

Women's Centre Presentation on Accessible Transit

The Women's Centre is a street-front, drop in space for thousands of women in Calgary. We have a very diverse community of women who come to the Centre for basic needs, like food bank referrals and peer support, for workshops and opportunities to meet other women, and for advocacy related work. Many women are living in poverty and visit the Centre for a chance to engage in a variety of ways.

One issue we hear about again and again is the challenges women face in getting around the city. They want to participate in their communities, but the cost of transit is too high.

Making it to doctors' appointments, going to class, picking up kids from daycare, stopping by the grocery store, getting to work on time. These are not optional activities but necessary pieces of daily life, and inaccessible to many women who cannot afford the current \$44/month for the Low Income Transit Pass.

At the Women's Centre, we have a program where women can call in for a book of bus tickets. People are eligible for one book every year. It's a first-come, first-serve program, and we run out every single week in a matter of minutes. Many women call for weeks before getting through. Women have to risk hopping on the train without a ticket, walk long distances, or in many cases, remain socially isolated.

We're here to support the City Administration's recommendation for Option 1: a sliding scale fee for the Low Income Transit Pass that deepens subsidies for people living far below LICO, with two notes:

- We would like to see the subsidy for the last band, for individuals living below 50% of the Low Income Cut Off, increased to 95%. The current recommendation, which would equal about \$15 a month, will still place an undue burden on women facing this extreme level on poverty.
- The Women's Centre supports a thorough assessment on these programs, with a report that examines expanding the program to 130% LICO. People who are living just above LICO are ineligible for many social programs and yet still live below income levels recognized by Living Wage studies as necessary for living with choice and dignity.

The Women's Centre is particularly invested in this issue because women are impacted by poverty in unique ways, and are more likely to live in deep poverty. Single parent households, which are led by women in 4 out of 5 cases, are living, on average, \$12,949 beneath the Low Income Cut Off (The Path Forward, 2016). Looking at the workforce, women make up two thirds of low-wage workers over the age of 25 (Labour Force Survey, 2015). Also, women who are working but still struggling financially, tell us that the 90 minute transfers on single use tickets aren't long enough to pick their kids up from child care on the way home – an issue that would be resolved if they could afford monthly passes.

In 2015, we saw an increase in use of our basic needs programs by 45%. For women, the cost of public transportation is prohibitive, often preventing them from accessing essential services and other social and community supports. When women with limited incomes can afford a transit pass, their quality of life – and that of their children – is enhanced as they are able to travel to take advantage of educational, employment, recreational and social opportunities.



