



**Deputation to Executive Committee  
City of Toronto**

**Thursday, November 12, 2019**

**EX10.1 Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy - 2019-2022 Action Plan**

**Submitted by: Susan Bender, Manager of Toronto Drop In Network and a member of the Fair Fare Coalition**

There is a lot to celebrate in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Action Plan and I commend the PRS Office and their partners across City of Toronto department partners for their commitment and their work.

I have worked for decades now with diverse groups of people and in neighbourhoods that are experiencing poverty, and now, I am supporting the critical work of 58 drop ins across the City. Besides advocating for more affordable and appropriate housing and for food security, I have found myself increasingly focused on public transit. Back in January, 2010, when the Fair Fare Coalition formed in response to the big jump in the cost to ride the Toronto public transit system (25 cents for cash and tokens and \$15 for a regular Metropass), the ideas of transit equity, of public transit as a public good and an essential public service and, especially, the idea of decreasing fares for people who most rely on the TTC yet are least able to afford it were ideas we fought hard to get onto the City agenda. The people and the organizations who joined FFC knew how important public transit was. We needed to convince others. And we did that work through our community based research and advocacy.

Now we are at a place where most people get how important public transit is to social inclusion, equity and cohesion in our neighbourhoods and for the City as a whole. The overwhelming support for the inclusion of transit equity as a central pillar of the City of Toronto's Poverty Reduction Strategy demonstrates this understanding.

So what residents of Toronto got was the Fair Pass program. FFC promoted the Fair Pass Program with our own posters, community talks and emails. We supported drop in participants to help other community members to apply for the Fair Pass. And we also encouraged people to push for an even more effective program.

The Transit Fare Equity Evaluation Report points to how impactful the current program is. It demonstrates that a transit fare structure that prioritizes affordability has huge potential for changing lives – by improving access to basic needs that support health and well-being, for strengthening communities because more people can participate and contribute through volunteering and participating in events; for increasing equity for people facing so many systemic barriers. These are the same benefits that FFC and other concerned groups emphasized when we fought against fare increases and advocated for measures that made public transit affordable and accessible.



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The report also points to how much more effective the Fair Pass Program could be. If only....!

If only what?

Last fall (September to November) FFC did our own mini-research to find out what community members thought about the Fair Pass Program based on their own experiences of it. We used a survey with 11 questions to talk to 150 people in 7 different drop ins in the city. (The STOP, Evangel Hall, The Mustard Seed, Wychwood Open Door. Sanctuary drop in and the Corner drop in, St. Stephen's Community House).

I want to share some of what we heard and learned about the real positive impacts of a discounted fare program as well as the challenges to applying for and using the fair pass.

**The resounding message is that lower fares offered by the program (especially single ride fares, a unique feature of the Fair Pass program) do make a difference and that the benefits could be even greater and more impactful if the discounts that were offered related to the real incomes and ability to pay of people the program is for. And that the Fair Pass Program needs to fully rolled out now.**

**First, the cost of fares** is still an issue: 57% of the participants of our survey indicated the discounted pass is not *cheap* enough. With the cost of living increases (1.5% from 20180 and ongoing stagnation of *Social Assistance rates* and wages, there is even more of a strain on the budgets of those with the least amount of income in the city. From 1990 to 2017, the cost of a TTC token increased from \$1 to \$3, a 200% increase that outpaces that of inflation. Here is what some people said:

**"I like it because it is affordable and one can load any coins."**

**"It's all about cost. Its' very expensive to use the FFC. I really hope they keep the discount fare program. It would be really nice if they reduced the monthly fare to \$50 because \$115 is still too much."**

**"It is positive in a way you can afford more to get your daily activities and errands done. Negatively I still need it to be funded. How does this work if I am on ODSPS and need to use my special diet money? "**



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**"I feel more involved in getting out. Being diabetic, the pass is a good way to travel at a lower cost. The problem here is I still need it to be covered by the ODSP to not use my special diet money. I need to go to food banks. I need to go shopping for groceries. I need to go do errands. I need to go to the doctor's office. This is a ridiculous way of trying to help the needy when you still have to pay for it out of your own pocket. It should be included in your OW/ODSP and paid for by them!"**

It is not a surprise that the Transit Fare Equity Evaluation found that many people receiving OW are not using their Fair Pass and fewer of them are using the Fair Pass compared to people receiving ODSP. If you have a maximum of \$343/month to purchase all your basic needs (including food and toiletries), using the TTC becomes the "flexible" or "discretionary spending" item in your budget. Except it is not discretionary. You need to travel and you have to figure out all sorts of ways to do it, and then accept when you just cannot make it to that appointment or program or event or social gathering.

