Town of Okotoks

Five-Year Transit Outcomes

2026-2030

Table of Contents

Land Acknowledgement

The Town of Okotoks acknowledges the original stewards of this land that we know and call Treaty 7 Territory, which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy First Nations the Kainai, Siksika and Piikani. The Stoney Nakoda First Nations, which includes the Bearspaw, Chiniki and Goodstoney, the Dene First Nation of Tsuut'ina and the Métis Nation of Alberta. We vow to continue honouring and respecting the Indigenous Peoples Sacred and traditional ways of life and will carry on this special relationship with the land so that generations to come can enjoy, use, and live off the land as their ancestors did. We honour and respect this space, the water, the animals, and all the beings who have a spirit and have been here long before us.

Executive Summary

The future vision for Okotoks Transit embraces a multi-faceted approach designed to meet the evolving needs of the community. Over the next five years, a set of desired outcomes will guide the development of a responsive, accessible, and sustainable transit system. These outcomes will focus on supporting diverse travel patterns and ensuring the service continues to meet the needs of all residents, whether commuting, accessing essential services, or requiring flexible mobility options. By planning with intention, Okotoks Transit aims to enhance the overall rider experience while aligning with broader community goals.

Okotoks' commitment to a sustainable future is evident in its guiding plans, including the Municipal Development Plan (MDP), Environmental Master Plan (EMP), and the Climate Action Plan (CAP), with transit playing a key role in achieving these goals. Transit helps to promote sustainable growth, environmental responsibility, and enhanced community well-being. The MDP highlights compact, mixed-use development patterns that reduce reliance on personal vehicles and a well-developed transit system will provide viable alternatives for residents to access employment, services, and amenities.

The CAP sets targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting sustainable transportation options. As stated in the CAP, increasing access to regional and local transit provides efficient transportation alternatives.

Okotoks' EMP targets a decrease in emissions and enhanced air quality, both achievable via effective transportation alternatives. The future of transit in Okotoks envisions a network that supports community connectivity, reduces environmental impact, and fosters a resilient, livable town.

In addition, the Social Needs Assessment has identified community transportation as one of the top five social priorities under accessibility and inclusive services. The assessment highlighted that access to essential services, such as transportation, is vital for residents, particularly seniors and individuals without private vehicles. Many rely on public transit to maintain independence and community connections, yet current transit options can be unreliable.

By strategically aligning Okotoks Transit with its guiding plans, such as the MDP, the Town can create a more sustainable, resilient, and livable community for all residents. This aligns with community priorities noted in the Social Needs Assessment. By providing an affordable, reliable and accessible transit, Okotoks can empower every resident to participate fully in community life, reduce environmental impact, and foster a connected, inclusive town where opportunity and well-being are within everyone's reach.

Background

Okotoks Town Council approved the Local Transit Implementation Plan in February 2019 with on-demand transit service launching in December 2019. This innovative service model provides curb-to-curb transit within town boundaries and provides a range of benefits to customers and the community, such as increased mobility options, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and improved access to community amenities.

The service's success is evident in its rapid adoption and recognition, winning the Minister's Award for Municipal Excellence for Service Delivery Innovation from the Government of Alberta. Key features include a flexible, app-based booking system and the use of vans or shuttle buses that are smaller in size to match Okotoks' urban form and scale. The success and demand resulted in service expansion in January 2022, a time when many communities operating transit were still recovering from the impact to their ridership as a result of the pandemic.

Okotoks' on-demand service comprises seven Town-owned vehicles. Peak customer demand periods are from 7:30-9:30 a.m. and 3:00-6:00 p.m. on weekdays, often resulting in ride unavailability. Transit ridership has exceeded expectations, reaching its 2026 target of 45,000 rides by its second year of service and achieving over 76,000 rides in 2023. Ridership experienced its first decline from 73,000 rides to 68,000 rides in 2024. This suggests there are potential service gaps, particularly in reliability and availability.

