

Subject: Targeted Support Program - City Wide

Reference:

Date to Council: April 1, 2020
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Transit Windsor
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Clerk's File #: TBD

To: Mayor and Members of City Council

Recommendation:

That, as a good will gesture, City Council **APPROVE** a one-time payment to Transit Windsor riders who purchased (subject to verification) a pass between February 19th, 2020 and March 19th, 2020 or held a monthly pass valid (subject to verification) for the period between February 19th, 2020 and March 19th, 2020 as follows:

- 1) For students able to demonstrate that they held a valid U-Pass (Universal Student Bus Pass) for the period February 19th, 2020 to March 19th, 2020 – a one-time payment in the amount of **\$25**;
- 2) For individuals able to demonstrate proof of purchase of a 15-day Adult, Senior, Student or Tunnel Bus Pass valid at some time during the period February 19th, 2020 to March 19th, 2020 – a one-time payment of **\$25**;
- 3) For individuals able to demonstrate proof of purchase of a 30-day Adult, Senior, Student, Tunnel Bus or Corporate ValuPass valid during the period February 19th, 2020 to March 19th, 2020 – a one-time payment of **\$50**;
- 4) For individuals holding an Affordable Pass Program (APP), Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) valid during the period February 19th, 2020 to March 19th, 2020 – a one-time payment of **\$75**.

Executive Summary:

N/A.

Background:

The outbreak of COVID-19, a new respiratory virus, has spread to multiple countries, including Canada. COVID-19 has caused unprecedented disruption to almost all facets of our daily lives including the closure of schools, the closure of non-essential businesses, the postponement of a by-election and the closure of the Canada-U.S. border to all non-essential travel. All of these closures were undertaken in a valiant effort to limit the rapid spread of this new disease. At the time of writing this report, there are currently 777,286 reported COVID-19 cases world wide and 37,140 deaths. In Canada, there are 7,333 reported cases of COVID-19 and 72 deaths. In Windsor, there are 65 confirmed cases in Windsor and Essex County.

The closures and/or reductions due to COVID-19 were not undertaken en-masse, but rather as the information currently available supported taking the action. Oftentimes, the measures to combat the spread of this disease have been unprecedented.

With respect to Transit Windsor, the following timeline shows Transit Windsor's changing response to COVID-19:

March 14, 2020

Transit Windsor service in place and beginning to see ridership decreases.

March 19, 2020

Announced that effective as of the end of the business day, Thursday, March 19th, 2020 and until at least April 5th, 2020, the Windsor-Detroit Tunnel Bus was suspending operations and that adjustments to other routes were anticipated. For the week of March 15th, Transit Windsor was experiencing daily ridership decreases as much as 60%.

Announced closure of the downtown Windsor International Transit Terminal (WITT).

March 20, 2020

Announced that in an effort to keep passengers and drivers as safe as possible, Transit Windsor was implementing a new protocol (which was to be in effect until at least April 5th) whereby all passengers would board at the rear door of the bus to limit the regular interaction with staff. Only the elderly, passengers with mobility issues and persons in a wheelchair would be permitted to board from the front door.

Announced that a reduced schedule plan would be announced shortly and would be in effect until at least April 5th when it would be reassessed.

Riders were asked to only use public transit if absolutely necessary for essential travel in the effort to stem the potential spread of the Coronavirus across the city, should the virus appear in our community.

(First case of COVID-19 confirmed in Windsor-Essex County late on Friday, March 20th, 2020)

March 26, 2020

Transit Windsor was experiencing ridership decreases consistent across the country, where transit properties were reporting between 60% – 80% decreases in ridership. For the week of March 22nd, 2020, Transit Windsor recorded 77% ridership loss over a similar period in February. As a precautionary measure to help safeguard the health and well-being of transit riders and operators alike, and to further help lower the risk of community infection within the City of Windsor, Mayor Dilkens ordered the temporary suspension of Transit Windsor operations, effective the end of normal operating hours on Sunday, March 29th, 2020.

The suspension of operations will last at least until Monday, April 13th, 2020.

Discussion:

The suspension of service was undertaken with the paramount goal of reducing the health risks to the people of Windsor. Nonetheless, the suspension of Transit Windsor operations until at least Monday, April 13th, 2020 will present a significant inconvenience to those individuals in our community who rely on public transportation.

As a good will gesture, it is recommended that City Council approve a one-time payment to Transit Windsor riders who purchased (subject to verification) a pass between February 19th, 2020 and March 19th, 2020 or held a monthly pass valid (subject to verification) for the period between February 19th, 2020 and March 19th, 2020 as follows:

- 1) For students able to demonstrate that they held a valid U-Pass (Universal Student Bus Pass) for the period February 19th, 2020 to March 19th, 2020 – a one-time payment in the amount of \$25;

Students tend to rely heavily on public transportation. The rationale for the recommended one-time payment of \$25 to qualifying U-Pass holders is that U-Pass holders pay \$66 a semester (4 months). This works out to \$16.50 per month.

The one-time payment will need to be administered by the University of Windsor Student Alliance (UWSA) as they administer the bus pass program for full-time and part-time undergraduate students. The UWSA will be required to demonstrate and provide evidence to the City that it has refunded the noted amounts to the eligible students. Any funds not distributed will be required to be returned to the City.

