

TRANSIT FARE FINES

Repayment Options

RECOMMENDATION

That the October 26, 2022 City Operations report CO00576, be received for information.

Requested Council Action	Information only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Healthy City		
City Plan Values	ACCESS		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	Inclusive and compassionate	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Community safety and well-being
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Policy C451H Edmonton Transit Service Fare Policy • City Policy C606 Access to Municipal Services Without Fear • Bylaw 8353 Conduct of Transit Passengers • Ride Transit Program • Leisure Access Program 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CO01192 Ride Transit and Leisure Access Programs, Executive Committee, October 26, 2022 • OCM01402 Public Spaces Bylaws Review, Community and Public Services Committee, September 9, 2022 • CR_7813 Transit Fare Fines, Community and Public Services Committee, March 24, 2021 • CR_5804 Permanent Ride Transit Program, City Council, November 28, 2021 		

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the March 24, 2021 Community and Public Services Committee the following motion was passed:

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“That Administration work with social agency partners to co-create equitable fine repayment options, including options to allow for proof of purchase of a monthly transit pass within a two week period, and conduct an anti-racism review of current low income fare programs to remove barriers and support equitable participation from those who need support, and provide a report back.”

Executive Summary

- Administration is preparing to return to the appropriate Committee in Q3 2023 with fine repayment options after the Public Spaces Bylaws review. As discussed in the September 9, 2022 Office of the City Manager report, OCM01402 Public Spaces Bylaw Review, a comprehensive review of three bylaws governing public spaces has been initiated, which will result in one consolidated bylaw governing public spaces. This will include alignment of bylaw infractions and associated fine amounts. In order to avoid a piecemeal approach to bylaw amendments, the report suggested that several related motions pertaining to fine repayment and restorative justice practices be rescheduled to align timing of the responses with the outcomes of the bylaw review.
- An anti-racism review, including two phases of engagement, was conducted to better understand the barriers to accessing low income fare programs. The engagement was part of a review process that aims to continually find new ways to reduce program participation barriers. The engagement showed the majority of program barriers centered around four areas: the application process; eligibility; fare product distribution; and program awareness. An action plan has been developed to address these barriers for each program.
- As part of building an inclusive and compassionate city, the City has a number of programs that are aimed at ensuring Edmontonians are supported and have the essential resources needed to be independent, safe and included in the community while advancing social equity. Low income transit fare programs are, by their nature, anti-racist as their primary aim is to improve access and level the playing field for equitable participation in civic life.
- Although Edmonton Transit Service offers several strategic fare supports for people experiencing low income, the action plan identifies opportunities to make transit even more accessible for marginalized Edmontonians by: supporting translation of application materials, allowing conditional eligibility, introducing a variety of fare product options to low income fare programs, and enhancing program communications and outreach.

REPORT

Fine Repayment Options - Interim Update

As per OCM01402 Public Spaces Bylaws Review, discussed at the September 9, 2022 Community and Public Services Committee, a holistic review of the three bylaws governing public spaces will result in one consolidated bylaw governing public spaces. This will include the alignment of bylaw infractions and associated fine amounts. The progress of this review will inform Administration’s response to several motions related to fine repayment options. Recommendations on alternative fine repayment options, including options to allow for proof of purchase of a monthly transit pass

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within a two week period as outlined in the current motion, will be brought forward in coordination with the results of the bylaw review, currently scheduled in Q3 2023.

In the interim, to ensure an equitable approach to fare enforcement and fare fine repayments, Transit Peace Officers will continue to focus on an “education first” approach to fare enforcement. Since 2015, there has been a consistent downward trend of issuing fare evasion tickets, specifically for riders with no fixed address. In addition, there is one existing program to help address challenges in paying tickets for general bylaw infractions — the Alberta Fine Option Program, which is operated by the Government of Alberta. If a person is convicted of an offence and a fine is imposed, they can work in community service projects and receive payment for their work in the form of a reduction to the fine amount based on an hourly rate. The Fine Option Program can be used to pay all or part of a fine.

Anti-Racism Review of Low Income Fare Programs

Programs that help build an inclusive and compassionate city focus on removing barriers and addressing gaps in programs and policies, to improve access for more equitable participation in civic life. Edmontonians with low incomes often need to choose between basic necessities, such as food and housing, and other needs, like transportation. Improving access to and awareness of low income transit fare programs will help address these difficult decisions. Improving access to low income programs also supports City Policy C606 - Access to Municipal Services Without Fear.

Administration enlisted local external engagement and policy advisors who work with racialized communities to conduct an anti-racism review of Edmonton Transit Service’s (ETS) low income fare programs. The engagement activities included organizations and individuals participating in the current low-income fare programs and other organizations that support similar communities but do not currently participate in the low income fare programs. Through this process, communities expressed transit is very important to addressing the social determinants of health and has a strong link to social inclusion, mental health and general well-being.

