

City of Mississauga
Memorandum



Date: June 12, 2023
To: Chair and Members of Transit Advisory Committee
From: Geoff Marinoff, Transit Director
Meeting date: June 20, 2023
Subject: **Streamlining MiWay's Bus Fleet Identity**

Recommendation

1. That the Transit Advisory Committee provide comments to staff for inclusion in a future report to General Committee, with respect to Streamlining MiWay's Bus Fleet Identity for operational agility.

Executive Summary

- MiWay ridership has grown beyond pre-pandemic levels and is at an all-time high.
- Although MiWay's ridership recovery strategy was successful, existing resource constraints on service hours and bus colours has presented new challenges in managing capacity on buses and continues to result in daily overcrowding on several routes.
- These challenges continue to intensify as MiWay adjusts its on-street services to adapt to changing customer demand patterns, updates the composition and technology within its bus fleet, and prepares to integrate the network with future higher-order transit services.
- A streamlined visual identity for MiWay's bus fleet, based on the orange bus livery applied to MiWay's newest buses, will support the delivery of a more consistent customer experience.
- The single colour of buses makes it easier for customers to identify a MiWay bus against the other service providers operating within Mississauga such as GO Transit-Green, TTC- Red, Brampton- Blue, Zum- Red/Grey and Oakville, Blue
- There is no impact to the Express services as a result of the colour change.
- The project can be funded through the existing Maintenance budget.

Background

In October of 2010 Mississauga Transit was rebranded to MiWay and new MiLocal (orange) and MiExpress (blue) buses were introduced into service. At the time, the launch of the new MiWay master (main) brand signaled major forthcoming changes in transit service growth and infrastructure improvements in Mississauga under the City's corporate (parent) brand. MiWay's express route network expanded systematically over several years along major corridors in the city, and integrated with the Mississauga Transitway when the first phase of the east-west bus rapid transit corridor opened in November 2014. Blue buses with the "MiExpress" service brand travelled on express routes, and orange buses with the "MiLocal" service brand travelled on local routes; however, "MiWay" remained the main brand for transit service in Mississauga, and the MiWay logo was added to all buses 2010 and older following the brand launch. Since the municipal operation of Mississauga Transit began in November 1973 – before the City of Mississauga was incorporated on Jan. 1, 1974 – transit vehicle branding has included the color orange, while the colour blue in the new brand identity aligned with the corporate visual identity.

MiWay saw impressive transit ridership growth over the decade from 31M in 2010 to 41M in January 2020. However, 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. By October 2020, ridership regained slightly to 45 per cent of October 2019 levels, and by the end of July 2021 (only about two years ago), MiWay was carrying 46 per cent of pre-COVID ridership. Today, however, MiWay ridership has grown beyond pre-pandemic levels and is currently at an all-time high.

Although MiWay's ridership recovery strategy was successful, existing resource constraints on service hours and bus colours has presented new challenges in managing capacity on buses and continues to result in daily overcrowding on several routes. These challenges continue to intensify as MiWay adjusts its on-street services to adapt to changing customer demand patterns, updates the composition and technology within its bus fleet, and prepares to integrate future higher-order transit services and new interregional connections into the transit network.

Comments

To understand these challenges and improve MiWay's agility in allocating MiWay buses to routes to match evolving customer demand levels, staff completed a review of bus fleet allocation needs, collected feedback from customers on their current service experience, and identified bus fleet growth requirements based on future battery electric bus plans.

Maintenance, Bus Allocation and Scheduling

MiWay's bus fleet has grown to include a mix of bus colours and bus types (i.e. 316 orange- 40-foot, 57 orange – 60-foot; and 83 blue – 40-foot, 30 blue – 60-foot). Although MiWay has 113 blue buses today, it will retire 19 of these vehicles by the end of 2023, resulting in 94 blue buses within a total MiWay bus fleet of 486 buses.

Two bus colours (orange and blue), along with various bus types and sizes (e.g. 40-foot and 60-foot buses), continues to present challenges with increasing complexity for the Maintenance team. Garage parking and layout is becoming more complicated, reducing the ability to allocate buses and be agile when an on street change-off of buses is required due schedule or mechanical or other maintenance needs. At any one time, about 20% (or 97 buses of MiWay's 486 total buses) are unavailable due to regulatory inspections and preventative/corrective maintenance programs.

From a bus allocation perspective, without additional funding resources to deliver more service hours, staff have worked to manage overcrowding by moving larger 60-foot buses from one route to another. Although this approach provides some agility to support customer growth, it also means that the allocation of bus colour to a route may not be accurate; that is, blue buses operating on local routes and/or orange buses operating on express routes, which results in an inconsistent customer experience.

