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Lethbridge Transit Redesigns Fixed Route, and Implements New Public Microtransit App

Lethbridge TRANSIT

LETHBRIDGE TRANSIT:
A fixed route & paratransit transportation provider offering services to the City of Lethbridge's residents.

CHALLENGES:
Maintaining service coverage & hours, despite major budget cuts.

SOLUTIONS:
Redesigning fixed route service and implementing TripSpark's microtransit app, Rides on Demand.

RESULT:
Able to work within their budget & increase their service area, offer more convenient travel with shorter travel times, and picked people up at the curb.

About The City of Lethbridge & Lethbridge Transit

The City of Lethbridge is in southern Alberta, just 2 hours (drive) south from Calgary, and about an hour north of the Montana border. Lethbridge Transit has been in operation since 1912, beginning with street cars, and then switching to buses in 1947.

Highlights	
🗺 **10** Routes	📍 **4** On-demand response zones
🚌 **50** Buses	👥 **2.5 Million** boardings (pre-COVID)

On-Demand Transit Initiative

Prior to the pandemic, Lethbridge Transit received a directive from city council to develop an on-demand transit system, to deliver service during off-peak times, and reduce operating costs. Coincidentally, around this same time, TripSpark was in the process of defining a new microtransit app, **Rides on Demand** (RoD) that could leverage the powerful algorithm and other functionality of the Novus and PASS demand response, and vehicle operator software. TripSpark reached out to Lethbridge to learn if they had given any thought to offering public on-demand transit service and if so, what were the needs and challenges they were looking to address. Then COVID-19 hit, and Lethbridge's fixed route service was halted.

Maintaining Mobility during COVID

By March 2020, Lethbridge Transit's ridership had declined by 90%. They urgently needed to create a safer and more efficient way of getting the public around the city. Early into the pandemic, the focus was on essential and frontline workers, so managing COVID- related challenges, maintaining service coverage, and hours, became essential.

An Ad-Hoc Demand Response Solution

To ensure that transit could keep running in a safe and reliable way, Jeff Gillette, Lethbridge Transit's, GIS & Application Specialist, enlisted the help of the TripSpark team. Together they devised an "ad hoc" on-demand solution using Novus, the software they used for their paratransit service, Access-a-Ride. Lethbridge created a temporary on-demand solution, "Rides by Reservation", where riders got picked up at fixed route stops. The interim solution worked, and it accomplished their goal of being able to maintain reliable and safe public transit, until things could return to (a new) normal.

> " *The TripSpark customer care team helped us modify Novus, import the buses, import the bus stops, they modified the Rangers for us, they even had Passenger Portal enabled for us, and created Notifications as well.*
>
> – Jeff Gillette

Rides by Reservation ran for about four months, until restrictions were lifted by the government. The new ad-hoc service had proven to be effective in reducing transit wait times, and meeting rider demand. In fact, more than 85% of trips were completed in less than 30 minutes. The main lessons that Lethbridge Transit learned from their short-term experiment were:

- There was a place for demand response in Lethbridge
- On-demand is a great bridge between fixed route and service elimination

> " *Overall, we had a really successful four months with the Rides by Reservation service, and I think it was kind of like the alpha to the Rides on Demand service.*
>
> – Jeff Gillette

Complete System Redesign

Streamlining Fixed Route Service

As part Lethbridge Transit's directive from city council to develop an on-demand transit system, and reduce operating costs, Lethbridge Transit used the opportunity to pitch to city council (and it was ultimately approved), to create a more efficient and effective conventional transit system. This was the beginning of cityLINK, an entire redesign of their fixed route system that could realize $350,000 in annual savings.

cityLINK focused on faster, more direct, high-frequency service, along high ridership corridors. The goal was to connect higher density residential areas with business areas, malls, schools, and hospitals.

Introducing Rides on Demand

Lethbridge Transit implemented TripSpark's microtransit app, Rides on Demand (RoD), to deliver first mile/last mile service, and door to door service, where fixed routes were underutilized.

RoD is a microtransit smartphone app that works with TripSpark's on-demand software platforms, Novus, and PASS. RoD allows transit agencies to provide convenient ride sharing service using their agency vehicles, with people heading in the same general direction, travelling together.

Rides on Demand Implementation

In the months leading up to implementing RoD, Lethbridge Transit worked closely with the TripSpark team. They were one of several customers that shared TripSpark's vision and insights throughout the design of Rides on Demand.
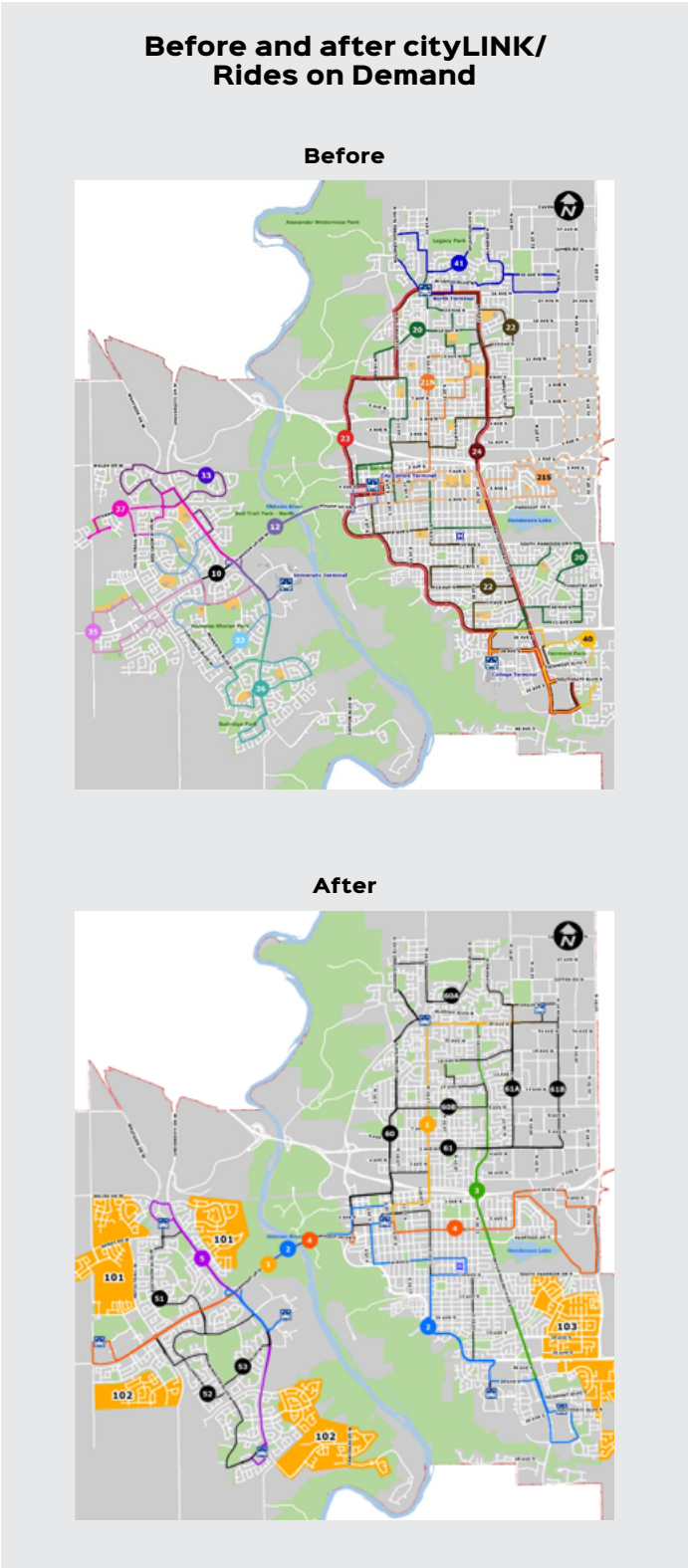
Working with their existing Novus software, the Rides on Demand deployment process was pain-free for Lethbridge. Up and running in a matter of weeks, with a minimal learning curve, and zero tech-related disruptions, RoD was quickly able to facilitate inter neighbourhood travel, and connect those neighbourhoods to cityLINK. And Lethbridge was able to share the good results of cityLINK with on-demand service too.

Early feedback from riders has also been positive. The app interface is intuitive, and easy to use, and there are multiple ways for passengers to book their trips: through the RoD app, by calling 3-1-1, or simply by asking the driver.

Highlights	
Fixed Route Redesign (new cityLINK)	**Rides on Demand**
Direct Direct connection to high ridership areas.	**4 Zones** • Curb to curb within zone • Each zone has a designated cityHUB to transfer to fixed route system • Zone size varies by time of day/day of week • Rides on Demand is used to operate demand zones • Pickups within 20 mins
Frequent 10-minute frequency in some areas.	

Early Results are Encouraging

At the time of this study, Rides on Demand had been in operation for only about 6 weeks. Already, results were exceeding expectations; RoD immediately enabled Lethbridge Transit to allocate resources where they were needed, provide transit service to outlying areas at no cost, improve service levels, and reduce operating costs, while increasing ridership.

Before and after cityLINK/ Rides on Demand

Before

After

Improvements

- The old transit system had lots of loops, and onboard times varied greatly for the same trip. Now onboard times are consistent, and on average, 10 minutes

- Rides on Demand increased service coverage areas and service hours

- With cityLINK and Rides on Demand, total ridership has increased

- Rider wait time is now consistently 20 minutes or less (versus 30 minutes for fixed route bus)

Lethbridge Transit and TripSpark: Moving Together

With a solid partnership spanning nearly a decade (beginning in 2014), Lethbridge Transit is well into the TripSpark ecosystem, with a full suite of fixed route, paratransit and now microtransit products in their mix. In a recent **TripSpark Transit webinar** hosted by transportation expert Paul Comfort, Lethbridge Transit leaders, Tim Sanderson and Jeff Gillette, were able to share the full details of their amazing journey to redesigning their fixed route service, and add microtransit, to successfully increase rider satisfaction, and manage their shrinking budget.

The City of Lethbridge is looking forward to the months and years to come, under their newly redesigned transit system, given the encouraging results they're already seeing.

> *"With Rides on Demand, using this demand response model of transit, we were able to reduce our expenses, increase our efficiency, and increase our ridership all at the same time."*
>
> *—Tim Sanderson, General Manager, Lethbridge Transit*

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TripSpark Technologies is a community transportation technology company focused on helping mid-sized transit agencies and private operators increase rider satisfaction, drive revenue, and address specific operational needs. TripSpark makes this possible by nurturing strong partnerships with our customers, offering the latest technologies and providing exceptional support.

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