

New Material provided subsequent to Committee discussions

Social Wellbeing Advisory Committee Advice Summary

Report Name: Sliding Scale Low Income Transit Pass Report (TT2019-1004)

Presentation to Advisory Committee: 2019 November 05

Question Posed to the Social Wellbeing Advisory Committee:

When this report was presented at the October 23 Standing Policy Committee of Transportation & Transit, there was interest in getting advice on the equity of potential greater age-based discounts while increasing the sliding scale Low Income Transit Pass fares for financial sustainability. How should the Social Wellbeing Principles be considered by Council in any decisions related to pursuing age-based subsidies or external funding for subsidies?

Social Wellbeing Advisory Committee (SWAC) Advice/Response:

The Social Wellbeing Policy encourages The City to "*strive to provide equitable services.*" This includes "*removing barriers to access and inclusion.*" Council directed SWAC to consult on proposed changes to the Sliding Scale Low Income Transit Pass program, and more specifically age-based subsidies and where external funds could equitably be applied, including the additional considerations of eliminating all transit fees for residents over 70; to reduce the cost of fares for youth and to extend free weekend and holiday transit to individuals under age 18.

Upon review of the Sliding Scale Low Income Transit Pass Report presented at Standing Committee, and in discussion with Calgary Transit, the proposed changes are proportional and seek to create equality within the bands, based on percentage of income, to address the \$6.5M financial shortfall resulting from the continuation of the program. This proportional approach to addressing the financial shortfall denotes that all citizens across the bands have the same ability and propensity to pay, whereas an equitable approach would prioritize ensuring all citizens have access to the same opportunities. As such, an equitable and intersectional approach should be applied, as age-based subsidies assume that all seniors and young people have the same ability (or lack of) and propensity to pay rather than applying the overarching principle of income verification, which would not be equitable. This approach and the proposed additional age-based subsidy considerations would favour two equity-seeking groups -- seniors and youth -- over others with different identity factors and access barriers, beyond age.

Furthermore, beyond the specific question asked during consultation, there was discussion regarding the overall impact to Calgarians, and whether other programs are looking to increase fees for access to programs and services or reduce subsidies to cover financial shortfalls, and how this may compound the impact to equity seeking groups (ie. access to recreation facilities; access to, and fares for, other transportation options; etc.).

SWAC advises Council to be clear on its priorities with respect to the Sliding Scale Low Income Transit Pass program, as indicated by its name the focus is on low income Calgarians. It must be recognized that racialized people, Indigenous people, persons with disabilities, Trans persons, etc. are disproportionality represented within low income Calgarians.

The SWAC supports an equitable and intersectional Sliding Scale Low Income Transit Pass program with a three band approach; however, there are some concerns about the equitability of proposed changes disproportionately impacting (and placing the burden of covering the financial shortfall of the program) on the most marginalized and already vulnerable Calgarians (Band A, which compromises 67% of program users). With the overall sustainability of the Sliding Scale Low Income Transit program in question, there are additional concerns regarding the extension of age-based segmentation and the risk of further shifting program cost pressures to low income Calgarians.

It would be beneficial to allow more time to explore the implications of income, age-based, and other intersectional approaches to future subsidies and the future application of external funding to subsidy programs.

Completed By: Jason Kingsley, Social Wellbeing Advisory Committee Chair