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Date March 2, 2021 **Report No.** 2021-140

To Chair and Members
Committee of the Whole – Operations and Administration

From Aaron Wallace
Acting General Manager, Community Services and Social Development

1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item ☐
Item For Consideration ☒

2.0 Topic Kids Ride Free Program [Financial Impact: None]

3.0 Recommendation

- A. THAT Report 2021-140 Kids Ride Free Program BE RECEIVED; and
- B. THAT staff BE DIRECTED to continue the Kids Ride Free Program on an ongoing basis with no charge for riders age 5-12; and
- C. THAT the necessary By-law to amend Schedule 1 of By-law 210-2019 being a By-law to Fix Fees and Charges to be collected by the Corporation of the City of Brantford for 2020 BE PRESENTED to City Council for adoption; and
- D. THAT anticipated revenue losses to the Transit Department be offset by an annual transfer of \$11,000 from the National Child Benefit/Social Assistance Reinvestment Fund.

4.0 Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update and evaluation of the Kids Ride Free Program following the three-year pilot period. The Kids Ride

Free Program decreased the transit fares for children 5 to 12 years old from \$1.75 per ride to \$0, effective September 2, 2018.

Ridership for children significantly increased during the pilot period, and a ridership survey summarized the social and economic benefits of the program. Staff are recommending that children 5 to 12 years old continue to ride Brantford Transit at no cost, and that the loss of revenue be offset through National Child Benefit/Social Assistance Reinvestment Fund with an annual transfer of \$11,000.

5.0 Purpose and Overview

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update and evaluation of the Kids Ride Free Pilot Program. This report provides an overview of the program and recommends that children 5 to 12 be permitted to ride Brantford Transit at no cost.

6.0 Background

In March 2018, Brantford City Council approved the following recommendations from report HHS2018-014 Enhanced Low-Cost Transit Options:

- A. That report HHS2018-014 Enhanced Low-Cost Transit Options BE RECEIVED; and
- B. That staff BE DIRECTED to implement a Kids Ride Free program for a duration of three years, effective September 1st 2018, to require no charge for children ages 5-12; and
- C. THAT staff BE DIRECTED to rename the Disabled Pass to the Affordability Pass, effective September 1st 2018; and
- D. THAT the necessary By-law to amend Schedule 5 – Public Works – Transit Services By-law 188-2017, being a By-law to Fix Fees and Charges to be collected by The Corporation of the City of Brantford for 2018, BE PRESENTED to City Council for adoption.

The Kids Ride Free Program became effective on September 2nd, 2018. Prior to September 2018, children aged 0-4 were able to ride Brantford Transit at no cost, while children ages 5-12 were charged a fare of \$1.75. The Kids Ride Free Program made it possible for children ages 0-12 to ride Brantford Transit at no cost.

Annual status reports of the Kids Ride Free Program have been included in the Healthy Kids Annual Update reports (Report No. 2019-77, Report No. 2020-57), summarizing the community response and increase in ridership resulting from the program.

The Kids Ride Free Program was funded with an annual transfer of \$11,000 to Brantford Transit from the National Child Benefit/Social Assistance Reinvestment Fund. This fund is administered by the Community Services and Social Development Department and is used to mitigate the impact of poverty for children in Brantford and the County of Brant.

7.0 Corporate Policy Context

Corporate Climate Change Action Plan

2021 – 2022 Council Priorities

- A safe, efficient transportation system connects the community across neighbourhoods, with neighbouring communities, and provincial transportation networks.
- The city is mitigating its environmental footprint and adapting to climate change.

8.0 Input From Other Sources

City of Brantford - Public Works

City of Brantford - Finance

9.0 Analysis

9.1 Kids Ride Free – Ridership Tracking

Prior to the implementation of the Kids Ride Free Program Brantford Transit staff estimated that children ages 5 - 12 accounted for 6,322 trips annually (Report No. HHS2018-014, Kids Ride Free). Following the implementation of the Kids Ride Free Program children age 5-12 ridership was as follows:

- 2019 - 42,228 rides
- 2020 – 20,499 rides

The decreased ridership seen in 2020 can be attributed to the restrictions put in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the tracking prior to the program only allowed for an estimate, the Kids Ride Free Program has showed significantly higher than anticipated growth in ridership for the 5 to 12 age demographic.

