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Date October 3, 2023 **Report No.** 2023-512
To Chair and Members
Committee of the Whole - Operations
From Inderjit Hans, P. Eng., PMP
Commissioner of Public Works

1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item
Item For Consideration

2.0 Topic **Review of Seniors Ride Free Month (June 2023)**

3.0 Recommendation

- A. THAT Report No. 2023-512, titled “Review of Seniors Ride Free Month (June 2023)” BE RECEIVED.

4.0 Executive Summary

At their February 28, 2023 meeting City Council directed staff to provide a program for Seniors Month in June 2023 where adults over the age of 50 could ride conventional Brantford Transit for free between 9am and 3pm, seven days a week. Through the Resolution, staff were directed to report back with impact of the pilot project and provide options for Council to consider with offering Seniors the opportunity for free transit.

5.0 Purpose and Overview

The purpose of this report is to provide the budget impacts related to the Seniors Ride Free program that was implemented on Brantford Transit for Seniors

Month in June 2023. The report also provides options for the implementation and ongoing evaluation of a permanent discounted seniors fare strategy.

6.0 Background

At their City Council meeting on February 28, 2023, Council approved the following Resolution:

THAT in recognition of Seniors Month in June staff BE DIRECTED to provide free transit ridership between 9:00 am and 3:00 pm Sunday through Saturday on Brantford Transit Conventional Services who are 50+ for the month of June.

The rationale for this initiative included:

- Removal of barriers to transit
- Support for healthy aging plan and to promote seniors' use of transit.
- Demonstrate commitment to seniors.
- Address potential limits to transportation options and reduce automobile use.

The Resolution directed staff to report back to Council with the results of the Seniors Ride Free pilot program during June 2023 and to provide Council with an analysis of the feasibility of a permanent Seniors Ride Free program.

This Report provides an estimate of the budget impacts of the June initiative and presents next steps for a possible permanent program.

7.0 Corporate Policy Context

Council Priority #3 - Move people more effectively

8.0 Input From Other Sources

Staff performed a peer review from other transit agencies where a seniors program is in place, these included Oakville, Durham, York Region, Mississauga, Brampton, Milton, Burlington, Hamilton, Waterloo Region, GO Transit, Toronto, Niagara Region, and Norfolk County.

9.0 Analysis

9.1 Seniors Fare Free June, 2023

Impacts on ridership and revenue for the Seniors Ride Free program in June 2023 were estimated through farebox data and ridership demographic information. Brantford Transit maintains separate fare card (B-Card) options for persons aged 65 and older, hereinafter referred to as seniors, and Adults aged 18-64. Seniors can easily be identified through a Seniors B-Card but there is no way of accurately determining the age of riders aged 18-64, nor those who purchase single fares not through a B-Card. As the original Resolution directing staff to implement this pilot program indicated free fares for users who are 50+, some assumptions were made in the following section to determine the impact of a permanent program. Additionally, distinguishing time-of-day use along with age is not supported in the current fare management system.

In the 2021 Census from Statistics Canada, the number of Brantford residents aged 50 to 64 was approximately equal to the number of seniors, aged 65 and older (about 30,000 each).

The cost of the June program was projected by estimating the revenue from seniors' B-Cards and cash ridership, then adding this to the assumed users who are aged 50-64 to align with the intent of the pilot program to be for any user over the age of 50, and estimating the time-of-day restriction.

9.1.1 Conventional Transit

Currently, about 400 individual seniors are estimated to ride Brantford Transit (about 1.5 per cent of the City's senior population) using the conventional service. To account for the 50-64 age group a rate of 0.5 per cent was used as it is expected that less users in that age group rely on public transit.

The monthly revenue from seniors, including B-Card passes and e-rides as well as cash riders, is approximately \$7,000 monthly (March 2023) or the equivalent of about \$84,000 annually.

Adding the additional revenue from the 50 to 64 age group increases this monthly amount by approximately \$3,000, totaling an impact of \$10,000 per month.

The Seniors Ride Free program in June 2023 was applied between the hours of 9:00 am and 3:00 pm. It is estimated that

there was a \$4,000 loss of revenue in the month of June as a result of this program. However, it should be noted that fare reductions typically result in a temporary increase in ridership but this is not expected to sustain in the long-term.

9.1.2 Specialized Transit (Brantford Lift)

Based on 2023 data, there are approximately 300 active senior Brantford Lift riders, taking a total of 361 rides per week. However, similar to the conventional transit pattern, there is a wide variation in use patterns. Applying these travel patterns and the various B-Card and cash rates indicates a monthly revenue of approximately \$6,700 or \$80,000 annually. The Seniors Ride Free pilot program did not apply to Brantford Lift services, thus the 50-64 age category was not included in this calculation.

9.1.3 Key Constraints

Providing free transit to persons 50+ on Brantford Transit would have the operator rely on identification or visual verification. Throughout the Seniors Ride Free pilot program in June 2023, Transit Operators allowed individuals to self-identify as 50+ to qualify for the program to make the service as accessible as possible.

With the new fare collection system expected to be installed and in service by early 2024, other options will become available to ensure fare evasion and fare programs are properly managed.

9.1.4 Results of Senior Fare Free June

During the month of June 2023 Brantford Transit provided 15,725 fare free rides to seniors.

