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YORK REGION TRANSIT
COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL SERVICES
DISCOUNT PILOT PROGRAM

The Transit Committee recommends that:

- 1. The deputation by Beverley Wood, Welcoming Arms Ministry, be received; and**
- 2. The recommendations contained in the following report, August 25, 2008, from the Commissioner of Transportation Services and Commissioner of Community and Health Services, be adopted:**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. A one-year pilot project for the provision of discounted transit fare media to pre-selected community-based social services agencies, as outlined in this report, be approved.
2. Consideration be given by Transportation Services and Community and Health Services staff to allow for broader community-based participation in the implementation of this pilot project and sharing the results of the pilot project with community agencies through the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness.
3. Staff report back to Regional Council in the fall of 2009 with respect thereto.

2. PURPOSE

This report seeks Regional Council approval to proceed with a program for the supply of discounted transit fare media to community-based social service agencies that focus on homelessness. A one-year pilot project is proposed to distribute transit tickets through local municipal offices to pre-selected agencies.

3. BACKGROUND

The original request on this matter was received from representatives of Aurora Council

A request was received by York Region Transit (YRT) from Councillor Granger of the Town of Aurora, with the support of Mayor Morris, in February 2008 to provide discounted transit tickets to local service agencies. This was prompted by a request from the “Welcoming Arms Ministry”, an ecumenical partnership involving four churches in Aurora (Aurora United, Our Lady of Grace, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian and Trinity Anglican). The tickets were seen as a more economical approach to their existing practice of paying taxi fares for client travel.

While this is a local request from Aurora, staff see it as having broader social agency applicability, so any consideration for providing discounted fare media for such a purpose should address similar needs across the entire Region.

Discussions have been held with Community and Health Services staff on the Region’s response

The Community and Health Services Department was contacted by YRT staff to provide input regarding the feasibility of offering subsidized transit fares to Region residents who access local social agencies. It was agreed that this could be an important support to helping low-income residents and those at risk to remain or become contributors to our communities and economy. Specifically, it was determined the overall target group could include people who are:

- Accessing services from a community-based social service agency.
- Accessing education or training programs.
- Seeking employment and/or housing.
- Participating in a program with a fixed start and end date.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

A review was conducted to identify how other transit systems are addressing this type of situation

The review showed that:

- A number of municipal transit systems offer subsidized transit for their residents at risk through reduced-cost passes. They include Calgary, Regina, Saskatoon, and Ottawa. The programs for subsidized transit in the cities in Saskatchewan are cost-shared with the provincial government.
- In the majority of cases, the reduced transit fares are for people receiving social assistance.
- The reduced cost passes offered by municipalities are generally:

- Monthly passes at 30% to 50% of the usual cost.
- Dependant upon clients showing proof they are social assistance recipients.
- Not applicable for transit service intended for people with disabilities.
- In Calgary, to obtain a reduced-cost transit pass, proof of earning less than 75% of the Low Income Cut-Off must be shown.

A survey of users of Calgary's low income monthly transit pass showed that:

- 99% said the pass was useful.
- 55% said it improved their personal finances.
- 35% said it improved their mobility.
- The average frequency of transit use increased from 8 to 11 times per week by using the pass.
- 59% said they were able to keep their job as a result of the pass.
- 55% said they were able to take more training/educational classes with the pass.
- 49% said they were able to find employment, or find better employment, by using the pass.

These results were reviewed by both Community and Health Services and YRT staff. Several options were discussed and it was concluded that:

- YRT offer a 15% reduction on transit fares to adults. This is in keeping with the discount presently provided to corporate clients who sign on to the Ridesaver program.
- As a partial distribution system already exists with most local municipal offices already selling transit tickets to the public (except for Georgina and King), eligible community-based social services agencies could purchase transit tickets from these locations at the reduced amount.
- The 15% discount would not be recommended for people receiving assistance under the Ontario Works program. The Community and Health Services Department already provides transit subsidy to people receiving social assistance which is funded under the 80-20 cost-sharing formula with the Province.
- Many community-based agencies are seeing residents who need subsidized transit to retain or secure employment and take part in supportive programs. A pilot program is therefore proposed that would be aimed at assisting low income residents who are using critical emergency supports for the homeless or those at risk of becoming homeless.

