Passenger Transportation Board
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Inter-city bus minimum route frequency

Context

The Board is authorized, although not required, to establish minimum route frequency (MRF) requirements for inter-city bus (ICB) services as part of the terms and conditions of licence.

Established MRF policy

The Board's established MRF policy required ICB operators to apply to the Board to amend their licence to change any MRF requirements. This application process was guided by the following requirements in the Board's Rules of Practice & Procedure (RPP):

- Minimum notice requirements (RPP 39)
- Rationale to reduce MRF requirements and associated notification requirements (RPP 40)
- Process to receive comments and other information pertaining to public notice of proposed MRF changes (RPP 41)
- Public hearing requirements (RPP 42)

COVID-19 policy

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Board temporarily changed its established MRF policy to provide enhanced flexibility to ICB licensees. Since March 18, 2020, the Board has permitted ICB operators to temporarily reduce or suspend scheduled service to below MRF requirements in the terms and conditions of their licence without applying to the Board for a reduction of service amendment (ICB COVID-19 Policy).

The ICB COVID-19 Policy is scheduled to expire on December 31, 2023, which would result in a reversion to the established MRF policy.

Consultations

The Board undertook consultations with ICB operators in September 2023.

Feedback highlighted a strong preference for ongoing flexibility with respect to MRF requirements and concerns about reverting to the Board's established MRF policy due to challenges associated with maintaining MRF on many routes. However, ICB operators also identified concerns about licensees potentially holding on to licences for certain routes (and potentially restricting opportunities for alternative providers) but not providing any service.

Following consultations and considering these concerns, the Board committed to review and potentially revise the MRF policy.

Applicability

This policy applies to all current and future ICB operators licensed to operate by the Board.

Policy

Requirement to maintain "active service"

ICB operators must maintain an active service on a Board-approved ICB route, as identified in the terms and conditions of their licence.

For the purposes of this policy, "active service" means maintaining at least one scheduled service per month. In the case of seasonal operations, it means one scheduled service per month during the seasonal period identified in the terms and conditions of licence.

Under this policy, this active service threshold is intended to ensure that ICB operators continue to operate a basic minimum level of service on approved routes while providing enhanced flexibility to

adjust MRF at their discretion.

Overview

Notwithstanding any MRF requirements identified in the terms and conditions of a licence, an ICB operator may reduce frequency of service on a Board-approved route at its discretion, provided these changes are consistent with the active service threshold described above.

Under this policy, ICB operators are no longer required to apply to the Board to reduce MRF, provided that an active level of service is maintained.

The purpose of this is to balance enhanced flexibility for ICB operators to make changes to MRF for Board-approved routes with ensuring ICB operators maintain active service on these routes.

This update to the Board's policy reduces regulatory burden and provides ongoing to support to ICB operators as they transition from the COVID-19 pandemic while advancing the Board's priority of maintaining an expected level of service to the public and supporting operators who are committed to provide ongoing ICB services.

This update to the Board's MRF policy does not change or revise any requirements in the terms and conditions of licence regarding route points on Board-approved routes.

Public notification

ICB operators who intend to reduce frequency of service on a Board-approved route must provide advance notification to the public. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Posting on the operator's website
- Posting in terminals, depots or an agent's premises
- Notification to mayors and councils of affected municipalities, chairs and directors of regional districts

- Notification to First Nations governments, Band councils and other community organizations

ICB Operators should aim to provide at least 24 hours for changes to weekly service schedules and at least two weeks for changes to monthly schedules.

Public funding agreements and requirements

ICB operators who have requirements related to route frequency in funding agreements with the federal or provincial government are expected to adhere to those requirements notwithstanding the Board's MRF policy.

Any issues pertaining to these or other funding arrangements must be addressed by the ICB licensee directly with the funding partner.

Repeal of RPP 39-42 in Board rules of practice and procedure

As part of this update to the Board's ICB MRF policy, RPP 39-42 in the Board Rules of Practice and Procedure are repealed.

Effective date

The updated MRF policy takes effect on the expiration of the ICB COVID-19 Policy on December 31, 2023.

There will be a period of 90 days to transition to the updated MRF policy.

Legislation

The Act:

28 (3) The board may establish terms and conditions that apply to a special authorization included in a licence, if issued, including, without limitation, terms and conditions respecting the following: …

(b) if the licence is to include an inter-city bus authorization, routes and minimum route frequencies

Related topics:

- Inter-city bus
- Board rules of practice and procedure
- ICB COVID-19 policy