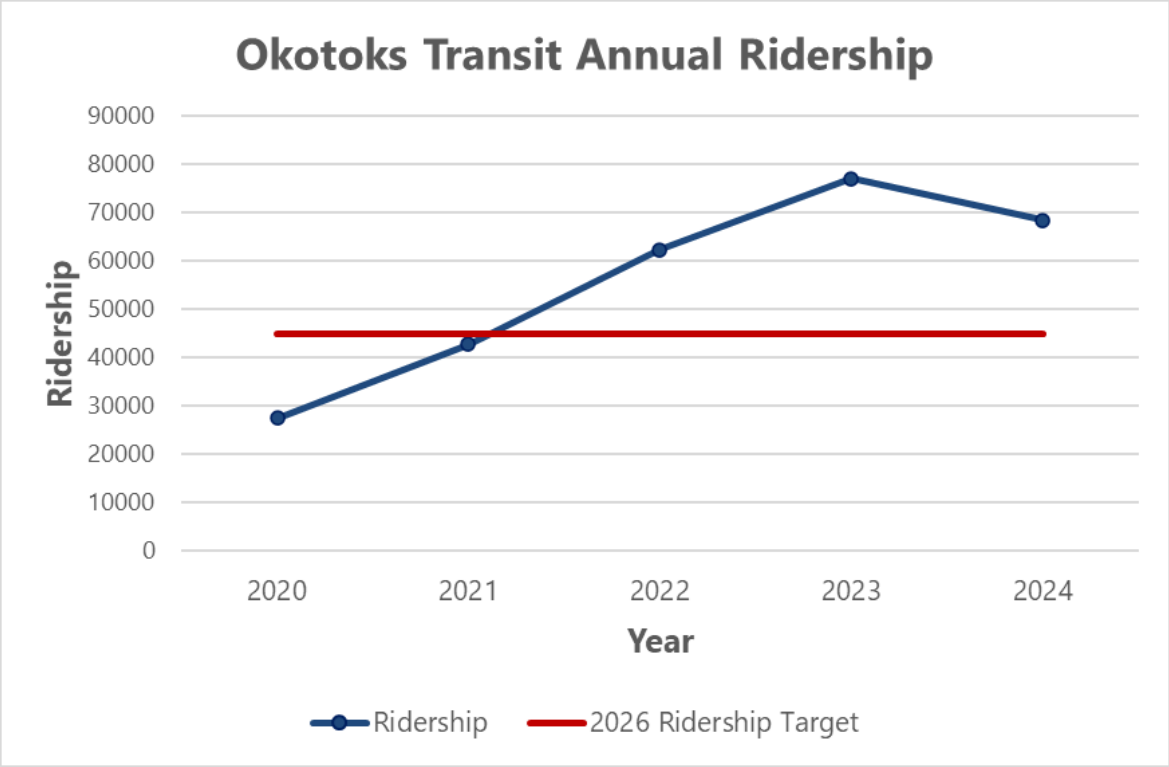

Figure 1. Okotoks Transit annual ridership (2020–2024) with a trendline indicating the 2026 ridership target.

To address the challenges of oversubscription and operational strain in the on-demand transit system, Leading Mobility conducted a fixed-route feasibility study in August 2023. The study assessed the current on-demand system, established service objectives for a potential fixed-route option, and analyzed trip data to guide future planning. The findings revealed that a significant portion of on-demand trips clustered along two primary corridors, presenting an opportunity to improve efficiency by introducing fixed routes in these high-demand areas. Two fixed-route concepts were proposed to complement the existing on-demand service, focusing on key employment locations and civic amenities. The proposed routes were informed by multi-year trip data to capture the highest concentrations of origins and destinations.

By introducing a hybrid model that combines fixed routes with the existing on-demand service, the study aimed to optimize cost-effectiveness, service reliability, and overall network efficiency. Fixed routes are better suited for high-volume corridors, offering

predictable schedules, while on-demand service remains ideal for low-density areas and first/last-mile connections.

This approach not only alleviates pressure on the on-demand service, freeing up capacity for more dispersed trips, but also aligns with Okotoks' strategic priorities of responsibly managed growth, a strong local economy, and enhanced culture and community health. The hybrid model offers a scalable, equitable, and sustainable solution to meet the community's current and future transit needs.

Current Service Delivery Model

The Town delivers public transit services via a contracted service delivery model. The Town defines the level of service, desired service outcomes, and targeted key performance indicators to the market who respond through a competitive bidding process. The successful contracted provider enters into a multi-year agreement, which provides the Town with budget certainty and consistent service delivery. Under this arrangement, the service provider is responsible for key operational tasks, including providing drivers, training, scheduling, vehicle maintenance, customer service, storage facilities, and software solutions. In return, the Town receives a fully managed transit service while maintaining oversight. The Town retains control over strategic decisions like determining service hours, implementing service level changes, and planning the future of the transit system.