Overview of Current Low Income Fare Programs

City Policy C451H - Edmonton Transit Service Fare Policy was designed with input from Edmontonians to focus on a needs-based approach to transit subsidies. Edmontonians clearly expressed support for providing discounted fares to those who need it most, and to move away from purely age-based fare categories. ETS currently offers three low income fare programs: Donate A Ride, Providing Accessible Transit Here (PATH), and the Ride Transit low income transit pass program. See Attachment 1 for further details regarding these programs.

A jurisdictional scan, outlined in Attachment 2, indicates that compared to peer agencies, ETS provides one of the highest volumes of fare-free products in Canada through the Donate A Ride and PATH programs. Additionally, the discount on the adult monthly pass offered by the Ride Transit program is also among the highest across Canada.

Program Reviews and Progress

In 2018, a program evaluation of Ride Transit was conducted to determine whether the program was achieving its intended outcomes, as outlined in the November 28, 2018, City Operations report CR_5804 Permanent Ride Transit Program - Transition (Attachment 3). While the review

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positively demonstrated the achievement of intended outcomes, some barriers to accessing the program and associated recommendations were identified. Some of the key themes and subsequent program improvements included:

- improving the readability of the application form;
- expanding the qualifying document that could be used for income verification - as a result, qualifying documents were expanded to include Canada Pension Plan-Disability Benefit, Government of Alberta Income Support, Learner Income Support, New Permanent Resident, Refugee Status, letters from sponsors of refugees, child under government care and Employment Insurance;
- adding sales channels to make fare purchases easier; and,
- increasing marketing and outreach through community organizations that support newcomers and other ethno-cultural groups.

In response to the current motion, Administration conducted two phases of an anti-racism review of these programs, details of which are included in Attachments 4 and 5. Overall, the engagement reconfirmed some of the findings from the 2018 Ride Transit program evaluation, while highlighting other areas where Administration could adjust to reduce program barriers for Ride Transit, PATH and Donate A Ride.

Next Steps and Action Plan

Following engagement during the summer of 2022, Administration developed an action plan, detailed in Attachment 6, to help further reduce barriers to the fare programs. The action plan was shared with the agencies that participated in the engagement and have participated in the programs. Highlights from the action plan include:

- Simplifying the application form, implementing an online application process and exploring application translation for that online application.
- Introducing conditional eligibility for Ride Transit applicants who meet minimum requirements or present an agency letter that explains their circumstances. This was highlighted by agencies as an important step to supporting newcomers and families in transition or with limited documentation.
- Introducing more fare product options under Donate A Ride to support different levels of transportation needs.
- Reviewing the funding formula for PATH and Donate A Ride to ensure a strong connection to social outcomes and responsiveness to community needs.
- Enhancing program communication and outreach to ensure more eligible individuals and agencies are aware of the programs

Administration has already started actioning many of these items for immediate implementation, with others being implemented throughout 2023, and on an ongoing basis. An update on the implementation progress will be provided to Council via memo by Q4 2023.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

An initial anti-racism consultation was conducted from September 2021 to December 2021 with the involvement of community agency staff, program participants and Administration staff. The

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purpose was to understand the barriers for Indigenous and ethno-cultural groups to accessing Donate A Ride, PATH and Ride Transit.

In July 2022, ETS led the second phase of engagement in partnership with external consultants. Results from the first phase of engagement were compiled and shared with community agencies in two workshops, details of which are included in Attachments 4 and 5 and inform the proposed next steps. Representatives from Donate A Ride and PATH agencies participated in focus groups where they were asked to provide feedback on results from previous program reviews as well as additional suggestions to improve accessibility to low income fare programs.

GBA+

Transit riders experiencing low income, newcomers to Canada or those experiencing houselessness or housing unaffordability who are unable to pay full price for transit are disproportionately impacted by transit fare fines. These groups have the least ability to pay for full-priced proof of fare payment and fare fines, and also have the highest need for transit access. The agencies consulted represent a cross-section of social service agencies involved in mental health support, homelessness, Indigenous communities, domestic violence, youth, family services and employment services.

The anti-racism review and engagement was conducted in partnership with external consultants with extensive experience in leading diversity and inclusion, equity and anti-racism initiatives across public sector organizations. The consultants used GBA+ processes throughout the entire review, ensuring there was inclusive representation with community agencies and program members participating in the engagements. The review (Attachments 4 and 5) focused on the experiences of low income and houseless populations with an active anti-racism approach and a concentration on program implications on race, immigration status, age, gender and other intersectional factors.

The Anti-Racism Review Action Plan (Attachment 6) outlines steps to reduce barriers and support low income transit riders who have experienced disproportionate barriers to accessing affordable transit.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Overview of Low Income Fare Programs
2. Fare Programs Jurisdictional Scan Summary: Transit Fare Programs
3. CR_5804 Permanent Ride Transit Program - Transition
4. Anti-Racism Review of ETS Low-Income Fare Programs - Phase 1, 2021 (Centre for Race and Culture)
5. Summary Report - Anti-Racism Review of ETS Low Income Fare Programs - Phase 2, 2022 (Equity in Action)
6. Anti-Racism Review of Low Income Fare Programs - Engagement Recommendations and Action Items