Start with a Pilot Program

The pilot will enable the Region to assess the response to the program and whether to recommend its implementation on a broader scope. It will also enable YRT municipal office ticket agents to become accustomed to the new program and gather their input prior to implementing a larger-scale initiative.

The pilot program can be quickly implemented to be available to agencies that assist those who are particularly vulnerable as the weather gets colder.

The agencies suggested to be included in this pilot program are all of the emergency shelters in York Region. They are:

- Sandgate Women's Shelter of Georgina.
- Yellow Brick House.
- Leeder Place Emergency Family Shelter.
- Newmarket Youth Shelter.
- Porter Place Men's Shelter.
- Sutton Youth Multi-Service Centre.
- Inn from the Cold.
- Mosaic Interfaith - Out of the Cold Program.
- Homebase Drop-in Centre.
- Housing Help Centre.
- Street Outreach Van.

One additional program, the Welcoming Arms Ministry, originally requested by Councillor Granger, will also be included in the pilot. By including this program, the Region will be able to assess how the discounted tickets could be used by smaller programs.

The pilot project will be monitored

An evaluation of the project will be undertaken after one year. Among other things, it will identify the number of participants, the satisfaction with the project of both participants and agencies, and its overall costs and benefits. It will also consider the implications of expanding the project to include other social service agencies in the Region.

Relationship to Vision 2026

Provision of subsidized transit would be consistent with the Region's strategic plan, Vision 2026, which identifies "ensuring mobility through accessible and affordable transportation" and "being responsive to the needs of vulnerable residents" as action areas. As noted previously, recipients of the low income transit pass offered in Calgary report that the pass has helped them find and retain jobs, further their education and training, and improved their mobility in general.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no significant additional costs associated with this proposal since the vast majority of clients are not currently using public transit. Existing resources and processes can be easily applied to achieve the desired provision of tickets. However, there would be a cost saving at the local agency level, since the cost of discounted transit tickets would

be significantly lower than taxi fares which are presently being provided. This may enable agencies to give residents more support.

There will be a small amount of incremental revenue for YRT as the potential users of these tickets are generally not using transit at the present time.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The impact to most local municipalities would be the inclusion of additional ticket inventory and distribution responsibilities. This would be in addition to their existing sales to staff or residents. For King and Georgina it would be an additional administrative task.

For residents from each local municipality who are experiencing a crisis, this program will make it possible to more easily look for housing, employment and other supports that will assist them to become contributing members of the Region's communities and economy.

7. CONCLUSION

The Transportation Services and Community and Health Services Departments have collaborated on a plan that will contribute to the Region's broader human service strategic goals. More affordable accessible transit will help residents find and keep jobs and obtain critical supports as well as housing.

It is recommended that:

1. A one-year pilot project be initiated to address the immediate request for subsidized transit. The progress of the pilot project will be monitored and evaluated (number of participants, level of satisfaction, costs and benefits, etc.).
2. During the pilot, staff explore the feasibility and budget implications of providing subsidized fares to a wider range of community-based social services agencies across York Region.
3. The current practice of providing single fares to Ontario Works recipients on an as-needed basis remain unchanged and be continued.
4. The pilot program results be shared with community agencies.

Transportation Services and Community and Health Services staff will continue to collaborate as needed. A report on the results will be brought back for Council consideration in the fall of 2009.

Report No. 6 of the Transit Committee
Regional Council Meeting of September 18, 2008

For more information on this report, please contact Don Gordon, General Manager, York Region Transit, at Ext. 5625.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.