



**Council Member Motion
For the Committee of the Whole Meeting of April 25, 2019**

Date: April 23, 2019

From: Councillor Ben Isitt and Councillor Sharmarke Dubow

Subject: Climate Action through a Major Expansion of Public Transit Ridership

Background:

Public transit in the City of Victoria is currently provided by BC Transit, a provincial Crown Corporation, with governance and oversight of the Victoria Regional Transit System provided by the Victoria Regional Transit Commission, in accordance with the *British Columbia Transit Act*, *British Columbia Transit Regulation* and the *Motor Fuel Tax Act*.

Funding for public transit is currently provided through a combination of provincial government subsidies, local property taxation within the transit service area, federal gas tax transfers, advertising revenue and use fees paid by transit users (fares).

Existing Fare Structure

User fees are determined by the Victoria Regional Transit Commission, with a current rate of \$2.50 per user per ride and a discounted monthly pass of \$45 for person 0-18 years and 65 years of age and over, and \$85 per month for all other users.

Special arrangements relating to use fees include the following existing programs:

- “U-Pass”: a universal program provided to postsecondary students at the University of Victoria and Camosun College at a rate equivalent to an adult monthly pass for a 4-month semester (a 75% discount for people eligible for this program);
- “Employee Bus Pass”: a program available to employees of eligible employers on an opt-in basis, providing a 15% discount off the rate for an adult monthly pass.

Consideration is also being given to the following discounted programs to specific user groups:

- Extending eligibility for the “U-Pass” 75% discount to Royal Roads University students, and to University of Victoria and Camosun College students during semesters when they are not enrolled in courses;
- Providing a universal bus pass to secondary school students living on the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations.

Public Transit as Climate Action

A climate emergency has been declared by local governments in the Victoria Regional Transit System service area including the Capital Regional District, the Town of View Royal, the District

of Highlands, the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria, pledging these municipalities to become carbon neutral by 2030 in order to meet the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) targets to avoid the worst consequences of global warming.

In the Victoria Regional Transit System service area, emissions from transportation amount to more than half of community-based carbon emissions. This means that changes in transportation choices in the region have the potential to make the biggest impact toward carbon neutrality and meaningful climate action in line with the climate emergency and IPCC targets.

Phasing Out User-Fee Barriers

User fees currently pose a barrier to public transit use, in terms of the financial barrier to people with low to moderate incomes, as well as a perceptual barrier to people who may be technically able to afford the cost of public transit. Existing inadequate service levels also pose a substantial barrier to mode shift toward public transit.

Removing user fee barriers to public transit has been embraced as an appropriate policy response in the context of climate change, by national jurisdictions including Estonia and Luxembourg, and municipal jurisdictions including Kingston, Ontario, which eliminated user fees for public transit for people under the age of 15 and introduced a universal pass program for high school students in 2017.

In the context of the climate emergency, and with a view toward ensuring access to public transit for people of all income levels, it is recommended that the City of Victoria endorse the policy of phasing out user fees and substantially enhancing service levels of the public transit system in the Capital Region of British Columbia.

Recommendation:

That Council endorses the following resolution and directs staff to forward copies to members of the Victoria Regional Transit Commission and to the Mayors and Councils of local governments in the Capital Region by April 26, 2019, requesting favourable consideration and resolutions of support:

Resolution: Climate Action through a Major Expansion of Public Transit Ridership

WHEREAS local governments in the Capital Region have declared a climate emergency, pledging to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 to avoid the worst consequences of global warming;

AND WHEREAS emissions from transportation generate the majority of community-based emissions within the region, meaning that changes in transportation choices have the potential to make the biggest impact in achieving carbon neutrality;

AND WHEREAS forward-looking jurisdictions around the world from Kingston, Ontario to Luxembourg and Estonia are eliminating user-fee barriers to public transit ridership, with residents paying for transit services through the tax system rather than at the fare box;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the City of Victoria calls on the Victoria Regional Transit Commission and BC Transit to:

1. Embrace determined climate leadership through a major expansion of public transit ridership in the Capital Region, focused on the phasing out of user fees and a substantial improvement in service levels and fleet electrification.
2. Begin implementing this progressive policy with a pilot programme in the 2020 budget eliminating user fees for people 18 years of age and younger, replacing revenues currently generated through fares with adjustments to provincial transfers and the property tax requisition.
3. Develop an implementation plan for a pilot programme for free transit within the Capital Region as a form of climate action, including enhanced service levels and fleet expansion to meet increased demand, in conjunction with fleet electrification.

Respectfully submitted,



Councillor Isitt



Councillor Dubow