

City of Mississauga
Corporate Report



<p>Date: August 26, 2021</p> <p>To: Mayor and Members of Council</p>	<p>Originator's files:</p>
<p>From: Geoff Wright, P.Eng, MBA, Commissioner of Transportation and Works</p>	<p>Meeting date: September 22, 2021</p>

Subject

MiWay COVID-19 Ridership Recovery Strategy

Recommendation

That the report dated August 26, 2021 from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works entitled "MiWay COVID-19 Ridership Recovery Strategy" be received for information.

Executive Summary

- MiWay has suffered ridership decline because of the COVID-19 pandemic and provincial stay-at-home orders over the last 18 months.
- Transit ridership in Mississauga and across the Greater Toronto & Hamilton Area (GTHA) is expected to return over the course of years, not months.
- MiWay is adjusting service frequencies across the network to ensure that service is available where and when customers need it, and the potential for overcrowding is reduced.
- MiWay is committed to monitoring all routes in the transit system network so that service levels are responsive to customers' needs and can change with shifts in demand as travel patterns continue to evolve.
- MiWay will continue to deliver quality, customer-first service to existing customers while building future transit capacity through strategic projects and initiatives.
- MiWay will focus its recovery efforts through responsive planning and delivery of reliable service, investing in our future, customer-first service, planning and adapting to the future, and revenue and fares management.

Background

In March 2020, MiWay suffered significant ridership loss as the province entered the initial two week lockdown period while learning about COVID-19 and its impacts on public health. The impact on transit systems was both dramatic and rapid. MiWay implemented rear door boarding, loading restrictions and free transit by March 21, 2020. Ridership plunged on average 75 per cent and transit fare revenue dropped to zero for 16 weeks. Essential workers needing to travel for work remained in the system.

Ridership varied as we moved through the various waves, stages of recovery and stay at home orders. It also varied depending on the type of route, time of day and day of the week. By October 2020, ridership had regained slightly to 45 per cent of October 2019 levels. By the end of July 2021, MiWay was carrying 46 per cent of pre-COVID ridership.

The majority of ridership loss remains in the weekday ridership segment with the bulk of this loss coming from our express network and community based local routes because of online schooling and work from home arrangements. MiWay routes along industrial corridors remains steady and strong.

Fluctuation in ridership demand is expected to continue as we move through the fourth wave this fall.

Present Status

Throughout 2021, provincial reopening phases, new lockdowns and the fourth wave continues to result in fluctuating ridership demand. MiWay continues to deliver transit service across Mississauga; ensuring those who have to travel have the option to do so.

MiWay is adjusting service frequencies across the network to ensure that service is available where and when customers need it, and the potential for overcrowding is reduced.

MiWay is committed to monitoring all routes in the transit system network so that service levels are responsive to customers' needs and can change with shifts in demand as travel patterns continue to evolve.

Comments

While the pandemic has severely impacted and challenged our business, it also presents new opportunity. MiWay must respond to this challenge and leverage this opportunity by fully understanding our customers, their new travel patterns, and expectations for the transit system.

At MiWay, with the support of the City of Mississauga, we are committed to **Build Back Better**.

City of Mississauga COVID Recovery Strategy

Mission

The City of Mississauga's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic will restore the City's ability to implement its strategic vision for the future. In short, recovery operations will ensure the City of Mississauga is a place where people choose to be. All recovery activities will align with the City's vision for the future, and the City's strategic pillars for change; move, belong, connect, prosper, and green.

Strategic Goals

The City's COVID-19 Recovery Framework aligns with the City's Strategic Pillars and highlights its commitment to public transit:

Move: The City will maintain and regulate a robust transportation network with a key focus on the recovery of Public Transit and role of Active Transportation.

Fundamental Principles

The City has identified several fundamental principles to apply throughout the recovery process. Principles that directly relate to MiWay include:

Protect the Health and Safety of the Public and Employees – Under the guidance of Peel Public Health and other health care professionals, best practices and safeguards will be considered as the recovery and re-opening of facilities, services and programs within the city.

Building Back Better – Recovery actions ensure the city is able to thrive well into the future. Societal, organizational, and individual behaviors may change temporarily or permanently because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This may require the City to modify the way it operates, or implement interim solutions.

Source:

https://www7.mississauga.ca/documents/committees/council/2020/2020_05_13_Council_Agenda.pdf#page=4

MiWay COVID-19 Ridership Recovery Strategy

The complete Ridership Recovery Strategy is provided in Appendix 1.

