



Committee of the Whole Report

For the Meeting of October 3rd, 2019.

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** September 30th, 2019
From: Fraser Work, Director of Engineering and Public Works
Susanne Thompson, Deputy City Manager/CFO
Subject: Fare Free Youth Bus Pass Program – Update and Considerations

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Negotiate a reduced fare for a Victoria Youth bus pass pilot program via upcoming VRTC meetings, at the rate of less than \$11.50 per month, with a duration of 1 year, November 2019 to November 2020.
2. Petition to BC Transit through the VRTC to introduce the required Smart Bus capabilities to enable online pass allocation, single, digital tap payment systems, and data capture, for our regional transit system.
3. Direct staff to introduce an interim monthly youth bus pass program as outlined in this report, at the rate defined via the VRTC negotiated amount for Victoria youth applicants 18 and under, as soon as possible in 2019.
4. Refer the longer term, steady-state youth bus pass resource requirements to the 2020 Financial Planning process, in order to:
 - a. Develop a steady-state bus pass program to be implemented by August 31, 2020 to coincide with the start of the next academic year.
 - b. Reduce administrative costs and requirements to the City, BC Transit and school district and other educational partners.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Council directed staff to introduce a City fare free youth bus pass program to be funded from new Sunday on-street parking revenues. BC Transit does not currently offer a bus pass that the City could easily and affordably administer for city youth riders. BC Transit currently offers two pass options that would need to be re-configured / re-purposed for a City youth program. Ideally a pass would be available through an online, digital system, available to eligible youth through BC Transit's pass services, but that would take time to put into place. In the interim, staff consider that providing the existing monthly pass card at a lower monthly rate (currently set at \$45 per month), could enable the city to offer an interim, pilot-pass option. This option poses the greatest potential to fund maximum ridership in the time available, but will require additional City resources to implement – all of which can be initiated using Sunday parking revenues, while we gain experience and data related to ridership and uptake. Staff recommend providing this lower cost monthly pass option, subject to VRTC approval at their next meeting in November 2019. Staff also recommend continuing to work with BC Transit to provide a more convenient, steady-state

youth pass option to maximize ridership while reducing overall resource and cost implications to the City, BC Transit and school district partners.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the progress and issues related to introducing a municipal, fare-free, youth bus-pass program, with recommendations for Council's consideration.

BACKGROUND

Council directed staff to introduce a free transit passes for youth in order to address affordability barriers for younger travellers and promote a community mode-shift to more sustainable, less GHG-intensive mobility choices. This program was intended to be funded from new Sunday on-street parking revenues and administered using BC Transit bus pass systems.

Council further clarified the scope of its intentions through a June 2019 motion:

- "Council directs staff to ensure that all residents of the City of Victoria who are under the age of 19 will have access to a pass for fare-free public transit no later than November 30, 2019, including the provision of a service pass ("VicPass") or similar mechanism for youth who may not be enrolled in a formal program of education or who may be in enrolled in an alternate program of education".

Since the direction from Council, staff and the Mayor's office have had several meetings with BC Transit, school district administration and youth service agencies. Staff note the substantial interest in this program, particularly for middle and high school aged youth.

The youth bus pass program is an important initiative to provide affordable, and more sustainable mobility alternatives for City youth (up to the age of 19), so that they could benefit from fare-free bus travel to and from school, and other travel needs. As per Council's direction, the program was envisioned to support all of Victoria's youth (estimated at 11,500 individuals) who are enrolled in a number of possible schooling situations, including:

- Attending public school in one of four School Districts (61, 62, 63 and 90)
- Attending private or independent schools
- Homeschooled youth, and
- Out of school youth (either graduated or not in school)

Council directed that revenues from Sunday on-street parking was to fund the program and that the pass administration would rely on BC Transit or existing public school enrollment administrative processes.

This report outlines the current information and issues related to the implementation of this program and provides a set of recommendations to deliver bus passes to youth within the fall 2019 fall period, as an interim state, prior to reaching a steady-state capability.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

At this time, BC Transit does not have a youth dedicated pass system, nor do they have an existing annual pass that city youth can independently subscribe to. BC Transit currently has two pass options available to users in the regional system, outside of the normal, single trip fare. One option is a standard monthly pass for \$45, purchased at commercial outlets in the region. The other option is a pass to students enrolled in Camosun College and UVic. This U-Pass

(“universal” pass) is set at a rate of \$138/year (equates to \$11.50/month), and is subscribed and paid for during undergraduate, post-secondary enrollment processes. The U-Pass is automatically purchased by all students whether or not transit is used by the pass-holder. The universal pass also acts as student photo ID and can be replaced if lost or stolen.

BC Transit has suggested that the City could administer a youth pass using either of these program architectures for individuals 18 and younger (their pass systems define adults as 19 years or older). Both options could work, but impose different costs and administration requirements to schools and/or City resources. The monthly pass is considered expensive and cumbersome for an ongoing program (monthly renewals), and the U-Pass, while more affordable (on a per month basis) has high administrative needs, and poses the highest potential costs to the City, regardless of ridership. Given these issues, the City must consider other interim and longer-term alternatives, which may be granted through VRTC approvals, in order to introduce an effective, convenient and cost-effective youth bus pass program.

As a part of option investigation, the development of a customized visual (non-swipe) transit pass was explored with BC Transit, similar to that of the pass available to low-income seniors and persons with disabilities in the Translink transit system. This approach was not supported by BC Transit as it added additional resource demands on transit staff, and has other risks such as increased fare disputes and fraudulent use.

It is difficult to forecast ridership of a free transit pass program and estimate the subsequent funds needed to support this emerging youth pass program. Piloting the program and monitoring the ridership and mobility patterns for a year or more would help understand demand and what investments are required to support the youth riders. Having ridership data will help determine the actual costs to BC Transit, and help the City understand youth demand, benefits and other program management/ administration needs.

Combining the lower U-Pass rates with the monthly pass card option could provide an acceptable interim option to effectively reduce administration overhead and ensure passes can be allocated to interested transit riders with reduced costs and lower administrative overhead.

This option can likely be achieved in November 2019, by allocating the required funds raised from Sunday parking revenues, to administer the youth bus pass program from City Hall, aiming to serve the highest number of youth riders. Staff will provide quarterly updates on bus pass program performance and funding health, and would immediately inform Council if and when forecasted bus pass applicants may exceed revenues. This model also would require communications with the public on the eligibility and bus pass distribution plan related to this new service/capability. Staff will work closely with BC Transit to ensure any program is able to capture the necessary ridership and route information to accurately quantify service, costs and other impacts to the bus transit system.

2018 – 2022 Strategic Plan

Directly responds to Council’s Sustainable Transportation objective, which identifies a 2019 action to implement a financing mechanism for transit funding for children in Victoria.

Impacts to Financial Plan

The recommended approach can be funded from new Sunday parking revenues, up to a maximum overall administration and ridership costs, which will be determined through program uptake. Staff

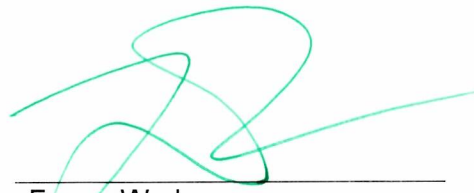
will update Council on financial considerations at quarterly reports or earlier if required.

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

The initiative directly supports goal 7(a) in the transportation and mobility section of the OCP, and specifically coordinated transportation planning (7.27), as well as overarching climate change, energy and community well-being.


Respectfully submitted,



Susanne Thompson
Deputy City Manager/
CFO

Fraser Work
Director
Engineering and Public Works

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:



Date: Sept. 30, 2019