The service delivery model is reassessed every three years to ensure cost-efficiency and value. This review includes a comparative analysis of the contracted model's costs versus the potential costs of delivering transit services in-house. This evaluation ensures that the most effective and economical approach is maintained while meeting the community's transit needs.

Alignment with Municipal Plans & Community Priorities

The direction and priorities of Okotoks Transit are shaped by several foundational documents along with priorities expressed by the community:

- **Municipal Development Plan (MDP):** Establishes a long-term vision for land use and supports the creation of a safe, equitable, and sustainable multi-modal transportation network, aiming to reduce dependence on personal vehicles.
- **Environmental Master Plan (EMP):** Sets priorities for environmental stewardship and sustainability, directly influencing the planning and operation of transit infrastructure.
- **Climate Action Plan (CAP):** Provides strategies to lower greenhouse gas emissions and bolster climate resilience, guiding the shift toward low-emission transit options.
- **Social Needs Assessment:** Identified community transportation as one of the top five social priorities under accessibility and inclusive services.

Together, these municipal plans and community feedback provide a clear mandate for Okotoks Transit to pursue initiatives that foster a connected, environmentally responsible, and accessible community.

Quadruple Bottom Line: Foundation for Decision-Making

The quadruple bottom line framework will inform all major transit decisions:

- **Purpose:** Ensures that transit initiatives reflect broader community impacts and values, extending beyond operational outcomes.
- **People:** Prioritizes improved connectivity, accessibility, and equity for all residents, supporting social inclusion.
- **Planet:** Focuses on minimizing environmental impact and promoting sustainable travel choices.

- **Profit:** Emphasizes long-term financial sustainability through efficient resource management and innovation.

Decision-making will continue to be evidence-based, using data, rider feedback, and performance metrics to drive continuous improvement. This framework allows for transparent evaluation of trade-offs, priority setting, and alignment with community needs and values.

Capital and Infrastructure Planning

Fleet Planning and Right-Sizing

To align with evolving ridership demand and sustainability goals, the future of transit will focus on right-sizing the fleet. For the on-demand service, this would involve purchasing smaller vehicles, such as hybrid or electric wheelchair-accessible vans. For the fixed-route service, evaluating the use of low-floor shuttle buses with a capacity of up to 21 passengers.

Vehicle Type	Capacity	Approx. Cost (2025)	
Hybrid Accessible Van	Up to 5 passengers & 1-2 wheelchairs	<$116,000 CAD	
Low-Floor Shuttle Bus	Up to 21-passengers & 1-2 wheelchairs	$325,000 CAD	

Table 1. Future vehicle type and seating capacity examples for fixed-route and on-demand services.

Lifecycle Capital Planning

The five-year lifecycle capital plan focuses on phased fleet renewal. Beginning in 2026, the plan outlines the acquisition of one (1) to two (2) shuttles annually to gradually replace aging vehicles as they reach their 5-7-year operational lifespan. The estimated replacement vehicle costs include a projected average increase of 5.4% each year and are outlined in Table 2.

Year	Type and number of Replacement Units	Projected Capital Expenditure
2026	Two (2) buses	$650,000
2027	Two (2) vans	$245,000
2028	One (1) van	$129,000
2029	One (1) van	$136,000
2030	Two (2) vans	$287,000

Table 2. The five-year lifecycle capital plan for fleet renewal.

Fleet Expansion

It is industry practice to separate lifecycle replacement vehicles from growth vehicles. This provides budget clarity for vehicles to reliably deliver existing levels of service (lifecycle) in comparison to additional vehicles required to meet increased levels of service (expansion). The five-year table provides a projection of when expansion vehicles may be required. These timelines can be adjusted based on community demand and changing priorities.

Year	Number of vehicles	Projected Capital Expenditure	Anticipated Operational Expenditure
2026	N/A		
2027	N/A		
2028	Two (2) buses	$725,000	Increase local fixed route level of service: $600,000
2029	N/A		
2030	One (1) bus	$405,000	Increase local fixed route level of service: $175,000

Table 3. Projected fleet expansion over the next five years.

Long-term Infrastructure Needs

To date, the Town's investment in the transit program has centred on rolling stock. This is not uncommon for communities' that deliver service via an on-demand transit model.

As the service, and service types evolve, the type of infrastructure investment will diversify to support accessibility, customer amenities, and service operations.

Passenger Amenities and Accessibility

The introduction and growth of a fixed-route network will create demand for customer amenities at bus stops. It is recommended, that the level of investment and amenities at bus stops is guided by average daily boardings. Consideration will also be given to other factors such as exposure to inclement or extreme weather, customer demographics, and proximity of similar amenities.

Amenity	0-10 Boardings	10-30 Boardings	30+ boardings
Lighting	X	X	X
Bus stop sign	X	X	X
Accessible Pad	X	X	X
Bench		X	X
Shelter			X
Three Stream Waste Receptacle			X
Bike Rack			X

Service Operations and Efficiency

The Town's contracted service provider is responsible for the storage and maintenance of the Town's transit assets. As the service grows, there will be a need to review these arrangements, including the possible provision of the Town providing storage and/or maintenance at a Town-owned facility as the transit fleet expands. This facility is noted as a potential future investment and falls outside of the 5-year horizon.

Capital Funding Sources and Partnerships

Public transit projects have traditionally received capital funding support from higher orders of government for state of good repair, lifecycle replacement, rolling stock, and

facilities. Funding, such as the Housing Infrastructure and Communities Canada's Public Transit Fund, is critical in supporting fleet replacement, expansion, and infrastructure while minimizing local budgetary impacts. The Town will engage with funding partners to identify grant opportunities to offset capital investments made at the local level.

In absence of grant funding opportunities, the Town will ensure that future investments are aligned with the quadruple bottom-line approach and supported through evidence-based decision making. This will ensure that transit capital projects are prioritized to achieve desired outcomes focused on service reliability, environmental sustainability, and long-term financial viability.

Zero-Emission Fleet Transition Plan

The Town of Okotoks has taken proactive steps to explore zero-emission opportunities for its public transit system. In 2022, the Town commissioned a comprehensive feasibility study by the Canadian Urban Transit Research and Innovation Consortium (CUTRIC) to assess the potential implementation of a zero-emissions bus fleet. This study evaluated the suitability and performance of zero-emission buses (ZEBs) for Okotoks Transit, considering the specific operational conditions of the local transit system.

The feasibility analysis examined a range of factors, including transit data simulations, geographical conditions, technical specifications of vehicles, and charging infrastructure. It assessed the existing on-demand service and the potential introduction of fixed routes and electric low-speed autonomous shuttles. While the study provides valuable insights for future transit planning, the adoption of low-carbon technologies will ultimately depend on securing the necessary funding and resources. Any new vehicle procurement will be carefully evaluated based on total lifecycle costs and alignment with greenhouse gas reduction targets outlined in the EMP and CAP.

CUTRIC's report offers detailed recommendations on implementing fixed-route transit and electrifying Okotoks Transit's fleet. It highlights that fixed-route operations are particularly well suited for electrification due to their predictable schedules, which align with the capabilities of battery electric buses (BEBs). Simulations suggest that BEBs can

efficiently support peak-hour fixed-routes. The report recommends starting with smaller buses for fixed routes to minimize upfront costs while gradually transitioning to full electrification. The study identifies significant long-term benefits of fleet electrification, including lower operational costs, reduced greenhouse emissions, and alignment with the Town's climate action goals.

Implementation Plan

Five-Year Transit Outcomes

The five-year transit outcomes will serve as a strategic guide for the future development of Okotoks Transit, ensuring that service enhancements and priorities are closely aligned with the Town's overarching vision for a sustainable, inclusive, and prosperous community. These outcomes are firmly rooted in the quadruple bottom line framework, which integrates four essential pillars-Purpose, People, Planet, and Profit-into decision-making.

Under **Purpose**, Transit service will celebrate and strengthen Okotoks' unique identity and create a lasting positive impact by bringing people together around shared values, traditions, and aspirations. Transit will be innovative, evolving to meet the changing needs of the community.

Under **People**, the focus is creating and maintaining community bonds through connecting people to the places they want to access. Transit services will be inclusive, including barrier-free and free of financial barriers, ensuring universal accessibility for all residents. Our evidence-based approach will provide residents and transit customers with a clear roadmap of service adjustments to improve their confidence and satisfaction in the service. The fixed-route network will evolve with the community, based on community engagement and usage data.

Transit service will be strategically and incrementally modified as part of the **Profit** pillar. Service delivery changes will improve ridership and, in turn, increase revenues. This will improve the revenue-cost ratio making transit a more financially sustainable service.

For **Planet**, over the next five years Transit will be positioned as a mode of choice for residents. This will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote a more environmentally sustainable transportation network. To support this outcome, the Town has completed an assessment of transitioning to zero-emission transit vehicles. This transition will be a longer-term goal due to the rapid changes and market forces that impact zero-emission vehicle technologies.

This holistic approach ensures that transit investments address immediate needs while supporting the community's long-term values and aspirations.

Expected Outcomes

Desired outcomes for Okotoks Transit over the next five years:

- **Enhance Reliability and Availability:** Enhance service consistency to make transit accessible when and where residents need it most.
- **Grow Ridership:** Attract new users through system improvements that prioritize efficiency and user-friendly experiences.
- **Improve Customer Experience:** Integrate real-time tracking and spontaneous boarding options to empower riders with greater convenience and accessibility.
- **Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** Public transit can reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions aligning with the EMP goals in creating a low-carbon environment and improving air quality.
- **Vitalize the Local Economy:** Strengthen local economic growth by improving access to employment hubs, retail centers, and business districts, fostering workforce mobility and commercial activity.
- **Enhance Community Well-Being:** Promote community well-being by connecting residents to healthcare, education, recreation, and social services, ensuring equitable access for all demographics.
- **Pursue Funding Opportunities:** Pursue grants, partnerships, and innovative funding models to align with long-term transit objectives and community priorities.

Service Analysis and Future Needs

Service Optimization and Modifications

Any modifications to levels of service will be guided by the following criteria:

Service Type	Minimum Thresholds (Passengers per Vehicles Hour)	Modification Thresholds (Passengers per Vehicles Hour)	Recommended Action
On-demand	4 PVH	N/A	No changes are recommended
Fixed-route	4 PVH	8 PVH	Increase additional service hours

Table 4. Transit service performance thresholds and recommended actions.

For the fixed-route modification threshold to instigate a service level change, the threshold of 8 PVH must be met for 20% of fixed-route service hours over three consecutive months.

Ongoing Performance Monitoring and Evaluation

Okotoks Transit is dedicated to ongoing performance monitoring and evaluation. By tracking key success measures, the system can identify both achievements and opportunities for enhancement. This commitment ensures that transit remains responsive to community needs, adapts to changing demands, and remains aligned with the Town's broader goals for sustainability and accessibility.

Outcomes and Measures

The following table outlines the desired outcomes for Okotoks Transit over the next five years, along with corresponding success measures:

Desired Outcome	Key Actions	Success Measure
Increased transit ridership.	1. Develop targeted campaigns designed to attract new customers and increase usage from existing transit customers.	1. Growth in overall ridership
Improve transit accessibility and social inclusion.	1. Alignment with evolving policies and community needs.	1. Number of accessible features included in Transit program.
Affordable transit options for all income levels.	1. Introduction of transit affordability program.	1. Affordability program is available to residents in need.
Better understanding of rider experience through regular feedback.	1. Customer satisfaction surveys.	1. Maintain an overall customer satisfaction rating of 85%.
A transit fleet that includes zero-emission vehicles where feasible.	1. Monitor changes in zero emission technologies that align with environmental objectives.	1. Increase number of zero-emission vehicles in the fleet.
Right-sized fleet that aligns with rider demand and reduces operational costs.	1. Update fleet specifications to match right-sized approach. 2. Create and implement new tracking processes to analyze cost per vehicle type.	1. Optimization of fleet size and reduced per-rider cost.
Stronger partnerships with local businesses to improve access to jobs and generate revenue.	1. Explore new revenue streams. 2. Collaborate with Economic Development and private businesses to encourage use of transit.	1. Growth in advertising or partnership revenue. 2. Increased transit trips to commercial/employment areas.

Conclusion

Okotoks Transit has achieved remarkable success, with strong ridership and industry recognition reflecting the value it brings to residents. The Town remains committed to evolving the transit service to meet the needs of the community. Over the next five years, Okotoks Transit will focus on enhancing reliability, improving connectivity, and ensuring equitable access for all residents. These priorities and expected outcomes directly support the vision of the Municipal Development Plan by fostering a safe, multi-modal transportation network and encouraging sustainable, compact growth. The Social Needs Assessment reinforces the importance of transit in promoting accessibility and social inclusion, particularly for those who rely on public transportation to access essential services and maintain community connections. By aligning future transit initiatives with these guiding plans and maintaining an evidence-based approach, Okotoks Transit will continue to strengthen community well-being, support managed growth, and foster a barrier-free transit network for everyone.