The MiWay Mission

MiWay provides Mississauga with a shared travel choice that is friendly, reliable and respects the environment. We help to connect people to their destinations with ease. We are people who care about people.

Our dedicated team is passionate about providing a customer experience that makes our riders feel valued. Helping make life in our city better.

We strive to listen to customers as we continuously evolve to meet the changing needs of the community.

MiWay COVID-19 Guiding Principles

MiWay plays a key role in the City's post pandemic recovery. The following principles will guide our decision making as we move forward:

Define success: MiWay will measure performance based on parameters outlined in our Customer Charter and through established Key Performance Indicators.

Understand a changing ridership base: Re-establish and respond to a new ridership framework – who do we move, when do we move them and where do we move them? Who are the customers we serve today? How have the needs of our customers evolved, and do the changes meet their needs?

Keep MiWay relevant: MiWay must remain top of mind to Mississauga residents, students and business owners and employees for continuous support. MiWay must tell the story of its ongoing focus on infrastructure investments and quality service delivery to drive awareness that MiWay is still in the community and working hard to make our city an attractive place to live, work and play.

Collaborate with our neighbours: MiWay is a key partner in fare and service integration initiatives for a seamless and consistent transit experience in the western GTHA given Mississauga's strong employment base and central location. We must leverage relationships and partnerships with neighbouring transit systems to serve the customer better.

Invest in our future: Transit is a key component and driving factor of building a sustainable city. MiWay will focus on investing in on-street transit infrastructure and technology improvements through the MiWay Infrastructure Growth Plan (MIGP). These investments will build network capacity, increase customer amenities and foster future transit growth.

Foster trust amongst employees and customers: Just as MiWay commits to a safe travel experience on every trip for our customers, employees expect a safe work environment and a place where they feel supported every day.

Foster collaboration between internal transit teams: MiWay must live our values of Trust, Quality, Excellence, Teamwork and Commitment, and build on lessons learned and individual staff skills to enhance collaboration and encourage cross-team participation on initiatives.

MiWay Service Goals

MiWay has identified the following goals that will focus our recovery efforts:

Responsive Service Planning and Delivery: Plan and deliver on-street service that adapts to meet changing customer demand

MiWay regularly examines changing travel demand patterns, and will continue to measure the pace and the degree of recovery across the city in order to forecast future needs.

On-street service delivery must strike a balance between the needs of customers and remaining financially viable in the environment of reduced revenue ridership.

To do this, MiWay is focussed on:

- Responsive service planning to balance on-street service and manage operational efficiencies;
- Active route management to ensure service reliability and on-time performance; and,
- Agile workforce management to manage fluctuating absenteeism to minimize impacts on daily service delivery.

Investing in Transit Infrastructure: Build and maintain a network that meets the needs of customers and supports a transit-oriented city

Building public transit technological and on-street infrastructure capacity in Mississauga continues to be a priority and highlights our ability to work closely with all levels of government to secure funding for projects that will help move people across our city, enhance the customer experience and help build a transit-oriented city.

To do this, MiWay is focussed on:

- Capitalizing on existing funding opportunities offered through the provincial and federal governments;
- Planning and implementing change through strategic plans;
- Leveraging multimodal transit hubs; and,
- Building technology capabilities through the Smart City Master Plan.

Customer First Service: Put the needs of the customer at the forefront of everything we do

To restore and regain ridership, MiWay must deliver a reliable and quality service, understand who our customers are, and meet changing customer needs.

To do this, we must:

1. **Understand the customer experience** through continued market research of both current riders, non-riders and lapsed riders
2. **Keep MiWay relevant** through audience specific campaigns and programs to engage employees and inspire and attract riders back to transit
(<http://inside.mississauga.ca/TW/Transit/Pages/MiWay-10-Anniversary.aspx>)
3. **Support customer needs** through Enhanced Customer Feedback and Information Line Support

4. **Adopt new technology** to provide timely and relevant service information through our key online and social channels, and third-party trip planning applications
5. **Invest in staff** through new and enhanced training and development opportunities
6. **Launch the MiWay Customer Charter** and report on its commitments

MiWay has committed to the following Charter benchmarks to ensure a consistent and pleasant experience:

- To provide you with reliable on-time service;
- To always be welcoming and courteous;
- To always take your safety seriously; and,
- To provide you with accurate, consistent and timely information.

The MiWay Customer Charter (see Appendix 2 – MiWay Customer Charter Commitments) will publically launch in fall 2021.

