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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Plan, Purpose and Scope

The Whistler and Valley Express – WAVE – transit system is provided as a partnership between the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW), BC Transit and Whistler Transit Ltd., the operating company. Established in 1991 with five buses in operation, the service has rapidly expanded to become a highly-travelled 21-bus operation, carrying 2.8 million passengers annually. Total expenditures amount to \$6.1 million.

This WAVE Five-Year Transit Business Plan has been developed in support of the RMOW's long range sustainability plan, Whistler2020, and the Whistler2020 Transportation Strategy. Designed to provide a context and framework for decision-making about transit matters, the plan proposes a series of service improvements designed to better serve the existing and growing market for public transit.

The plan focuses on the local WAVE service, and is essentially a service plan. Although reference is made to the need for regional transit, specific proposals will be developed through a separate process. There are also three other relevant planning processes currently underway which are related to the business plan - the WAVE Accessibility Study, and the BC Transit/RMOW joint reviews of both fleet and garage facility requirements.

Market Analysis

The plan identifies a number of key market characteristics affecting future needs for transit in Whistler.

- The period of rapid growth in population, employment, development and visitor levels in Whistler is now over. Increases during the next five to ten years will be much more modest, and will level off as development capacity is reached.
- Permanent residents, seasonal residents and visitors all constitute distinct market segments, with differing travel patterns and service needs. Whistler has a very high transit mode split for work trips – especially during the winter - and especially for seasonal residents. A significant number of visitors also use transit.
- Land use in Whistler is generally transit-supportive. Although Whistler is close to build-out, the Rainbow lands and the Athlete Village developments will require transit adjustments and additions.
- Given that the overall size of the market is forecast to be relatively flat, other market drivers including fare levels, parking policies and increased regional transit could all have a considerable impact on future transit use.

Review of Existing Transit Service

The plan summarizes the results of a detailed analysis of the WAVE service.

- WAVE's performance compares extremely well against the five systems of similar size in BC Transit's Municipal Systems Program. In fact, WAVE boasts the highest productivity rate of all the transit systems in B.C. It also has one of the best cost recovery rates, in spite of the fact 40% of all passengers ride free on the Village Shuttle.
- WAVE offers a very high level of service – operating nine routes, 22 hours per day and 365 days per year. In the peak winter months most routes operate with a 15-minute frequency through much of the day, with a six to 10-minute frequency on the Village Shuttle. Comparison of WAVE to other resort communities suggests there is also real potential for future growth in regional service.
- One of the biggest challenges for WAVE remains the strong peaking of demand for transit – on both a daily and a seasonal basis. High ridership also presents its own challenges in terms of maintaining schedule reliability.

Proposed Service Improvements

With service and performance levels already very well above average - and resident and tourist population growth slowing as Whistler nears development capacity – the plan suggests major transit route restructuring will not be required during the next five years. Nonetheless, in order to maintain high performance and customer satisfaction levels - and to meet the need for transit to new and planned developments- incremental changes are recommended.

The plan proposes a series of service improvements over the next five years. These proposals are grouped into two time frames (see summary table on the following page).

- **For the 2008 to 2009 short range period 16,300 hours** of new service is proposed, representing a 24% increase over the existing service level and generating 388,000 more rides. Because most of these service improvements would not be during peak periods in the winter season only one additional in-service vehicle would be required.
- **For the 2010 to 2012 medium range period 11,200 hours** of new service is proposed (assuming Athletes Village is served by the recommended 1-Creekside Express extension). The projected increase in ridership would total 321,000 trips. By the end of 2012, service levels would be about 40% higher than currently and planned new developments would have transit coverage. Five additional in-service vehicles would be required.

Facilities and Fleet

The existing garage facility at Function Junction will have capacity for up to 34 vehicles if the second phase of the facility expansion proceeds as planned. With the projected increase in the WAVE fleet to 33 vehicles by 2012, it is likely that the facility will reach capacity shortly after 2012. Future garage requirements therefore are being examined in the facility planning review noted above.

The 13 Orion vehicles will reach the end of their 20-year life cycle during the plan period and will need to be replaced, providing the opportunity to make the WAVE fleet 100% accessible. The 12 Dennis Darts are generally not well-suited to the high level of in-service use in Whistler, resulting in high maintenance costs. These vehicles will likely be replaced prior to the end of their life cycle. Again, as noted earlier, future fleet requirements are under joint review by the RMOW and BC Transit.