Actual revenue loss for the Seniors Ride Free Pilot Program in June 2023 is estimated to be \$4,000. However, Brantford Lift was not part of this pilot program. If this program were to become a permanent program it would be expected that the additional \$6,700 monthly revenue loss associated with Brantford Lift would be applied based on a program for persons 65+.

9.2 Long Term Fare Strategy Options

Council additionally directed staff to provide an assessment of the feasibility of a permanent program.

A scan of nearby transit systems was completed to determine the relevant free fares provided by each. As shown in Table 1, only Oakville, Brampton, and Burlington provide fare-free transit to persons aged 65+ (Brampton restricted to residents only), and Mississauga provides a significantly discounted fare (\$1.00).

All other transit agencies surveyed have fare structures for seniors that are similar to those of Brantford Transit.

Table 1- Seniors Fare Policies in the GTHA and Surrounding Areas

Municipality	Fare-free – Youth	Fare-free – Seniors	Fare-free – Other	Comments
Oakville	Age 0 to 19	Age 65+	CNIB	Program launched May 1, 2023
Durham	Age 0 to 19	None	CNIB	Presto card required
York Region	0-5	None	CNIB	Presto
Mississauga	0 – 12	65+ \$1	CNIB	6-12 and Seniors fare extended from Midday to all day launched May 1, 2023
Brampton	0-5	65+ resident	CNIB	Non-resident seniors pay regular senior discounted fare
Milton	0-12	None	CNIB; Low income	Presto required
Burlington	0-12	65+	CNIB; Low income	Presto required
Hamilton	0-5	None	None	6-12 pilot closed April 30, 2023
Waterloo Region	0-5	None	CNIB; veterans	
GO Transit	0-12	None	None	
Toronto	0-12	None	CNIB	CNIB free fare only available to

Municipality	Fare-free – Youth	Fare-free – Seniors	Fare-free – Other	Comments
				Toronto residents
Niagara Region	012	None	CNIB; Veterans; Military	
Norfolk County	0-5	None	None	

Based on the industry scan, of the four GTHA municipalities that offer free or significantly discounted fares for seniors, three offer the program all day, and all have an eligibility criterion limiting the program to riders aged 65 years or older.

For these reasons, the assessment of the permanent program was based on application to riders 65 years of age or older, and all-day service. The age criterion is not only consistent with GTHA practice, but also with other programs at the City of Brantford such as the Wayne Gretzky Sports Centre swimming.

9.2.1 Permanent Fare Free

The impact of a potential free transit program for seniors aged 65 years or older for all day conventional service can be projected from the temporary June 2023 assessment. In that assessment, the original base projection, based on available data, was a monthly cost of about \$7,000 or about \$84,000 annually.

Similarly, Brantford Lift monthly revenue is projected to be slightly lower, at \$6,700 or \$80,400 annually, bringing the total annual revenue loss to approximately \$164,400 should the program be implemented permanently.

Staff is currently undertaking a Transit Optimization Study which will include a thorough review of the transit network, routes, operations, and provide recommendations for a fare strategy. As this work is ongoing, staff will investigate the feasibility for a permanent Seniors Ride Free program through the Transit Optimization Study.

Implementing a fare program for seniors on Brantford Transit will encounter similar issues to those in the June 2023 program assessment, but as a long-term program, steps will be reviewed as part of the Fare Strategy through the Transit Optimization Study to mitigate the issues identified. This can include:

- Requiring all seniors wanting to take advantage of the program to acquire, register and use a B-Card. This proposed policy is consistent with other area agencies offering free transit to seniors.
- Program the new account-based system to collect data on the trips taken by the card holder, but not deduct a fare or debit e-rides. The seniors monthly pass would be eliminated.
- Requesting ID from boarding riders.
- Allowing riders to board free after an initial request for ID.
- Adding clear information on or near the farebox informing boarding passengers that a fare is not required for riders aged 65+.

10.0 Financial Implications

In the month of June 2023, Brantford Transit provided 15,725 fare free rides to seniors. An analysis of ridership patterns and fare data provided an estimated revenue loss of \$4,000 for the month of June for the conventional service.

A permanent full day fare-free transit program for seniors aged of 65 years or older, based on available data, is estimated to have a monthly revenue loss of \$7,000 or about \$84,000 annually, associated with the conventional transit service.

Although Brantford Lift was not included in the pilot program, if this program was to be made permanent Brantford Lift would be required to match the fare structure of the conventional service as per the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act. Brantford Lift monthly revenue loss is estimated at \$6,700 or \$80,400 annually, therefore the total annual revenue loss would be approximately \$164,400.

11.0 Climate and Environmental Implications

Providing fare free rides to seniors may incentivize seniors to take public transportation rather than single use vehicles which will in turn lower community greenhouse gas emissions from transportation.

12.0 Conclusion

Based on this assessment, staff will provide a comprehensive Fare Strategy as part of the Transit Optimization Study that would encompass options for all citizens to be able to access transit in an affordable means and provide any financial impacts expected due to the strategy being accepted. Also, the Fare Strategy will investigate implementing a low-income transit pass that would allow citizens that qualify to have access to an affordable, subsidized transit pass. The recommendations from the Fare Strategy will be presented to City Council as part of the final Transit Optimization Study.



Inderjit Hans, P. Eng., PMP
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Attachments (if applicable)

Copy to:

In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required yes no

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk yes no

Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council?

yes no