MiWay will launch audience specific campaigns and programs to engage employees, (<http://inside.mississauga.ca/TW/Transit/Pages/MiWay-10-Anniversary.aspx>) and inspire and attract riders back to transit. We will create awareness and engagement of MiWay's value proposition and service offerings with customers and stakeholders (residents, non-riders and businesses), both online and offline.

Planning and Adapting to the Future: Integrate higher-order transit services and interregional connections

Continued investment in MiWay's transit fleet and infrastructure over the next four years will ensure transit remains a viable and attractive option for residents and visitors in Mississauga. Success here will be critical to maintaining MiWay's current ridership base and to rebuilding overall ridership numbers.

MiWay will focus its growth investments in the following areas:

- Implementation of the MiWay Five 2.0 – The Next Five Service Plan as ridership returns to pre-COVID levels and when service growth warrants;
- Investigate the benefits and costs of **on-demand service** options to meet service needs in specific areas;
- Building, and servicing a Higher Order Transit integrated transit network; Hurontario LRT, Lakeshore and Dundas BRT and neighbouring city's higher order transit expansion;
- Building sustainability to meet the City's Climate Change Action Plan goals by adopting new hybrid bus and fleet technology, and participating in green facility study and hydrogen pilot projects; and,

- Bus Replacement Management Plan to manage future fleet requirements while alleviating existing operating expense on buses not required to fulfill daily service, while maintaining the ability to respond quickly to fill daily service requirements.

When MiWay returns to pre-COVID ridership levels and as growth is warranted, service and fleet growth investments will be managed through the City's annual budget process.

Revenue and Fares Management: Balance value (service provided) for money paid (customer)

As the city re-opens MiWay will take this as an opportunity to understand the changing travel demand, and to measure the pace and the degree of recovery across the city in order to more accurately forecast the future needs and revise plans to operate transit.

To manage revenue and fares, MiWay will:

- Apply for, and leverage available Transit Relief Funding available through the provincial and federal governments;
- Review MiWay's transit fees and fare strategy;
- Participate in both fares and local service integration discussions with 416 and 905 transit service providers; and,
- Review future fare payment options through PRESTO open payment and third party e-ticketing solutions.

Strategic Plan

MiWay is the operational division that executes the City's strategic pillar of Developing a Transit Oriented City and the strategic goals of:

- Build a reliable and convenient transit system
- Increase transportation capacity
- Connect our city
- Develop environmental responsibility
- Provide mobility choices
- Build and maintain infrastructure

Engagement and Consultation

MiWay staff collaborate internally across sections and with neighbouring transit partners to delivery a quality and integrated transit service that matches customer needs. MiWay works closely with teams across Transportation & Works and Corporate Services to build transit infrastructure and shape community awareness.

Engaging with, and working closely with, our secondary and post-secondary school communities and key business contacts remains a priority as we ready ourselves to welcome

these key demographic segments back on transit as schools and businesses reopen. Driving engagement through a Strategic Marketing Communications Plan is key to driving ridership back to MiWay and keeping transit top of mind as a choice way to travel with lapsed and new riders. MiWay will launch audience specific campaigns and programs to engage employees (<http://inside.mississauga.ca/TW/Transit/Pages/MiWay-10-Anniversary.aspx>) and inspire and attract riders back to transit.

The MiWay Customer Charter will launch in fall 2021.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact resulting from the recommendation in this report. The MiWay COVID-19 Ridership Recovery Strategy will guide the organization but makes no request for financial commitments or investments. Managing ongoing impacts to the transit and requests for funding will be managed through the City of Mississauga's budget process.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 Ridership Recovery Strategy will serve as a guiding document for staff as we rebuild our ridership base, continue investing in transit infrastructure, and support our employees. The priority for MiWay is to ensure the transit system remains a safe and viable travel option for all, and to gain back lost ridership by restoring confidence in our service. Staff will continue to adapt and adopt new customer-focussed initiatives to meet the changing needs of our customer base and expand transit ridership markets.

Transit plays a key role in helping the City recover from the long-term financial impacts of COVID-19. Future financial investment in service hour growth and new staff resources will be managed strategically, based on current data and projected ridership growth.

Attachments

Appendix 1: MiWay COVID-19 Ridership Recovery Strategy

Appendix 2: MiWay Customer Charter Commitments



Geoff Wright, P.Eng, MBA, Commissioner of Transportation and Works

Prepared by: Erin Beaudoin, Transit Information Advisor