Summary of Proposed Short Range Service Options, 2008-09						
	Service description	Service hours	Additional vehicles	Additional ridership	Total cost (2007 \$)	Additional revenue
Proposed for implementation in 2008						
S-1	1-Creekside Express extended shoulder season	400	--	12,000	\$25,000	\$15,000
S-2	2-Whistler Creek extended Function Junction service	800	--	12,000	\$50,000	\$15,000
S-3	3-Emerald/4-Alpine separate routes winter evening period	2,300	--	69,000	\$144,000	\$88,000
S-4	3-Emerald/4-Alpine separate routes winter midday period	1,900	--	67,000	\$119,000	\$84,000
S-5	3-Emerald/4-Alpine separate routes non-peak season AM peak period.	900	--	23,000	\$57,000	\$29,000
S-6	Earlier winter peak season service start	1,100	--	44,000	\$69,000	\$35,000
S-7	Village Shuttle extended non-peak season service day	700	--	21,000	\$44,000	--
S-8	7-Tapleys 60-minute non-peak season evening service	300	--	6,000	\$19,000	\$8,000
S-9	Schedule maintenance	2,400	--	24,000	\$151,000	\$19,000
Proposed for implementation in 2009						
S-10	New Bayshores-Upper Nordic Shuttle	5,500	1	110,000	\$331,000	\$140,000
Total short range		16,300	1	388,000	\$1,009,000	\$435,000

Summary of Medium Range Service Options, 2010-12						
	Service description	Service hours	Additional vehicles	Additional ridership	Total cost	Additional revenue
M-1	1-Creekside Express year round service	2,300	--	69,000	\$144,000	\$88,000
M-2a	Athletes Village 1-Creekside Express extension	2,500	1	50,000	\$187,000	\$63,000
M-2b	Athletes Village Bayshores Upper Nordic shuttle extension	1,800	--	32,000	\$100,000	\$41,000
M-3	3-Emerald/4-Alpine increased winter peak frequency	1,900	2	76,000	\$180,000	\$97,000
M-4	Village Shuttle increased winter peak frequency	1,600	1	96,000	\$131,000	--
M-5	Schedule maintenance	2,900	1	30,000	\$212,000	\$23,000
Total medium range *		11,200	5	321,000	\$854,000	\$271,000

*Assumes implementation of option M-2a

Funding and Fares

Total estimated costs for the short and medium range proposals combined total \$1.86 million, against projected revenues of \$0.71 million.

Historically, the Province of B.C. - through BC Transit - has funded 46.69% of the cost of conventional transit service in the Municipal Systems Program. However, since 2003, the RMOW has used the "flexible funding" option provided by the Province to fund 100% of service expansions.

BC Transit is working with the provincial government towards the development of a sustainable long-term funding and governance structure for transit in B.C. In the 2007/08 provincial budget, the Province made some funding available for service expansion at up to the historic level of cost-sharing. Should new funding again become available from the Province in future years, it would be used to help offset service expansion costs proposed in this plan. Having a clearly defined vision in the WAVE business plan will help the RMOW in securing any new provincial funding as it becomes available.

The RMOW is responsible for approving and amending fare structures for the transit system. Currently (2006/07 fiscal year) \$2.2 million, or 36% of total operating expenditures are recovered from fares. (The costs of the Village Shuttle, which is provided free to riders, are covered by the RMOW's portion of the hotel tax.)

Fare levels for WAVE have been unchanged since 1997. Compared with other communities in B.C., the cash fare in Whistler is relatively low while 30-day WaveCard costs are relatively high. The plan suggests that the RMOW may wish to review the ratio between cash fares and prepaid fare products, and examine the potential for developing new prepaid fare products which could better meet the needs of specific markets.

Supporting Strategies

The plan discusses a number of strategies to be implemented in support of the service plan. The RMOW is responsible for the implementation of transportation demand management – TDM, and in this regard it actively promotes ridesharing and cycling. The RMOW is also responsible for maintaining bus stop facilities, and plans are in place to improve transit information at 20 stops. BC Transit and the RMOW will continue to jointly develop and implement annual marketing plans for WAVE.

The TDM measures with the greatest potential to influence future transit requirements in Whistler relate to parking charges and the provision of free transit. The 1999 Whistler Comprehensive Transportation Study proposed the implementation of pay parking for day visitors, with revenue to support TDM programs - including expansion of free transit service throughout Whistler. (In both Vail and Aspen day visitors must pay for parking and all local transit is free.) Discussion regarding a similar arrangement for Whistler has ensued for several years. This remains a sensitive issue, as businesses often feel they must continue to provide free parking in order to attract more customers.

The application of free fares system-wide would have a significant impact on ridership, and would result in the need for expanded service beyond what is outlined here. Thus the total cost of free fares would be more than just the foregone fare revenue.

Plan Implementation and Monitoring

The WAVE Five-Year Transit Business Plan is not a static document. It will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis to reflect performance achieved in the new services implemented to date, and to respond to changes in markets and demand. The order of implementation for the proposed service improvements may also change as part of this adjustment process.

Key performance indicators - KPIs - will be used by the RMOW and BC Transit to help establish priorities for new services, and to monitor the performance of new services after implementation. In addition, other factors - particularly community goals - will be taken into consideration as this business plan is implemented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Resort Municipality of Whistler and BC Transit:

- 1. Approve the WAVE Five-Year Transit Business Plan as a guide for transit service planning and delivery in Whistler.**
- 2. Develop five-year KPI targets, as outlined in Section 2.3, by the end of 2007.**
- 3. Approve in principle the Short Range Service Options outlined in Section 5.4, and direct staff to proceed with more detailed planning work. Implementation will be subject to available funding, and final approval will be part of the annual operating agreement budget development process.**