We know in the drop in sector how important getting to all these things are for housing stability. What we offer at drop ins – especially the social connections, a supportive community and access to referrals and support – helps keep people housed.

**Second, people who could really use it are still not able to get it – people who are not receiving government benefits like child care subsidy or social assistance.**

**"Since I am not an OW/ODSP I am not able to get the fair pass. Although I am still considered low-income. It would be great if they offered the pass to all low-income families rather than just those on OW/ODSP. I work but the price of transportation is still very high."**

The Evaluation report highlights important considerations, including looking at low usage of the Fair Pass, and supports for people to use their Fair Pass. Our report adds to an understanding of these issues.

I urge this Committee and City Council to fully commit the City of Toronto to achieving transit equity.



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- **Roll the Fair Pass Program out according to the original timeline. Fully fund the Fair Pass program in this budget.** There is no indication that next budget, or the next one, or the next one will offer more funding. So do it in this upcoming budget.

More importantly, be bold, be visionary. FFC spent a long time talking and testing in our different communities what would make a real difference for people living on low income. The answer - deeper discounts. Therefore, I also urge you to:

#### **1. Provide free transit for people receiving social assistance.**

- Ensure that public transit-focused poverty reduction initiatives can make the biggest positive impact for the most people who are experiencing poverty. This starts with acknowledging that people who are receiving OW or ODSP simply do not have enough income to pay for basic necessities, including public transit. Paying 1/3 of your basic needs allowance on a monthly pass is not sustainable.

#### **2. Provide a \$50 monthly pass and \$1.00 single fare for people on low incomes**

- People living on low wages experience similar struggles to make ends meet. This fare structure would mean a minimum wage worker would spend about 3% of their income on transit.

#### **3. Make transit free during extreme weather alerts.**

- Sometimes being able to get somewhere by TTC is life-saving. Not everyone who needs a token or ticket is connected to an agency that distributes them during alerts.

Thank you

Additional learnings from FFC survey follow.



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#### **Barriers to applying for and using the Fair Pass**

- 76 percent of the people surveyed said that the application process is difficult.
- 96 percent of the people interviewed that are eligible did not know a discount existed. Some of the people surveyed who are receiving OW and ODSP had not been told about the Fair Pass program. People receiving OW and ODSP who do not have positive relationships with their caseworkers and/or do not see them often are particularly disadvantaged in terms of having the information they need to decide whether or not to apply for the program.
- People also had concerns about privacy with the Presto system, including that their trip information available through their Presto card could be shared with police or government. 33% of people interviewed who were eligible but did not apply for the fair fare pass said their reason for not applying was that they found Presto to be a major problem. One person wrote that "I do not trust Presto with my traveling information" even though he was eligible to apply. Another person disclosed that they were not applying for the Fair Pass because they were concerned about the security of the Presto system.

"I have issues buying the right card."

"I do not like the idea of Presto. Having to continuously reload the card is annoying. I do not want to add my personal information to have it reloaded automatically. The machines don't even work half the times."

**With the elimination of tokens on the horizon, community-based education and supports for people to navigate discounted fare programs and, especially, the Presto system are critical for the equitable access to public transit system. Toronto Drop in Network organized community forums for TTC and Metrolinx/Presto to hear community agency concerns and recommendations regarding needs of people they work with and functionality of the Single Presto ticket and bulk purchase process.**

**People need to be able to add funds to their Presto card and to purchase single presto tickets in more locations than currently available.** Fair Pass users more often ride buses which suggests that the subway station option is not useful for them. Shoppers Drugmarts are not located in all neighbourhoods.