

U-Pass Options for 2021

Recommendation

That Community and Public Services Committee recommend to City Council:

That a temporary exemption to City Policy C451H Edmonton Transit Service Fare Policy for the period January 1, 2021, to April 30, 2021, to allow for fare program eligibility expansions, as outlined in the November 13, 2020, City Operations report CO00091, be approved.

Executive Summary

The regional Universal Transit Pass (U-Pass) provides eligible students at participating post-secondary institutions with unlimited travel on Edmonton Transit Service (ETS) and participating regional transit providers at a discounted rate for the school term. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, post-secondary institutions are continuing to deliver learning online and holding a limited number of classes and labs on campus into the winter 2021 term. Consequently, U-Pass was paused for the fall term and that arrangement is recommended to be extended to the winter term in 2021.

Effective September 2020, temporary measures were put in place to support students affected by the pause on U-Pass. These include access to the Ride Transit Program for qualifying students and an expansion of the age eligibility for youth fare products for post-secondary students as well as seniors fare products. Extending these temporary measures for the winter term would continue to address the gap for affected students.

Report

The regional Universal Transit Pass (U-Pass) is provided through contractual agreements between Edmonton Transit Service (ETS), St. Albert Transit, Strathcona Transit, Leduc Transit, Fort Saskatchewan Transit, and Spruce Grove Transit and four post-secondary institutions in Edmonton: University of Alberta, MacEwan University, NAIT and NorQuest College. The U-Pass agreements are based on a model that has a discounted fee charged to all students in exchange for access to regional transit services during the term. The current agreement expires in August 2021 and negotiations are underway for the 2021-2025 agreement.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, post-secondary institutions are primarily delivering learning online and holding a limited number of classes on campus for the fall term. Post-secondary institutions have indicated these arrangements will continue for the winter term. Consequently, temporary measures introduced by Administration for the fall term will need to be considered for the winter term, from January to April 30, 2021.

U-Pass Solutions

The following temporary measures were put in place for the fall term and are recommended to extend into the winter term to support affected students:

- Expanding the current ETS Youth fare products to include post-secondary students of any age;
 - The temporary expansion of the age eligibility of the youth fare category provides students with a discounted monthly pass at \$72.50 and books of 10 tickets for \$19.00.
- Expanding the ETS Ride Transit Program eligibility criteria by removing the current requirement that the applicant not be a post-secondary student;
 - To address the transportation needs of qualifying low-income students, Administration temporarily expanded eligibility of the Ride Transit Program to include eligible students through to the end of December 2020. For a single-person household, the income threshold is \$29,069. As of September 28, 900 students have been enrolled in the program.
- ETS seniors fare products for students who are seniors.

In addition, most regional transit partners offered a variety of fare products, including youth, student and seniors options.

Transit Fare Policy Impacts

The recommended approach is aligned with the principles in City Policy C451H (Edmonton Transit Service Fare Policy). Namely, the changes follow Fare Policy principles to ensure that transit fares continue to be balanced, equitable, affordable and rewarding in light of the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The proposed changes will provide a discounted rate to a group of riders who had previously not been included among the discounted fare groups within the Policy by temporarily expanding the age criteria of the youth category to include eligible post-secondary students.

Communications and Implementation

If Council approves the recommendation in this report, eligible post-secondary students will be informed of these options via direct communications from their Students' Associations, updated messaging on takeETS.com, and social media

updates. Eligible post-secondary students will be able to purchase passes and fare products at retail locations across Edmonton or online through the ETS Public Store. Additionally, transit staff will also be informed of this updated approach.

Financial/Budget Implications

Reductions to 2021 U-Pass revenue will be reported as part of the upcoming Supplementary Operating Budget Adjustment being presented at the November 16/18, 2020 City Council meeting. For the winter term, it is anticipated that U-Pass revenue loss will be \$9M; this can be partially offset by any transit fare sales to students through the temporary measures described in this report. For the October 2020 sales period, an estimated 437 Ride Transit passes were sold to affected students, generating approximately \$14,858 in fare revenue. Administration cannot determine how many youth product purchases were made by U-Pass students; therefore, that portion of revenue is not reported separately.

Public Engagement

Public engagement was not conducted due to the ongoing nature of the U-Pass negotiations with post-secondary student groups.

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome(s): Edmontonians use public transit and active modes of transportation.			
Outcome(s)	Measure(s)	Result(s)	Target(s)
Customer Satisfaction	Overall Customer Satisfaction of ETS	75.9 (2019)	79% (2021)
	Customer Satisfaction of ETS by Post-Secondary Students	74% (2019)	Target is set for overall customer satisfaction 79% (2021)

Risk Assessment

Risk Element	Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk Score (with current mitigations)	Current Mitigations	Potential Future Mitigations
Customers/ Citizens	Online/distance learning continues beyond winter term of 2021 after the temporary measures expire.	3 - Possible	2 - Moderate	5	ETS will work with regional partners to explore longer-term options should U-Pass disruption extend beyond the winter term, as it may impact the long term viability of the product.	Propose a different fare structure for post-secondary students should U-Pass no longer be viable. Research and analysis, including financial and risk analysis, would be completed prior to recommending solutions.
Customers/ Citizens	If recommendation is not approved, U-Pass participants may be without discounted transit options. This could impact the future of the U-Pass program.	4 - Likely	2 - Moderate	8	ETS provides a number of fare products as outlined in the Fare Policy. Students may be eligible for other discounted fare options.	ETS will work with regional partners to explore longer-term options should U-Pass disruption extend beyond the winter term, as it may impact the long term viability of the product.

Others Reviewing this Report

- M. Persson, Chief Financial Officer and Deputy City Manager, Financial and Corporate Services
- C. Owen, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement
- R. Smyth, Deputy City Manager, Citizen Services
- B. Andriachuk, City Solicitor