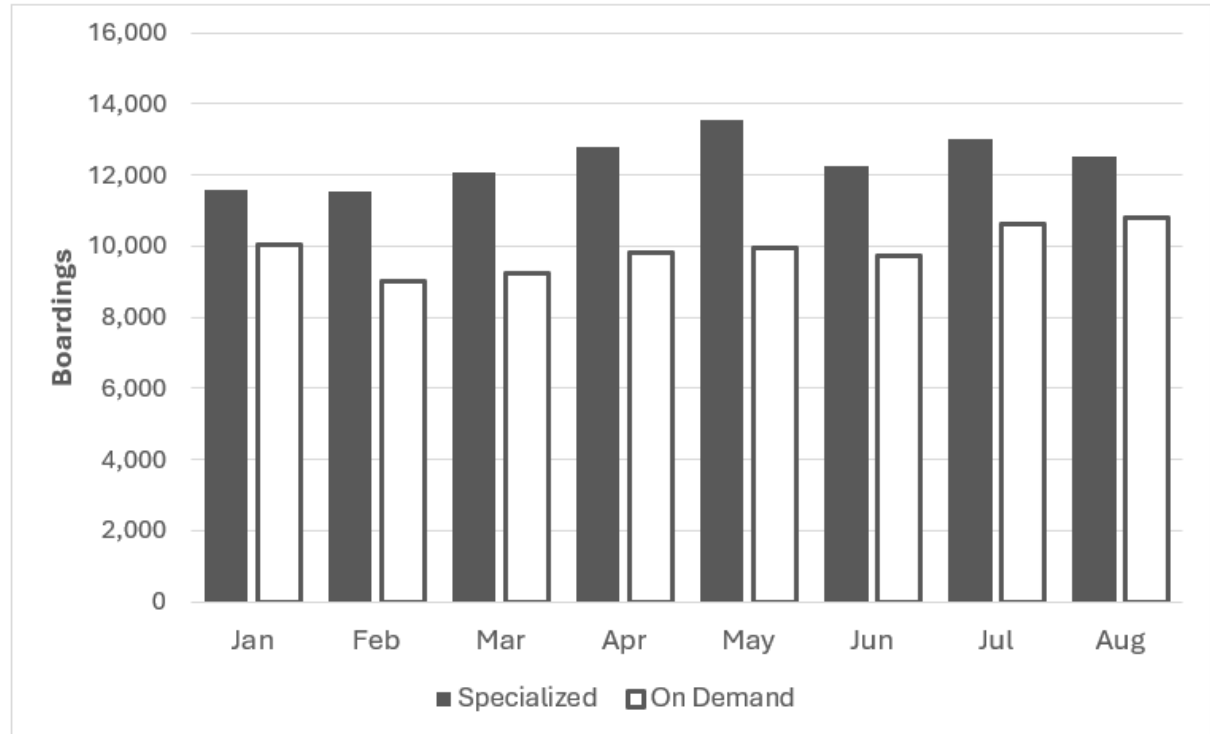
4.4 Weekend Route Performance, Boardings per Hour:

- a. Reflecting substantial ridership increases on weekends over the past two years, route performance throughout the day exceeds performance thresholds on most routes. During some times of the day, route productivity suggests the need for additional service on some routes, most notably PULSE 901.
- b. The Fall 2024 network performance assessment identified that the following routes are not meeting the minimum service standards service standards of 25 boardings per hour on PULSE rapid bus routes, and 15 boardings per hour on local/base routes: 121, 411, 502
- c. Service on these routes will be monitored. Preliminary ridership data from September 2024 indicates that Routes 121 and 502 now meet productivity targets. Adjustments will be explored for implementation in 2025 to ensure customers' travel needs are being met by service on these routes and adjusted accordingly.

4.5 On Demand, including Specialized Transit:

- a. Ridership growth on the On Demand service has slowed since the initial post-pandemic increases. This is attributable to flattening demand coming out of the pandemic, more scheduled service which reduces reliance on On Demand, and the On Demand system operating at or near capacity at peak periods.
- b. On Demand/Specialized Transit trips continue to increase; boardings in September 2024 are approximately 25% higher than at the same time in 2023.
- c. Additional service hours being deployed in Fall 2024 will support further ridership growth and a decline in the rate of unaccommodated requests.

Figure 4: Monthly Boardings On Demand and Specialized Transit 2024



4.6 Moving Forward:

- a. While significant progress has been made to advance equity across the transit network, more needs to be done. DRT continues to prioritize social equity, identifying service enhancements based on weighted ridership through priority neighborhoods. These enhancements will see a broader span of service to support off-peak commuting, and provide high-quality, direct service.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 In many instances, the demand for transit services continues to exceed the service levels currently offered, and many residents continue to lack access to DRT services when needed. Key corridors are performing very well throughout all times of the day, however, residents in several urban areas of the Region, such as Seaton, West Whitby and Newcastle, continue to only have access to scheduled transit during weekday peak periods. Significant increases in frequency could be implemented today while continuing to deliver service within established productivity guidelines. Improvements to frequency would provide residents with improved travel options and flexibility, resulting in increased ridership and influencing the modal shift towards public transit
- 5.2 Transit routes currently operating below the service guideline will be monitored closely to evaluate service effectiveness. In some areas of the Region, population

density, destinations and mixed uses, and the challenging active transportation environment, may not support higher demand for transit services.

Respectfully submitted,

Original Signed by

Bill Holmes
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Recommended for Presentation to Committee

Original Signed by

Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
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