In response to the COVID-19 Pandemic the Safe Restart Program initiated by the Province has contributed funding to offset revenue impacts to Brantford Transit for loss revenues/ridership since the start of the pandemic in March 2020. These funds will be applied to any revenue losses to Brantford Transit up until March 31, 2021; staff are anticipating that these funds may extend to the end of 2021.

9.2 Kids Ride Free Program Survey

A Kids Ride Free Program survey was developed to capture user feedback. Surveys were distributed onboard transit vehicles to parents with children 12 and under, as well as providing parents with the option to complete the program survey online. A total of 279 surveys were completed, and key findings include:

- 88% of those surveyed agreed that the Kids Ride Free Program has made it easier to get out more and go more places in Brantford
- 85% of those surveyed said that they are using the bus more since the Kids Ride Free Program began
- 60% of those surveyed said that the Kids Ride Free Program made it possible for someone in their family to use Brantford Transit for the first time

Parents also shared positive feedback about how the program impacted their lives, increasing their ability to access services and connect to the community, including the following comments:

- “I don't drive, this program allows me to go out with my son without worrying about spending extra money! I love it”
- “It has been extremely helpful, we have been able to afford to go more places that we couldn't go before. We are low income and this helps so much.”

- “Loving the freedom it gives me and the kids and a better impact on the environment!!”
- “I appreciate the ease of not having to worry about the extra funds as well as the ability to take my children with me more often.”

9.3 Kids Ride Free Program - Environmental Impact

The City of Brantford Climate Change Officer has noted that choosing to take the bus instead of a car saves the carbon emissions associated with that trip. Over the course of a year, the average car produces 5 tonnes of carbon emissions. Taking one car off the road for a year has the same impact as planting 10 new trees that each live to be 80 years old. In the City of Brantford, transportation emissions contribute 41% of all GHG emissions for the City. Reducing the number of cars on the road also reduces traffic congestion and emissions from idling.

A long term target was set by Council in December 2019 within the Climate Emergency Declaration. Council agreed, in principle, to a municipal target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 for both the Corporation and the community. Promoting public transportation as an alternative method of moving throughout the City at a younger age may help to create transit users out of the next generation of car buyers.

9.4 Continuing the Kids Ride Free Program

The Kids Ride Free Program has provided increased access to services and amenities, increased ridership for a new generation of bus riders, and lessened the environmental impact of residents by encouraging alternative transportation options.

The Kids Ride Free Program is set to end in September 2021, as per the approved three year timeline. Staff are recommending that the Kids Ride Free program be continued on an ongoing basis and that the user fee schedule for Brantford Transit reflect an ongoing \$0 fee for riders aged 0 - 12. The Transit Department will continue to receive an annual transfer of \$11,000 from the National Child Benefit/Social Assistance Reinvestment Fund to offset revenue loss by Brantford Transit.

10.0 Financial Implications

Brantford Transit has projected that adjusting the age for free ridership from 0-4 years of age to 0-12 years of age will result in lost revenue of approximately \$11,000 for each year based on the estimated ridership prior to implementing the program. As noted in the report, the number of riders ages 0-12 showed significant increases following the implementation of the program far exceeding the prior ridership. Staff estimates that this increased ridership is a direct result of the Kids Ride Free Program and that if the program were eliminated ridership would return to the previous levels. Therefore the amount proposed to offset the loss of fare revenue is reflective of the estimated revenue lost rather than accounting for increased ridership as a result of the program.

The cost of the three year pilot has been covered with an annual transfer of \$11,000 from the National Child Benefit/ Social Assistance Reinvestment Fund.

To support the Kids Ride Free program ongoing, \$11,000 will be committed to the program annually, at no additional cost to the municipal budget.

11.0 Conclusion

Expanding low-cost transit options helps remove and prevent barriers to employment, health care, recreational, educational, and social activities. Affordable transportation is a key component of enhancing the quality of life for Brantford residents and reducing the community's climate impact. The three-year pilot of the Kids Ride Free Program introduced a new generation to a more economical and environmentally friendly transportation option. Staff recommends that Brantford Transit continue providing free rides for children 0-12 years old.



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Community Services and Social Development

Prepared By:

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Attachments: N/A

Copy To: N/A

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