

Frequently Asked Questions for Regional Public Transit Service

1. Why does the government need to modernize the bus industry?

Since the 1960s, Alberta has regulated intercity passenger bus service. In exchange for providing regularly scheduled bus service to rural Alberta, government limited competition on more profitable routes. Due to declining passenger ridership and the expansion of regional transit, this way of doing business is no longer viable.

Bus modernization is about supporting our communities and putting in place the tools necessary to support a flexible and responsive busing system for all Albertans. The new framework creates an open market for carriers that supports free enterprise, removes barriers for new and existing service providers, minimizes start-up costs and encourages competition. More information about bus modernization is available on Alberta Transportation's website at:

<http://www.transportation.alberta.ca/499.htm>

2. How is regional public transit service defined? How is a regional public transit provider defined?

A regional public transit service is defined as an extension of a municipal transit service outside of its municipal boundaries, or a transit service owned and operated by a regional public transit service provider, or a transit service designated by the Minister as a regional public transit service.

A regional public transit service provider is defined as a municipality, or group of municipalities, or municipalities in partnership with private carrier(s), created and organized as one corporate entity, and accepted by the Minister for the purposes of providing regional public transit service within a region as described in its operating authority certificate (OAC).

3. Who needs to apply for an OAC?

All regional public transit service providers need to complete an application for an OAC for Regional Public Transit Service.

Any contracted carriers that operate the services on behalf of the regional public transit service provider will also require their own OAC in addition to the OAC issued to the regional public transit service provider, and should also complete the application form for an OAC for Regional Public Transit Service.

4. Why does regional public transit service require an OAC?

Regional public transit service is a type of scheduled passenger transportation which often requires certain permits and exemptions, in particular to allow standees on transit buses. An OAC is the best means to streamline the process for obtaining permits and exemptions into a one-window approach, as requested by stakeholders.

5. How is the bus modernization different from last year's review of regional public transit service?

In 2009, a review of regional public transit service was initiated to examine passenger and vehicle safety, weights and dimensions and economic competition. Since then, the review has been expanded to include local, regional and provincial bus transportation.

Bus modernization will encourage the use of a passenger risk mitigation strategy and compliance with Alberta's Commercial Vehicle Dimension and Weight Regulation on provincial highways within the next five years, and streamlines all permits and exemptions into the OAC application process for regional public transit service providers.

6. What if I currently operate a regional public transit service?

Current OAC holders will need to renew their certificates under the new regulatory framework when their certificates come due.

7. How long is an OAC valid?

OACs are to be renewed annually for Alberta providers and contracted carriers, or renewed every three years for non-resident providers and contracted carriers.

8. Does the OAC mean a regional public transit service provider has the exclusive rights for bus transportation in the region they have identified or on a certain route?

With bus service modernization, economic conditions and exclusivity rights have been removed from OACs. Regional public transit service providers will not have exclusive authority or monopoly of bus transportation within the regions they have identified. Private sector carriers will have the same opportunity to provide scheduled bus services through the same region or along the same route.

9. How large of a region can a regional public transit service provider identify?

Regional public transit service providers should identify their region in the OAC application for approval. The region should include the exact geographic boundaries of the service area - the roads, highways and the municipal boundaries where the regional public transit service provider will provide bus services. Applicants must identify the boundaries on a map and include the map with the OAC application.

10. What if my region changes?

Any changes to the region that was identified in the OAC application would require the regional public transit service provider to re-file so that the update can be made to the OAC.

11. When do regional public service providers have to use weight compliant buses?

Regional public transit service providers will be required to use vehicles that are compliant with the Province's Commercial Vehicle Dimension and Weight Regulation by October 1, 2016. In the interim, five-year sunset permits will be issued. The Province will also continue to work with municipalities to find alternative weight compliant solutions.

12. Is there financial assistance available?

GreenTRIP is a one-time capital funding program that will support new and expanded public transit throughout Alberta. The program is to help provide Albertans with a wider range of sustainable public transportation alternatives for local and regional travel making public transit more accessible. Public transit capital projects are eligible for cost-sharing and require application for the funding. Private sector carriers are also eligible for GreenTRIP funding if they partner with a municipality or region to advance a particular project. More information about the funding program can be found at: <http://www.transportation.alberta.ca/4280.htm>.

13. What is a passenger risk mitigation strategy?

A passenger risk mitigation strategy is a risk management based review of a regional public transit service to ensure passenger safety, recognize and mitigate passenger safety issues, and enables a regional public transit service provider to allow standees on a transit bus. The regional public transit service provider is required to make its passenger risk mitigation strategy available to its ridership, drivers and general public for review.

14. Who needs a passenger risk mitigation strategy?

All regional public transit service providers applying for regional transit service must submit a passenger risk mitigation strategy with their OAC application.

15. What is required in a passenger risk mitigation strategy?

A regional public transit service provider needs to consider many factors in developing a passenger risk mitigation strategy. These include but are not limited to:

- allowing, controlling, or limiting standees,
- limiting the maximum speed during extreme weather conditions,
- establishing a policy concerning types and amounts of luggage allowed on the bus, and
- using forward facing seats.

16. Why is a passenger risk mitigation strategy required?

A strategy is required to ensure that the provider has identified risks to the public when, for instance, a vehicle which is not originally intended for high speed travel or do not normally allow for luggage is used to provide the service, e.g city transit buses. Transit buses are designed to carry standees on low speed urban routes. Transit buses have passenger safety features like

stanchions, hand holds, and have side facing seats generally allowing a transit bus to carry more standees than seated passengers. Generally, transit buses are not intended to be operated at highway speeds. In the event of a serious high-speed collision, standees within a transit bus are in a vulnerable position. In order to mitigate the increased risk to passengers by allowing standees outside of a municipality, a passenger risk mitigation strategy is required.

17. How do I apply for an OAC for regional public transit service?

Applications for OACs are available online at: www.transportation.alberta.ca/499.htm

18. When does bus modernization take affect?

The modernized framework will be in place by October 1, 2011. New applications will be accepted beginning September 1, 2011. This gives government an opportunity to inform carriers and other stakeholders about the new framework. It also gives new service providers opportunities to start up new services in Alberta.

For more information on bus modernization, please contact:

Carrier Services, Alberta Transportation
4920 – 51 Street
Red Deer, AB T4N 6K8
Phone: (403) 340-5444
Fax: (403) 340-4806
Website: www.transportation.alberta.ca/499.htm