



The Brief

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Changes to Fredericton transit leave many with limited bus access



Fredericton buses parked in front of King's Place. Photo by Doug Mullin.

By SHAWN MARTIN

Fredericton - Recent changes to Fredericton transit in outlying areas of the city continue to pose challenges to residents of Lincoln and Silverwood. The future of these outlying transit routes also remains uncertain.

"My daughter was so luckily employed by Fredericton Autism Connections... With the bus gone in another year, she will not be able to attend any events going on at Fredericton Autism Connections," says Donna Gorham, one of many local residents impacted by Fredericton City Council's decision to reduce several Fredericton Transit bus routes and raise bus fares.

Gorham's daughter, who has Asperger's Syndrome, has been accessing Fredericton Autism Connections in Lincoln for employment and social purposes.

"The bus is her only way to get to work," explains Gorham of her daughter's transportation needs.

Fredericton City Council approved a new transit plan on July 14, 2014, which would see hourly service on all routes, including half hour service at rush-hour times, and greater access for more densely populated areas of the city. The plan also moved to eliminate transit routes to both Lincoln and Silverwood.

The plan, however, was met with harsh criticism for having failed to properly consult the public or take into account public input on the proposed plan.

"The consultation process felt like it was being pushed on the city as a done deal," says Doug Mullin, a local transit advocate and founder of Making Transit Work.

"It was almost like it was a fait accompli. There was a lot of feedback, but it wasn't although it made any change," posits John MacDermid, Ward 10 City Councillor and chair of the city's Transportation Committee.

Following public outcry from Lincoln and Silverwood residents, these routes were extended by City Council for 12 more months, effective September 2, 2014.

While both bus routes were temporarily saved from the chopping block, this extension comes with less frequent runs—two each morning and afternoon on weekdays—and a universal fare increase of 25 cents, bringing a one-way fare to \$2.50.

"As a resident of Ward 7 (Lincoln), the reduction of transit services have been increasingly difficult for me," expresses Kelsey Nevers, a student at St. Thomas University.

"Traditionally, when you have services cut, they never come back," explains Mullin, amidst concerns that transit services would not be further extended to Lincoln and Silverwood.

The city's current transit strategy subsidizes transit on a "40/60" basis; this means that 40% of the city's subsidies for transit come from rider fares, while the other 60% come from property taxes.

Following City Council's transit reforms, property-owning residents of Lincoln and Silverwood will continue to

contribute 60% of subsidies for transit services while receiving limited and possibly zero access to said services.

City councilors, such as MacDermid, are looking for alternative and cost-effective ways of providing transportation to outlying areas of Fredericton.

"Quite often the private sector is one way of doing that... There are other jurisdictions looking at hybrid systems, such as contracting out to taxis," says MacDermid.

In these hybrid forms of transportation, municipalities contract out service to a taxi company. Riders pay the taxi driver a reduced cab fare subsidized by the municipality, as well as the internalized cost of public transit. The taxi will then take residents to a nearby bus stop and provide the rider with a transfer sheet, permitting them access to public transit such as buses.

While this hybrid system is seen by some as efficient for a cash-strapped city such as Fredericton, Mullin argues that it works better for individuals and not families that may end up paying multiple transit fares and at an increased rate.

Scott McConaghy, Lincoln's City Councillor, who was outspoken on the initial elimination of transit access to his ward, would prefer to see existing bus services extended beyond the current 12 month period.

"My hope is that the numbers will be solid enough and similar to other areas that we see in the fringes...So I'm very optimistic that we'll extend it further than one year."

Other residents, such as Mullin, are thinking more broadly in their proposed alternatives to public transit in Fredericton, and are advocating for increased funding to public transportation as a long-term investment.

"You get a public transit system based on the money you put into it. I see public transportation as infrastructure, as opposed to a public service."

Both Councillors MacDermid and McConaghy feel that the city now has adequate time to develop a plan for delivering some form of transit to outlying areas of Fredericton, namely Lincoln and Silverwood.

While there is no current plan for what happens following the expiration of the 12 month extension of the Lincoln and Silverwood bus routes, Councillor MacDermid acknowledges the importance of this issue, "There is recognition on council that this is core service that needs to be provided."

For residents such as Gorham and Nevers, their ability to access Fredericton transit today, and in the future, remains uncertain.

Shawn Martin is a social work student at St. Thomas University interning with the NB Media Co-op.

Green Party leader takes Fredericton riding, NDP leader resigns

By TRACY GLYNN

Fredericton - Brian Gallant's Liberals have formed a majority government in New Brunswick, taking 27 of the 49 seats in the New Brunswick Legislature. The Progressive Conservatives took 21 seats and for the first time east of British Columbia, the Green Party has taken a seat in provincial government.

David Coon supporters waited past midnight, following a vote counting fiasco, to confirm that the Green Party leader and long-time environmentalist had won the Fredericton South riding, defeating Progressive Conservative Energy and Mines Minister Craig Leonard in a close race.

Pundits are saying that Leonard lost his seat to Coon because his party's cuts to pensions alienated their base of supporters. However, Coon's supporters, many of them defected NDP members, see Coon's victory as moving New Brunswick in a different direction on many contentious issues like shale gas and abortion rights.

"David's win is phenomenal! It gives people a voice on the floor of a house that does not listen to the needs of everyone," says Judie Acquin-Mikovsky, a shale gas opponent from St. Mary's First Nation.

"It gives us an opportunity to explore alternatives that we have been made to believe are unreachable. Although he has a big mandate on his shoulders, David's convictions and dedication through the years has proven that he is a man of his word."

NDP leader Dominic Cardy failed to win his riding of Fredericton-West Hanwell, losing to Conservative Brian MacDonald. The party attempted to rebrand itself as the "New NDP" and move the party to the centre in a bid to appeal to voters but failed to win any seats in the Legislature.

Cardy's NDP attempted to get votes in Kent County by calling for a two-year legislated ban on fracking during the campaign period. However, many shale gas opponents in Kent County could not forget Cardy's calls for the Alward government to enforce the rule of law when the blockade against SWN's shale gas equipment in Rexton was violently broken up by the RCMP on Oct. 17, 2013.

The NDP has not held a seat in the New Brunswick Legislature since Elizabeth Weir represented Saint John from 1995 to 2005. Cardy announced during his concession speech that he would be resigning as party leader at the party's fall convention.

A summer of activism against the status quo

A flurry of activity in opposition to the status quo on a variety of contentious issues like abortion, forestry and shale gas spread throughout New Brunswick this summer.

Reproductive justice activists got busy organizing to make abortion access an election issue in the wake of the announcement of the Morgentaler Clinic closure. They released a candidates'... *(continued on page 2)*



David Coon made history on New Brunswick election night when he won the Fredericton South riding. For the first time east of British Columbia, the Green Party has a seat in provincial government. The riding has also historically always been Conservative or Liberal. Photo by Jon Pedersen.

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