Early Transit Phase-In Policy: Promoting Transit in Growing Communities

Organization
City of Brampton — Brampton Transit

Status
Ongoing

Overview
Large cities typically experience the challenge that faced Brampton in the mid-1990s. As subdivisions grow, transit services are not implemented fast enough to give new residents the choice of using transit. Instead, many people opt to purchase a second vehicle and get in the habit of driving. Brampton took a proactive approach by introducing transit routes to new subdivisions as early as possible.

Results:
- Between 1996 and 2000, ridership grew by 40%, double the increase in Brampton's population, and double the national transit ridership increases for the same period.
- By the end of 2002, ridership had increased to over seven million passenger trips per year, a 55% increase since the phase in policy was adopted.

Budget:
- Part of the city's transit operations budget

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Resources
- Web site — www.city.brampton.ca

Community context

The City of Brampton (population 325,000) almost doubled in size between 1986 and 2001, and its population is projected to increase to 650,000 by 2030.

Brampton is a bedroom community of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) with many of its residents commuting to other parts of the GTA. A 1995-1996 transportation study revealed that, even if all of Brampton's roads were built to capacity, 25% of all trips would need to be by transit to avoid significant congestion.

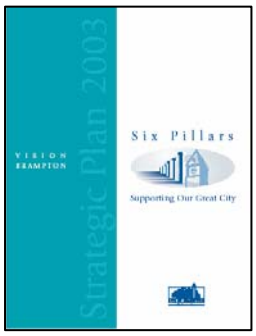
Between 1989 and 1996, however, transit ridership in Brampton declined by 12%, dropping from a record high of over 5.5 million trips each year to 4.9 million.

Part of this decline was attributed to the recession experienced country-wide during the mid to late 1990s. In a recession, there tends to be fewer discretionary trips taken (for shopping and recreational purposes, for example). Also during this time, the Province of Ontario removed subsidies to public transit.

Policy context

In 1995, the city's transit department was moved from the community services department into public works. Previously, the transit department (which was also part of parks, recreation, and fire services) had to compete with public works for budget revenues.

In 1998, the city adopted a new Official Plan, *The Four Cornerstones of Brampton.* The plan was updated in May 2003 (*Six Pillars Supporting Our Great City*).

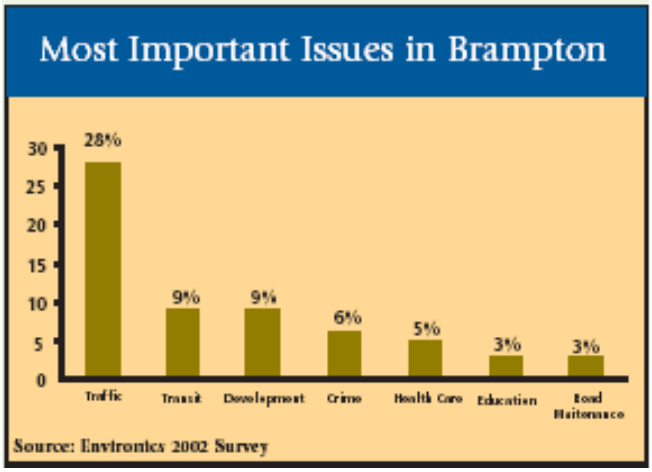


The vision for the city's 2003 Official Plan is: To be a vibrant, safe and attractive city of opportunity where efficient services make it possible for families, individuals and the business community to grow, prosper and enjoy a high quality of life.

In both strategic plans, the city adopted several transit objectives:

- Develop safe and attractive transit systems and services to improve personal mobility and travel choices and conserve energy resources;
- Expand the local transit system;
- Monitor and manage land use designations to support transit and reduce congestion;
- Provide convenient transit service between Brampton and Mississauga, Metro Toronto, and other area municipalities; and
- Develop a rapid transit system in co-ordination with other activities in the GTA.

