

MEMO

TO: Toronto Transit Commission

CC: Andy Byford, CEO, TTC, Roberto Rossini, Deputy City Manager & CFO; Dr David McKeown, Medical Officer of Health; Community Development and Recreation Committee

FROM: Councillor Joe Mihevc, Ward 21, St. Paul's West

RE: Providing Affordable TTC Fares for Low Income Riders

DATE: November 15, 2013

I am writing to request the Board of the Toronto Transit Commission request staff to engage with staff from Toronto Public Health, City Planning, Employment and Social Services, and other relevant staff and report on strategies to improve public transit affordability, particularly for low income people. Specifically, I am asking staff to report on three proposals to make transit more accessible to low income Torontonians:

1. Provision and implementation of a discount on bulk token purchases to social service agencies;
2. The extension of "Student" fares to adult learners in General Education Development and other continuing education programs; and
3. The implementation of a pilot to provide a means-tested discounted Metropass (and/or future Presto Pass) to low income Torontonians.

Background

While the provincial government has continued to push the burden of funding public transit operating onto municipalities, TTC riders have seen fares increase well above the rate of inflation over the past 15 years. Over the past three years the "farebox recovery ratio" – the portion of the TTC's operations paid for directly by riders through tokens and passes – has steadily increased, and is now close to 80%. No other Canadian city – or similar international city – places so much of the cost of transit operation directly on riders. Toronto should target a farebox ratio of closer to 68%. This is a historic figure that had been used for decades.

Absent the ability to lower fares across the board, or any apparent willingness by the provincial government to reinvest in public transit operating funding, the City and TTC should examine methods to improve access to public transit for low income people.

These changes to the fare structure would improve the service offered by TTC to low income Torontonians. These provisions would not be cutting edge; they would simply bring Toronto in line with other cities in Canada that already offer similar discount transit fares. Since 2005, Calgary has provided a 50% subsidy to low income youth. In 2013, that discount was extended to low income adults. Up to 10% of Calgary residents now qualify for the subsidy. Regina has had a similar fare subsidy since 2003. In both cities, residents apply annually to qualify for the program. Proof of income is used to qualify for the program.

While increased fares are preferable from both a social and environmental standpoint to cuts in service, they have had the effect of making TTC prohibitively expensive for low income people. The negative health and social impacts of lack of transit access are clearly outlined in the Board of Health's report of March 23, 2013: "Next Stop Health: Transit Access and Health Inequities in Toronto", available at

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.HL20.3>

Sincerely,

Councillor Joe Mihevc
Ward 21, St. Paul's West