

## Letter from Shelagh Pizey-Allen, TTCriders

**Re: Fair Pass Program - 2020 Update**

November 11, 2020

Dear members of the Economic and Community Development Committee,

TTCriders is a membership organization of transit users. When the first phase of the Fair Pass was launched, we worked with a variety of agencies and individuals who receive Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program to promote the program, support people to sign up, and conduct a survey about barriers to accessing the Fair Pass.

We are deeply concerned about the indefinite delay to rolling out the Fair Pass discount to all low-income Torontonians. People living on low incomes depend on transit the most.<sup>1</sup> We urge you to implement the following recommendations:

**1. The City should offer in-person sign up options, and offer sign-up clinics with Metrolinx so that Fair Pass cards can be applied for, validated, and loaded on the spot.**

The multiple steps to obtain a card, apply to the program, load a card, and validate it creates barriers. People without online access can only load their cards at subway stations or Shoppers Drug Marts, which are not present in many suburban areas. In addition, PRESTO cards must be validated within 30 days. The City is requesting that Metrolinx allow real-time validation of cards during the online or phone application process, but there must be an interim solution.

Shifting the application process to online and phone will make it easier for some applicants, but those without online or phone access will fall through the cracks. The Phase 1 Evaluation Report (2019) found that the “majority of cardholders heard about the program in-person at a TESS Application Centre/ODSP office (48%), or through a TESS produced card or flyer in the mail (13%). These findings suggest that **direct (in person) communication with staff may be the best method for this type of program.**”<sup>2</sup> Other barriers identified in the 2019 Phase 1 report include language barriers and confusion about where to load funds.

**2. The City should offer the option of sending programmed, validated PRESTO cards by mail to ensure access to the program.**

The Phase 1 Evaluation Report found that the majority of residents (approx. 75%) who were eligible chose to receive the Fair Pass via mail. PRESTO cards should be free for everyone.

**3. The discount must be rolled out faster to low-income Toronto residents.**

Staff will explore extending the Fair Pass program to Toronto residents who already receive other means-tested supports (e.g. Rent Geared to Income housing, recreation subsidy) but not

---

<sup>1</sup> The Fair Pass Program - 2020 Update report notes that in September 2020, compared to January 2020, the decline in ridership for Fair Pass users was 37%, compared to a 61% decline for non-Fair Pass TTC users: <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2020/ec/bgrd/backgroundfile-157895.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2019/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-139482.pdf>

until the end of 2021. A full roll-out of the program to all low-income Torontonians (Low Income Measure plus 15%) has been indefinitely delayed. This is unacceptable, especially during a pandemic. The Fair Pass discount must be extended as soon as possible.

#### **4. The City must act on removing access barriers that were identified in 2019.**

The Phase 1 Evaluation Report (2019) documented many barriers to accessing and using the Fair Pass that have not yet been addressed. One key barrier is the different light and sound emitted when concession cards are tapped. This has disproportionately impacted Indigenous peoples' Fair Pass usage, according to the report. Some eligible people declined to apply for the discount due to potential stigma, embarrassment, and interactions with fare inspectors.

Another key barrier is difficulty accessing PRESTO technology in suburban areas. Half of cardholders who participated in the in-depth Evaluation Report interviews said that they would "like to be able to load their FP at other locations, specifically mentioning convenience stores, grocery stores and banks, as well as on buses and streetcars." Nineteen percent said that they were unsure or unaware of the different places that they could load money on their card.

#### **5. TTC should be free for people who receive OW and ODSP, and on extreme weather alert days.**

The cost of the Fair Pass is still unaffordable for people who receive Ontario Works (\$733/month for a single person) or Ontario Disability Support Program (\$1,169/month). Currently, OW and ODSP recipients are not eligible for the Fair Pass program if they receive transportation supports greater than \$100. This has created confusion about who is eligible. Free TTC for social assistance recipients would also ensure more seamless, equitable access for suburban residents who lack internet access or online banking to re-load PRESTO cards.

Some drop-ins have TTC tokens available on extreme cold alert days, but these are of little use to individuals who are trying to get to a shelter or drop-in. Jury recommendation #22 of the Grant Faulkner inquest states that Toronto should:

"Advocate to the Toronto Transit Commission and Metrolinx to emphasize the importance of ensuring appropriate access to transportation for individuals who are homeless, and consult with members of the Scarborough community when it is considering these issues to ensure that the transition to Presto technology does not create barriers."<sup>3</sup>

During the pandemic, it is more urgent than ever to ensure that everyone can access safe public transportation.

Sincerely,

TTCriders and the Fair Fare Coalition

---

<sup>3</sup><https://www.mcscs.jus.gov.on.ca/english/Deathinvestigations/Inquests/Verdictsandrecommendations/OC/InquestFaulkner2018.html>