According to the city's 2003 Official Plan, the most important issue facing Brampton residents is traffic (shown in the chart below).



The city's proactive transit policies are showing that transit is both needed and desired to avoid serious traffic congestion in future.

Rationale and objectives

Due to the downturn in the economy and the restrictions on the revenue that could be generated through development charges, the city had only limited resources to improve its existing transit services.

Older neighbourhoods were already well-served by public transit, while most new Brampton residents came from concentrated areas that have a good level of public transit. As such, these residents had higher expectations for the city's transit system. Council therefore decided that the city should focus on improving its existing system by introducing transit into new subdivisions.

City council directed staff to proactively plan for transit—through a series of actions listed below—and set short and long-term objectives for transit ridership.

Short-term objectives:

- Increase transit ridership
- Achieve a cost recovery rate of 65% (the difference between the amount spent to operate transit and the fares recovered by transit users)
- Provide an efficient transportation alternative to its residents

Long-term objective:

- Increase the modal share (the percentage of passengers carried by different modes of transportation) for public transit to 25% by the year 2021

Actions

New subdivision agreements. All of the city's new subdivision agreements stipulate that transit must be phased in and that roads be built wide enough for bus routes, so that transit services can be introduced at the earliest possible time.

Participation in planning and road development. Transit staff participate in the subdivision planning and ensure that transit routes and services—bus stop pads, pedestrian walkways, etc.—are provided as development proceeds. Staff also work with developers on proper road development to accommodate transit.

The community of Springdale, northeast of the city, is a good example of this. Springdale was built by one developer and, with the assistance of transit staff, phased in transit perfectly. The developer constructed mid-collector streets, rather than the looped streets the developer originally preferred. The city also set a limit of 13,550 new houses units in Springdale to ensure that traffic would not exceed the capacity of the road system, resulting in further congestion.

Bus route planning. Transit staff drive through subdivisions, as they are being developed, to determine bus routes. Typically, within one year, transit routes are operating in any new subdivision, or within two to four months of residents moving in.

Traffic signals. Transit staff review where traffic signals will be placed, as proper traffic signalization keeps traffic moving. Prior to subdivision approval, staff members review the plans, make recommendations, and are actively involved in the overall transportation planning process.

Communication with residents. Staff ensure that new residents are informed of new transit routes. In addition, developers pass this information to potential new residents so that they can purchase a home based on their desire for transit.

Meeting demand. With new routes and services the city had to buy more buses. In September 2002, the city purchased 21 new buses and has plans to acquire 195 more over the next 15 years (105 for growth and 90 for replacement). Its 2003 budget approved the purchase of 17 new transit buses. With a larger fleet, staff believe that the city's bus-to-passenger ratio will improve from the current one bus for every 2,950 residents, to one bus for every 1,979 by 2011. In December 2003, the city's fleet consisted of 137 buses, with plans to purchase 18 more beginning in 2005 to accommodate growth.

Results

While it is difficult to attribute the following results directly to Brampton's early transit phase-in policy, the city's success does corroborate the effectiveness of the approach.

- Between 1996 and 2000, ridership grew by 40%, double the increase in Brampton's population, and double the national transit ridership increases for the same period.
- By the end of 2002, ridership had increased to over seven million passenger trips per year, a 54.7% increase since the phase in policy was adopted.
- When the city initiated this policy, it wanted to achieve a 65% cost recovery rate. Between 1996 and 2000 the cost recovery rate rose from 62% to 74% in 2000.
- In December 2003, the cost recovery rate was 59% with an average operating cost of $1.04 per passenger. Brampton Transit attributes this to the capital costs of replacing buses and introducing new routes.

Examples of how transit is being incorporated in new residential developments include Mount Pleasant, Springdale and Trinity Common. By November 2004, GO Transit will complete a new transit station in Mount Pleasant, and the new community is being planned around the station. The area will be transit-oriented and land use will complement transit and capture ridership. Potential buyers have already begun asking when it will be built.

