



MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: October 17, 2024
To: Community Services Sub-committee
From: Michael Mousley, Manager of Transit
Report Number: COM24-007
Attachments: None

Title: Proposed Free Transit Day

Objective: To have Council consider waiving all transit fares for City bus services (Transit and Mobility) for a period of one (1) business day on Tuesday November 26, 2024 in observation of World Transit Day (recognized on Sunday November 10, 2024).

Background: At the June 13, 2023, Social Services Sub-committee, a delegation from the EPIC Advocacy group of The Local Community Food Centre made a presentation. The delegation requested that the City of Stratford make transit passes free, on an opt-in basis, for residents who are in receipt of Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) or Ontario Works (OW). This was an added component for data collection included in the free transit day.

In the past, the City of Stratford has been supporting the Stratford Business Improvement Area (BIA) initiative of Car-Free Fridays, to advertise and promote the travelling without use of carbon emissions and promoting healthy lifestyle choices of walking, biking, or other physical means of transportation. Offering transit services without cost supports the use of environmentally friendly transit options by removing the cost barrier. The BIA is excited to co-host with the Transit Department on November 26.

Analysis: To appropriately measure the potential estimated financial impacts of providing a free transit system and provide meaningful data back to the Mayor and Council, staff are suggesting the use of a free transit day. The initiative to make transit free for one day would provide staff a further opportunity to test ridership and assess required process changes.

The Car-Free Fridays serve a dual purpose of supporting green initiatives as well as providing an opportunity to measure transit usage. This could then help inform potential future programming and the possibility of an enhanced fare structure.

Free Transit Day on September 8, 2023, resulted in 36% increase in ridership.

The City's Director of Building and Planning has reviewed this initiative and fully supports advancing sustainable transportation options. Encouraging free transit days aligns with good planning practices that reduce vehicle dependency, increase transit ridership, and promote healthier, more vibrant urban growth. This initiative contributes to a more sustainable and accessible community, supporting long-term city development goals.

Financial Implications:

Financial impact to current year operating budget:

The estimated impact to the 2024 revenues, if the recommendation is accepted, is \$5,000 in the form of reduced transit fare revenue for the day. This loss of revenue is estimated from analyzing 2023 daily transit fares on the last Tuesday in November. The actual revenue impact may vary due to the variety of transit fare options such as monthly fare vouchers and variants in demand which can be impacted by other variables, like weather or concurrent events. To track the financial impacts, this is captured as 'interfunctional' which ensures the department maintains the revenue effect while the cost is reflected in corporate fee waivers. This does not have a direct levy impact, rather is a tracking tool to illustrate forfeited revenues.

Financial impact on future year operating budget:

As this is a one-time proposal, there are no direct impacts to future year budgets. If this did recur, in future years, the presentation is changing from 'fee waivers' to be reflected as a discount line. Should further analysis result in changes to the fare structures later, these impacts would be outlined at that time.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities:

Enhance our Infrastructure

This report aligns with this priority as the data gathered will inform strategies to improve the pedestrian, cycling, and transportation experience by implementing the short-term initiatives from the Transportation Master Plan. Further, it works toward the City's climate action goals.

Alignment with One Planet Principles:

Health and Happiness

Encouraging active, social, meaningful lives to promote good health and wellbeing.

Travel and Transport

Reducing the need to travel, encouraging walking, cycling and low carbon transport.

Staff Recommendation: THAT a Free Transit Day be authorized by waiving transit fares for one (1) day on November 26, 2024;

AND THAT the financial transaction be recorded as interfunctional as noted in Report COM24-007.

Prepared by: Michael Mousley, Manager of Transit
Recommended by: Tim Wolfe, Director of Community Services
Joan Thomson, Chief Administrative Officer