



MEMO TO: Mayor Cerkvenik and Board of Trustees

FROM: Michael Brack, Town Manager

DATE: January 7, 2026

SUBJECT: Emerald Line Transit Options

Matter before the Board:

Discuss potential changes to the Emerald Line used for The Lift, given escalating increases in service costs.

Background:

In November 2019, the Emerald Line was established and remains the latest addition to The Lift Bus Service in Fraser. In November 2023, the Emerald Line expanded its service options from a standard 60-minute service to 60-minute service during “Non-Peak Season” times and 30-minute service during “Peak Season” times. “Peak Season” times are defined as the last two weeks of December, most weekends in January and February, and throughout March for spring break.

During the 2026 budget season, Winter Park provided the cost of the upcoming 2026 transit operational year, which was \$1,658,657. This reflected a cost increase of 30% above the budgeted 2025 transit operational year or an increase of \$377,719. This increase also followed a 22% budgeted increase from the 2024 to 2025 operational year. Revenues forecasted for 2026 from the 1% Sales Tax Restricted to funding transit costs are projected at \$1,200,000 which falls about \$458,657 short to cover the 2026 operational year from new revenues which would require allocation from the Town's unassigned fund balance to cover these costs.

When this large increase in cost for the 2026 transit operational year was provided to the Town and discussed at the September 8, 2025, Transit Advisory Committee (TAC) Meeting, Fraser representatives voiced their concerns about the increased cost and requested the Transit Manager to provide options where cost-cutting would make the most sense for Fraser.

Eventually, the recommendation for lowering costs for the 2026 transit operational year was made by the Transit Manager to change the existing Emerald Line from 60-minute service for Non-Peak season and 30-minute service for Peak Season to a standard 60-minute service for Peak and Non-Peak Season times which was in place from November 2019 to November 2023. This recommendation was due to the fact that the Emerald Line was the only true transit line solely to Fraser that wouldn't impact transit services in Winter Park. This cost option was provided to the TAC at their November 3, 2025 TAC Meeting and approved which saved the Town of Fraser \$130,000 for the 2026 transit



operational year and would result in a 16% increase over the 2025 transit operational year budget instead of a 30% cost increase.

Since this change to the Emerald Line to remove the 30-minute Peak Season service, the Town of Fraser has received various complaints and concerns from Fraser residents regarding the scheduling issues of getting riders to Winter Park Ski Resort before it opens. Following these complaints, the Town Board has requested that these concerns be discussed at the January 7 Town Board Meeting.

Following multiple concerns voiced about the change in service for the Emerald Line, the Town of Fraser has been looking more closely at the published schedule to explore any possible scheduling changes that could make sense while being sensitive to large cost increases to Fraser's proportion of transit costs. Those options are planned to be presented in more depth at the January 7 Town Board Meeting.

As mentioned at previous Town Board Meetings, the Town of Fraser will be working closely with the Town of Winter Park to explore future service options to address these increased costs and work towards a more sustainable public transportation system. This may include evaluating different public transportation options, routes, frequencies, and even revisiting the Intergovernmental Agreement that was entered into with the Town of Winter Park in 2018.

Recommendation:

Staff recommends careful consideration of large changes in cost appropriations for 2026 to ensure that the transportation costs budgeted for in the Town of Fraser's budget don't impact the Town's ability to pursue other competing budget priorities included in the 2026 and future Town budgets. If any changes in the Emerald Line are pursued, it is encouraged to consider changes that would have the greatest impact while being mindful of large increases in Fraser's share of transit costs.