Brampton Transit sees this new type of community as a natural progression for the development industry. The industry is beginning to recognize that public attitudes towards transit are shifting and that they need to plan for transit to capitalize on emerging market trends.

The new procedures have had a dual effect—the city is able to monitor and manage land use designations and zoning so that transit is supported and staff and operating costs are more efficiently used.

The transit stops above illustrate how transit was integrated into the development of Trinity Common, a subdivision in the north of the city.

Participants

City of Brampton and Brampton Transit

Resources

Staff resources. Staff from the city's Planning, Design, Development Department review all subdivision plans first to ensure that all necessary transit infrastructure can be incorporated. Brampton Transit reviews the plans to ensure that there is sufficient room for buses to turn around, bus stop locations, pedestrian walkways and stop pads, etc.

Champions. City council was subjected to public criticism for focusing on transit in a period of economic hardship. The members of council saw, however, that traffic congestion was already a problem and would become worse with time. Brampton Transit applauded council's action, saying that councillors showed greater leadership and foresight in addressing problems 10 or 20 years down the road.

Budget. Not applicable as this was part of the overall operational budget of the City of Brampton's transit services.

Timeline

1996. Brampton Transit begins to implement the policy as per the actions listed above.

1998. City council adopts its Official Plan *The Four Cornerstones of Brampton.*

May 2003. City council updates its Official Plan, now called *The Six Pillars Supporting our Great City.* In both the 1998 and 2003 Official Plans, the city adopts transit objectives.

Lessons learned

Get into new subdivisions early with transit in mind so that residents don't get used to driving the car.

Subdivision agreements can be used to stipulate that transit be phased in and that roads be built wide enough for bus routes so that transit services can be introduced at the earliest possible time.

Planning for transit should include road development, placement of traffic signals, and bus routes.

Give residents advance notice about transit routes, ideally when they view plans of the subdivision so they can then purchase their homes accordingly. Staff knew of other municipal jurisdictions where residents had not been well-informed of new transit routes and, as such, conflicts had occurred. Identifying and phasing in bus routes helped to avoid conflicts because people could choose their home based on their desire for transit.

Transit may operate more effectively as part of public works rather than community services so that all transportation matters can be planned under one department.

Political leadership is required in any policy change. Without the support of city council during a crucial period of time, staff would not have had the authority to proceed with the changes necessary to introduce transit early into new subdivisions.

Multiple developers did not pose a problem. Although multiple developers might appear to pose a problem, the exact opposite has proven to be true. City staff have seen a "renaissance of new thinking" in the development industry—developers have an understanding of what the road network will look like and how transit fits in.

Prepare to meet increased demand. Prior to initiating the policy, transit staff had received few if any calls from residents for new transit routes. After the procedural changes were made and residents began to notice that transit was being planned early in subdivisions, city staff experienced an increase in calls from people in other communities asking for more or new transit services.

Next steps

Brampton is nearing completion of its long-term *Transportation and Transit Master Plan* (TTMP) that will effectively and efficiently accommodate the city's transportation needs, with particular attention to increasing and improving the role of transit. The development process includes opportunities for all community stakeholders to review and contribute to the emerging plan, and initiatives such as new roads, interregional transit links and new transit technologies.

The city is working with the York Region on a bus rapid transit line called Acceleride. Acceleride will enhance transit services between Brampton, York Region and the TTC, and between Brampton and Mississauga. It is the first initiative to come out of the city's TTMP.

In the interim, Brampton Transit is conducting a short-term review to identify areas where it can be more efficient and to develop a five-year plan. To keep up with the city's growing population and increased demand for public transit, staff has asked city council to budget for 25 new transit positions. Brampton operates one of the leanest transit operations in the country, with 220 full-time transit operators, and only one mechanic for every eleven buses. The industry standard is one mechanic for every six buses.

Images are courtesy the City of Brampton