MiWay's two bus colours is also a restriction for the Scheduling team because it reduces the efficiency of the schedules when interlining a bus on local and express trips based on vehicle colours. By contrast, one MiWay bus colour would allow one bus, for example, to remain on the road and to be scheduled from a local to an express route without having to return to the garage to change buses due to the vehicle's paint scheme. Furthermore, staff today can only provide the correct bus size and colour 77% of the time based on fleet availability. This inconsistency in service delivery adds friction to the overall customer experience.

Customer Feedback

MiWay surveyed customers online and in person in Q1 of 2023 to identify how important blue and orange colours were to them when riding MiWay. Responses were split with almost half of respondents indicating that the blue bus color is helpful in identifying an express service, while another half of respondents indicated they prefer to identify a route/service using the electronic destination sign. Overall, while blue and orange bus colours can be helpful in distinguishing between local and express services, customers would prefer to rely on the destination sign as the best way to correctly identify their route if MiWay cannot deliver service in a consistent way.

Future Bus Electrification

MiWay is progressing on its commitment to the environment and the City's Climate Change Action Plan goals by replacing its bus fleet with low or zero-emission vehicles, pursuing low or zero-emission pilot opportunities, and monitoring new bus technologies to stay up-to-date with industry trends.

This year MiWay already began adding 165 new, second-generation hybrid-electric buses to its bus fleet. In 2010, blue and orange buses offered different amenities on board (e.g. new power outlets on blue buses for customers to charge their mobile devices), but in 2023, the onboard customer experience is fundamentally the same.

Moreover, in the next three to five years, new battery electric buses will be part of the MiWay fleet mix, which will add further complexity to supporting two bus fleet colours. The electric technology will require more charging and allow for shorter travel distances per bus. This means buses will need to be scheduled and rotated at a different frequency than diesel buses do today.

Streamlining the Bus Fleet with only Orange Buses

Based on the challenges identified and overall customer feedback, it is recommended that MiWay implement a streamlined visual identity for its bus fleet, based on the orange bus livery applied to MiWay's newest (2022) buses, to deliver a more consistent customer experience.

A more simplified service brand structure (i.e. no blue buses and no secondary "MiLocal" and "MiExpress" service brands) will better support service delivery, maintenance and brand-building efforts as MiWay updates the composition and technology of its bus fleet, and prepares to integrate future higher-order transit services and new interregional connections into the transit network. This approach will also allow for short-term (temporary) vehicle branding to highlight new bus technology (such as hydrogen or fully electric) while it is being piloted or introduced as other GTA transit systems have done (e.g. TTC).

Within our city boundaries customers are also impacted by other transit services with various colours such as GO Transit- green, TTC- Red, Brampton- Blue, Zum- Red/grey, Oakville – blue and the Hazel McCallion Line (HML) will be Silver and black. Moving to a single orange colour simplifies the transit brand identification for MiWay customers in Mississauga.

MiWay will develop and implement a marketing communications campaign to educate customers about this brand identity evolution to support the electrification of the transit fleet, integrate MiWay services with new, forthcoming higher-order transit lines (e.g. Hurontario Light Rail transit), and to deliver a more consistent customer experience.

To support this change, MiWay bus orders going forward would include only orange buses. The remaining blue buses in the fleet (currently 113) would either be repainted orange, or would be identified for decommissioning as part of the bus retirement plan.

With transit growth expected, this change strengthens our position in the future to provide a reliable, efficient travel choice that delivers an excellent customer experience by allowing MiWay to be more responsive to change, improve service reliability and reduce overall service costs.

This change has no impact to the Express services for customers. Customers will still see the benefits of a faster, more streamlined service when travelling on the MiWay Express services.

Strategic Plan

Making it easier for MiWay to deliver a more consistent customer experience for all customers and adapt to significant operational challenges supports the following strategic goal:

Move: Developing a Transit-Oriented City

Build a reliable and convenient system.

Financial Impact

Work to repaint existing blue buses to orange and apply current MiWay brand identity decals can be completed by MiWay staff. The project can be funded through the existing Maintenance budget at a total cost of approximately \$125,000 over 18 months.

Conclusion

With transit growth expected, this change strengthens our position in the future to provide a reliable, efficient travel choice that delivers an excellent customer experience by allowing MiWay to be more responsive to change, improve service reliability and reduce overall service costs with no impacts to the Express services.



Geoff Marinoff, P.Eng, Director, Transit