

WORK SESSION AGENDA

ITEM SUMMARY

City Council



STAFF

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SUBJECT FOR DISCUSSION

Transfort Optimization Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this item is to present the Transfort Optimization Plan, fiscally constrained, short-range service plan that aligns Fort Collins' transit network with current financial realities, community needs, and long-term sustainability goals, with a focus towards increasing ridership and better serving transit-reliant populations and high-travel corridors. Developed through extensive public engagement, data analysis, and national best practices, the plan prioritizes frequency, reliability, and equitable access while maintaining a fare-free system. The recommended scenario establishes a streamlined, grid-based network that strengthens high-demand corridors, improves connectivity to key destinations, and operates within available resources. It also updates Dial-A-Ride and Dial-A-Taxi services to maintain flexibility while meeting ADA requirements and introduces a new safety and security partnership with Police Services. Together, these efforts position Transfort to deliver a more efficient, sustainable, and community-focused transit system that remains adaptable to future funding and evolving needs.

GENERAL DIRECTION SOUGHT AND SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

1. What questions of feedback to Councilmembers have about the service planning principles and priorities guiding the future transit system?

BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

The Optimization Plan serves as a fiscally constrained, short-range service plan that implements elements of the long-term Transit Master Plan. It focuses on maintaining a fare-free, equitable system while growing ridership and aligning service delivery with financial realities, post-pandemic travel patterns, and evolving community needs. The plan's goals include maintaining a fare-free transit system that supports equity and attracts riders, conducting inclusive engagement to ensure diverse voices shape priorities, aligning with best practices to support ridership recovery, adapting service to reflect post-COVID travel behavior, designing a simpler and more intuitive network, and ensuring financial feasibility within available resources.

Across the transit industry, expenses have grown dramatically, between 50 and 70 percent since 2019, and Fort Collins has experienced roughly a 50 percent increase over that same period. Consistent with national trends, Transfort's largest cost drivers have been personnel, vehicle repair, and contracted services. While revenue has increased modestly, primarily at the City level, it has not kept pace with rising

expenses. Transfort has also experienced reductions in key revenue sources, including FLEX partnership funding and the FASTER operational grant. In the short-term, Transfort has leveraged the 2050 tax, in line with ballot language, to meet the increased expense needs. Beginning in 2026, Transfort anticipates receiving between \$2 and \$3 million annually in new state funding through Senate Bill 230, which establishes a dedicated funding stream generated by oil and gas fees to expand and improve public transit statewide. This new funding has been incorporated into financial assumptions for the recommended scenario.

Transit continues to be a key City strategy in achieving Council and community goals. The Optimization Plan strengthens alignment with the City's Strategic Plan by focusing on efficiency, reliability, and equitable access, laying the groundwork for a sustainable and resilient transit system. The recommended scenario was informed by three foundational elements: community and stakeholder feedback, data evaluation, and best practices from peer agencies that have successfully recovered ridership post-pandemic. To understand trade-offs around possible system design, three preliminary scenarios were developed within a fiscally constrained 130,000-hour framework, later refined to 110–115,000 hours to reflect updated budget forecasts.

- Scenario 1: Travel Patterns, focused on high-frequency, direct routes on major travel corridors.
- Scenario 2: Rider Demand, prioritized service for transit-reliant communities.
- Scenario 3: Condensed with Microtransit, combined a high-frequency core network with flexible coverage with on-demand microtransit in low-density areas.

Transfort and FC Moves conducted a comprehensive engagement effort, reaching thousands of residents through surveys, open houses, community events, and presentations to Boards and Commissions, the Community Advisory Committee and other key stakeholders and partners. Key partners included Colorado State University, Poudre School District, and community organizations serving older adults, the business community, people with disabilities, and underserved populations. Feedback emphasized frequency over coverage as the top priority, support for simple, linear routes, improved reliability and safety, and expanded evening, weekend, and school-oriented service. Residents also identified system gaps, particularly along Timberline and south of Harmony, and expressed skepticism about microtransit due to cost and the inconvenience of transferring depending on the model used. Overall, public engagement indicated strongest support for Scenario 1, Travel Patterns, with elements of Scenario 2, Rider Demand, reflected in the final hybrid recommendation.

Each scenario was evaluated using multiple data inputs, including ridership by route and stop, route productivity, demographics, and travel demand. Peer analysis of six high-performing transit agencies revealed key trends: smaller service areas and simplified networks improved efficiency, operating costs increased industry-wide even with service reductions, and agencies that focused on frequency, reliability, and transit reliant riders achieved the strongest recovery. These findings reinforced the need for a leaner, data-driven, grid-based system prioritizing high-performing routes, equity, and key core travel corridors over infrequent coverage routes.

Transfort's redesign is guided by five core principles: frequency, productivity, equity, simplicity, and efficiency. These principles informed network design priorities emphasizing a grid-style structure that focuses on the highest-traveled corridors, improves service for many transit-reliant populations, enhances access to key destinations such as schools, healthcare, and affordable housing, and maximizes ridership return per dollar invested. The plan reflects the best knowledge and data available today within a constrained budget. and Transfort remains committed to ongoing evaluation and adaptation as conditions evolve.

The recommended transit network strengthens core routes, reduces detours, and aligns resources with the highest-demand areas. The plan introduces a layered network with frequent routes operating every 10–20 minutes, core routes at 30-minute service levels during peak periods, and local routes serving

corridors with steady but moderate demand. Tradeoffs between frequency and coverage were carefully balanced to prioritize equity and long-term sustainability with available resources.

Under federal ADA requirements, Dial-A-Ride service must extend three-quarters of a mile from any fixed route. As the fixed-route system becomes more condensed, the Dial-A-Ride boundary will also contract. Approximately 39 existing clients will fall outside the new area but will be 'legacy'd' in to ensure continuity of service. The reduction primarily affects single-family neighborhoods, while most healthcare providers and human-service facilities remain in the service area. Because Dial-A-Ride mirrors fixed-route service hours, Sunday paratransit service will be discontinued. Currently, an average of 19 trips occur on Sundays. Based on projected ridership and cost increases, Sunday service in the new service area is estimated to cost approximately \$80,000 annually to continue. However, the Dial-A-Taxi program will be expanded to bridge service gaps, allowing Dial-A-Ride eligible riders within the Growth Management Area to take taxi trips any day of the week or time of the day using a \$15 voucher toward the taxi fare. Based on the available budget, Transfort estimates that 30 vouchers will be available per day, seven (7) days per week. If funding for this program increases, the number of vouchers per day will also increase. These program adjustments maintain flexibility for riders while aligning operations with fiscal and regulatory requirements.

Transfort is also advancing work to enhance safety and security across the system. Community survey results indicate improved perceptions of safety, though continued progress is needed. Due to challenges filling Transit Service Officer positions (68 applicants and only one hire since fall of 2024) Transfort is pursuing a hybrid model in partnership with Police Services through the Homeless Outreach and Proactive Engagement (HOPE) Team and the Mental Health Response Team (MHRT). Using the SARA Model (Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment), this partnership will identify key safety concerns, address root causes through environmental and operational changes, implement targeted responses such as signage, cameras, and de-escalation training, and assess progress through data and feedback. This approach brings specialized expertise, ensures consistent presence, and provides proactive support for both riders and operators.

NEXT STEPS

Currently, the project is in the stage of confirming principles and priorities with Council. Following Council feedback, Transfort and FC Moves will share outcomes with the community, finalize implementation plans, and begin phased rollout of the operational plan in 2027.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Proposed System Map
2. Paratransit Polygon
3. Outreach Overview
4. Presentation