- 2) For individuals able to demonstrate proof of purchase of a 15-day Adult, Senior, Student or Tunnel Bus Pass valid during the period of February 19th, 2020 to March 19th, 2020 – a one-time payment of **\$25**;
- 3) For individuals able to demonstrate proof of purchase of a 30-day Adult, Senior, Student, Tunnel Bus or Corporate ValuPass valid during the period of February 19th, 2020 to March 19th, 2020 – a one-time payment of **\$50**;

The rationale for the 15-day and 30-day Adult, Senior, Student, Tunnel Bus or Corporate ValuPass payment of \$25 and \$50 respectively, is that these individuals are transit users who have demonstrated a commitment to using public transit by purchasing a 15-day or 30-day pass at a cost of \$47.85 and \$95.70 respectfully.

- 4) For individuals holding an Affordable Pass Program (APP), Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) valid during the period February 19th, 2020 to March 19th, 2020 – a one-time payment of **\$75**.

The rationale for providing a one-time payment of **\$75** to individuals taking public transit utilizing APP, OW and ODSP is that these individuals are amongst the most vulnerable in our community – low income, disabled, underemployed or looking for work. Apart from representing a good will gesture, it is hoped that the \$75 will also provide them with some financial assistance in their effort to secure other modes of essential travel or be able to access home delivery services.

Further details on how to apply and the deadline to apply to receive the one-payment will be communicated through the City’s website and 311.

Risk Analysis:

There is a risk of fraud associated in providing payments to the various transit pass holders identified in this report. This risk will be mitigated through implementing various proof of purchase requirements/verification methods, which transit pass holders will need to undertake in order to receive the one-time payment.

Depending on the availability of staff resources, the timeline to process these one-time payments could be delayed. However, every effort will be made to ensure that the one-time payments are processed as quickly as possible.

Financial Matters:

The estimated financial impact of issuing payment for those passes purchased between February 19th and March 19th, 2020, is outlined in the table below.

Passes Issued February 19 - March 19, 2020						
	ODSP	APP	OW	Total Passes	Rate	Payment
30-day pass	714	402	1446	2562	\$ 75.00	\$ 192,150
	Adults	Students	Seniors	Total Passes		
30 day pass	482	3256	754	4492	\$ 50.00	\$ 224,600
15 day pass	244	595	74	913	\$ 25.00	\$ 22,825
				<i>Estimated application rate @ 30% -</i>		\$ 74,228
	University of Windsor - Upass			Total Passes	Rate	Payment
April portion	Estimate based on number of passes issued			13230	\$ 25.00	\$ 330,750
	<i>* final numbers to be confirmed with University Student Associations</i>					
				Total estimated one-time payment -		\$ 597,128

ODSP, APP and OW recipients will receive a payment of \$75. Transit Windsor, working with the Social Service Department, will endeavour to issue payments as quickly as possible. Pass holders utilizing these programs are able to be identified through the various programs under which their passes are issued, along with Transit Windsor sales reports.

Regular 30- or 15-day passes for Adults, Students and Seniors will be refunded through an application process in the amounts of \$50 and \$25 per pass, respectively. Unlike the afore-mentioned programs where detailed customer information is available, bus pass purchasers in these categories would be required to provide proof of purchase in order to request payment. While Transit Windsor encourages all monthly pass holders to keep their monthly receipt for the length of time that their pass is valid, it is likely that a many transit riders will not have their receipt available. For purposes of estimating the potential financial impact, it has been assumed that approximately 30% of monthly pass holders will apply for this benefit. This percentage falls in line with other application based payments the city has administered in the past. It should also be noted that while not identified in the chart above, Tunnel Bus and Corporate ValuPass passes would also fall under this category. The number of these passes issued on a monthly basis are minimal and would not significantly impact the estimated total payments.

The UPass program is an agreement between the City of Windsor and University of Windsor Student Associations that allows students to receive a bus pass at a significantly discounted rate of \$66 per semester as part of their tuition. In the 2019-2020 academic year, approximately 13,230 students paid into the UPass program. A payment of \$25 for each pass issued would result in a payment of \$330,750. This estimated payment would be issued as a lump sum to the University of Windsor Student Alliance for administration and distribution back to their students. The UWSA will be required to provide evidence and demonstrate refunds have been made to the eligible students. Any amounts not distributed will be required to be returned to the City.

Due to the use of estimates in the above analysis, the final amount of the total payment issued will fluctuate depending on individual verification of the final number of passes issued, the number of regular pass applications received, and through discussions with the University of Windsor Student Associations regarding the final number of passes issued under the UPass Program. Costs will be tracked in the Transit Windsor operating budget and updates on the financial impact of these recommendations will be brought back to Council as part of regular variance updates and will be tracked as a component of the overall corporate costs currently being tracked relating to the COVID19 Pandemic.

Consultations:

Finance

Social Services

Conclusion:

The decision to protect riders and drivers and to lower the risk of spreading COVID-19 in our community was not made in haste but rather was part of a series of ongoing

measures undertaken to protect our community from COVID-19. Many in our community rely on public transportation for their travel needs. The recent decision to temporarily suspend Transit Windsor operations will affect those individuals. As a gesture of good will, this report recommends that Council approve providing the various transit pass holders identified within this report with a one-time payment that may be of financial assistance to them in their efforts to obtaining other modes of essential travel.

Planning Act Matters:

N/A.

Approvals:

Name	Title
Patrick Delmore	Executive Director, Transit Windsor
Mark Winterton	City Engineer – Corporate Leader – Environmental Protection & Infrastructure Services
Jelena Payne	Community Development and Health Commissioner – Corporate Leader – Social Development & Health
Joseph Mancina	Chief Financial Officer/City Treasurer – Corporate Leader – Finance & Technology
Onorio Colucci	Chief Administrative Officer

Notifications:

Name	Address	Email

Appendices: