

**REPORT TO THE VICTORIA REGIONAL
TRANSIT COMMISSION**

BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program
March 2009

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Context

Since 1997, the Victoria Regional Transit Commission has provided free bus tickets to the Community Council to distribute to people with urgent transportation needs. The Community Council, through an innovative partnership with social service nonprofit agencies, developed an efficient and effective process to double the number of tickets distributed at no charge to people living on low income in BC's Capital Region. This program has grown since its inception, and supports the work of up to 67 local agencies as well as enhancing the lives of hundreds of citizens.

Currently up to 80,000 free transit tickets and 440 free passes per year are available for distribution through the BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program (BCTTAP). Agencies purchase tickets and passes through the Community Council. Tickets purchased by agencies are matched on a 1:1 basis by the Transit Commission up to a maximum allocation of 40,000 free tickets per year and 220 monthly passes.

The Victoria Regional Transit Commission continues to demonstrate innovation and leadership in supporting people living on low income in BC's Capital Region to access BC Transit. This partnership model has great potential to be replicated in other communities across the province.

Observations from 2007/08

1. Current Ticket Use

In 2007/08, 42 agencies participated in the BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program distributing over 62,000 tickets in BC's Capital Region.

Information gathered from agencies during that time continues to demonstrate that ticket usage remains relatively consistent over the years. A notable shift in 2007/08 was in the increased use of tickets for health-related appointments.

Figure 1 Ticket Usage Statistics

Description	2007-08	2006-07	2005-06	2004-05	2003-04
Employment related	20%	24%	29%	25%	17%
Health/medical/ Counselling	45%	35%	32%	34%	38%
Basic Needs	12%	9%	13%	12%	14%
Financial Assistance Worker	8%	8%	7%	8%	11%
Children/family	4%	6%	4%	4%	6%
Court	2%	2%	2%	3%	3%
Other	9%	15%	12%	13%	10%

Source: Participating Agencies' Ticket Tracking Data

The number of participating agencies increased by 25% in 2008/09. These agencies distributed the current allotment of 80,000 tickets.

Agencies report on their transit ticket usage throughout the year and participate in an annual meeting. The annual meeting provides a unique opportunity to focus on transportation needs and gaps in the system in this region. When agencies met in 2008 there was agreement on a number of benefits to the distribution of bus tickets including:

- Tickets are very helpful to people in the Person-with-Disabilities application process. There are many appointments to keep during this time and transportation is essential.
- School-based youth and family counsellors in School District No. 61 report that tickets are useful for students not attending school due to lack of transportation.
- Tickets are useful for people apartment-hunting as well as for those living a great distance from their work, services and appointments, often due to the low vacancy rate and the need to live further from the urban centre. People who in the past might have walked to these locations now need transit.
- Tickets are useful to people volunteering in the community. Agencies requested that "Volunteer" have its own category in the reporting sheets to reflect people on income assistance and others developing their employment skills, social networks and contributing to the community.

Some agencies who buy tickets through the BCTTAP program were reporting decreased funding prior to the economic downturn that hit in the fall of 2008. This situation is unfortunately expected to worsen during 2009/10. A list of participating agencies is attached along with a map locating agencies.

2. Current Monthly and Daily Pass Uses

In 2005, the Victoria Regional Transit Commission included monthly passes in the BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program. The Commission has since increased their maximum allocation from 120 passes a year to a current 220 passes, accounting for a potential 440 free passes available to residents in urgent need for transportation. Monthly passes support individuals and families to move beyond using transit for the narrow definition of urgent transportation needs, and encourage greater involvement in family and community life.

Distribution of monthly passes continues to increase. In 2007/08, eight agencies participated in distributing passes, accounting for 290 monthly passes given to those in need for free. In 2008/09, 396 passes were distributed. Day pass use has dramatically increased in the last couple of years from a total of 22 in 2006-07, to 84 in 2007-08 and 116 in 2008-09.

Agencies at their 2008 annual meeting commented on the addition of passes to the BCTTAP program:

- Passes are very helpful to people job hunting and or beginning jobs, as are community buses. Some people use these during the first two weeks of employment (until they receive their first paycheque). Some people may not accept a job if they do not have the means to cover initial transit costs.
- Clients with young children appreciate day and monthly passes because youth aged 12 and younger can travel at no cost with their parents or a guardian.
- Agencies note a time gap between when people begin social assistance as a Person with Disability and receipt of their yearly transit pass.
- It was again noted that a monthly purchase option for the YouthPass would make it much more accessible to students. Currently the program requirement to purchase a minimum of six months is a barrier to many youth.
- A weekly or multi-day pass option was suggested for people needing a pass for short time periods. Some transit systems have 3, 5 and 7 day passes or visitor passes, and something like this was seen to be very useful to BCTTAP program clients and for visitors to the community as well.

Tracking the use of day and monthly passes is challenging as people use them to run a number of errands. In many cases the monthly pass provides the opportunity to participate more fully in life, which means the pass is used for a large number of activities and not just the most basic of needs.

Agencies involved in the program report that one of the important benefits of the passes is that they can be used for personal and social uses such as visiting friends and family, attending school events, volunteering and so forth. These activities can help reduce the isolation of poverty.

As noted above, purchasing a pass through the YouthPass program was identified as a continuing challenge for low income students. A recent community survey identified poverty as a difficulty for many youth in BC's Capital Region, particularly youth over age 12¹. Survey informants also noted universal program access is best, where possible, thus avoiding stigmatizing youth that need basic supports.

Recommendations:

- *Develop a multi-day and/or weekly pass option for the BCTTAP program, visitors and community members who may need a pass for short time periods.*
- *Revisit approaching School Districts to administer an adapted YouthPass purchase program that universally allows monthly payments for families and older youth who have difficulty accessing funds for a 6-month lump payment.*

¹ *School-based Counsellor Survey: Identifying Issues for School-Age Youth in BC's Capital Region (2009).*
Prepared for the United Way of Greater Victoria by the Community Council.

3. Impact of Elimination of Two Zones and Transfer Use Policy

The annual meeting of agencies involved in the BCTTAP offers an opportunity for reflection on past activities and events. Looking back to 2007/08, participants made the following observations:

- The move from the two-zone to one-zone system continues to make a huge difference to clients in the Western communities, appreciated by riders and agencies alike. It is more accessible and more affordable, and the single zone fare cuts down on the agency administration time.
- Agencies noted the positive impact of the extended/round-trip transfer time: it has meant twice as many people now have access to transportation for short round trips (for example to make appointments, pick up a cheque, drop off a report or resume, and so forth).

4. Looking Ahead: Emerging Needs

Along with reflecting on the past year, participating agencies have the opportunity to look ahead during the annual meeting and identify areas of concern. The following emerging needs were identified during the last meeting:

- Agencies are working to improve distribution of information about this program to their staff and colleagues. For example, WorkLink includes information on the program in their staff training program. In the past, transportation has been a roadblock for the 15 to 30 age group to attend employment readiness programs. Between the community buses and everyone having knowledge of the BCTTAP, attendance has improved to almost 100%.
- Agencies continue to advise clients needing transportation to government offices, such as the Income Assistance program, to request transit tickets from the Ministry staff as they do have bus tickets available. Past meetings between BCTTAP agencies and Ministry staff raised the concern that transportation was a necessity in ensuring clients accessed services. This has been useful information for clients and agency staff to retain and pass on. .
- Some agencies who buy tickets through the BCTTAP program were reporting decreased funding in July 2008, prior to the economic downturn that hit in the fall of 2009. This situation can only worsen during 2009/10.

The established BCTTAP proved to be a useful vehicle for the Victoria Foundation to direct funds to people living on low income. In November 2008, the BCTTAP through the Community Council, was invited to submit a proposal related to the transportation needs of individuals and families living on low income. The grant from the Victoria Foundation allows for the distribution of approximately 12,000 tickets for distribution through the BCTTAP over a two year period. These additional tickets will provide a beneficial support to the community during difficult economic times.

Summary and Recommendations

The Victoria Regional Transit Commission continues to demonstrate innovation and leadership in supporting people living on low income in BC's Capital Region to access BC Transit. The program has highlighted the importance of transportation to enable people to meet basic needs and to fully participate in community life. Over the years, more agencies have included "transportation" as a line in their budgets and have raised funds to purchase bus tickets. This current year the program has drawn additional resources initiated by the Victoria Foundation to support community agencies and their clients across BC's Capital Region.

Participating agencies and their clients value the BCTTAP and the opportunity to share observations related to transportation in this region.

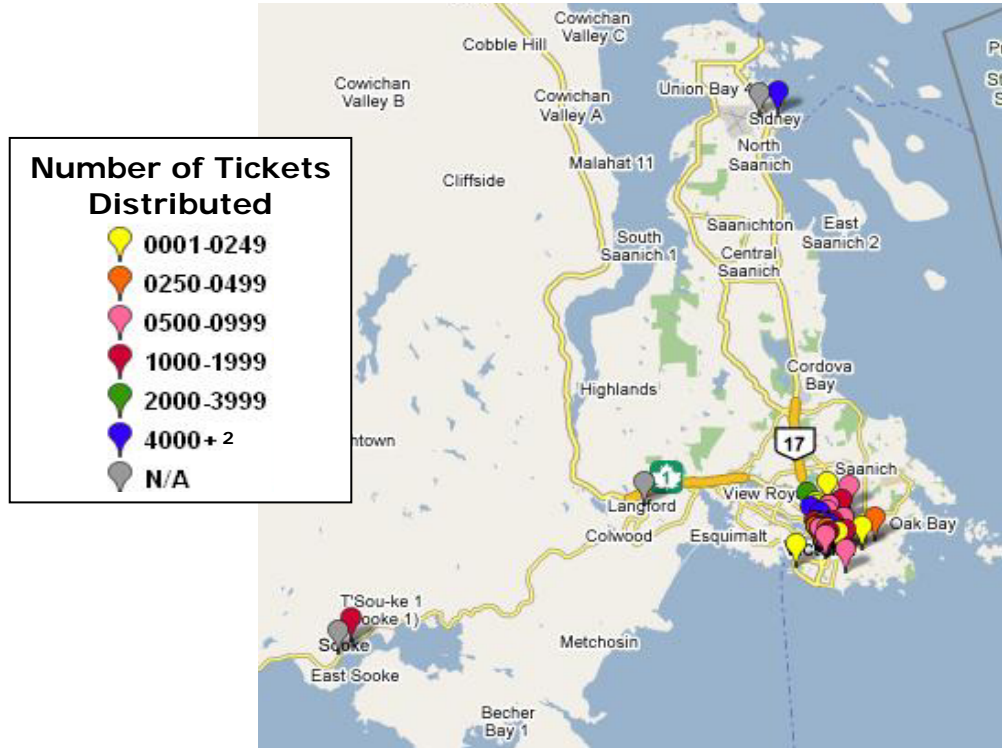
Based on the June 2008 annual meeting of participating agencies, there are two recommendations to the Victoria Regional Transit Commission:

- *Develop a multi-day and/or weekly pass option for the BCTTAP program, visitors and community members who may need a pass for short time periods.*
- *Revisit approaching School Districts to administer an adapted YouthPass purchase program that universally allows monthly payments for families and older youth who have difficulty accessing funds for a 6-month lump payment.*

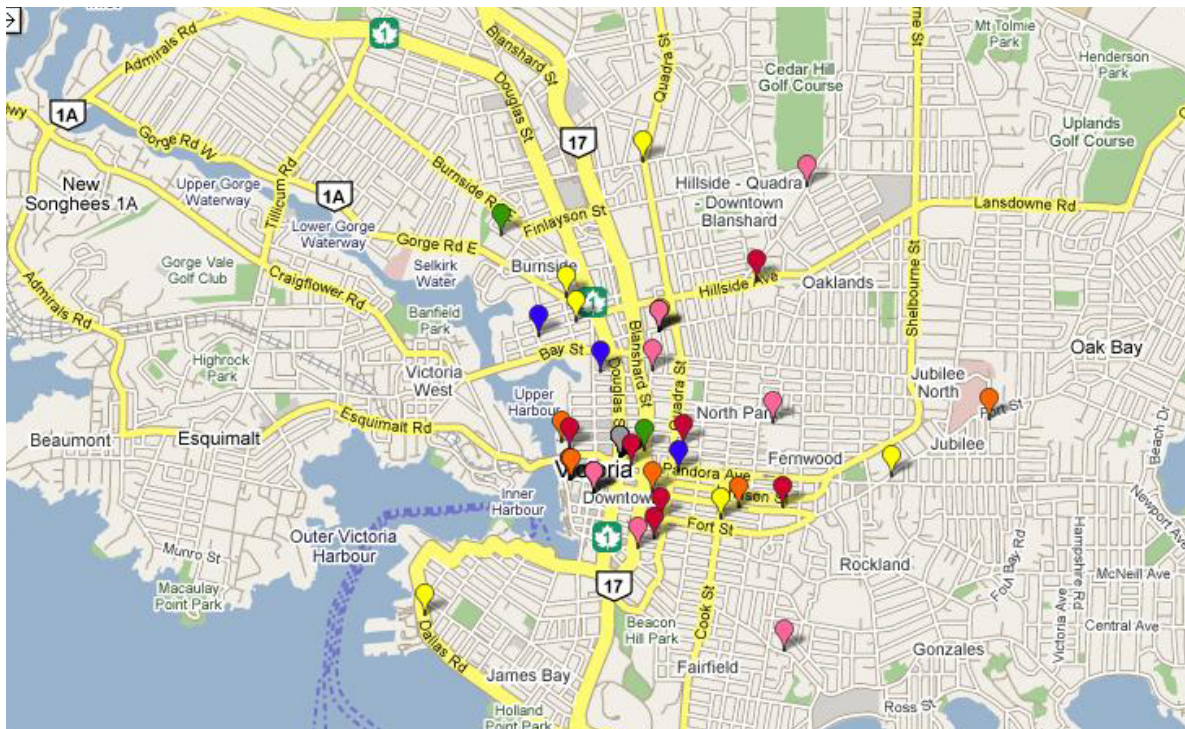
Appendix 1
BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program
Participating Agencies

AIDS Vancouver Island	Pacific Centre Family Services Association
Beacon Community Services	PEERS
Blanshard Community Centre	REES Community Casual Labour Pool
Boys and Girls Club Services of Greater Victoria	Saanich Neighbourhood Place including the Food for Families Program
Bread & Roses Collective	Sandy Merriman House
Bridges for Women Society	Single Parent Resource Centre
Burnside Gorge Community Association	Sooke Residents in Need Society
Citizens' Counselling Centre	Sooke Transition House, Annie's Place
Cool Aid Community Health Centre	St. Vincent de Paul
Epilepsy and Parkinson's Centre	Streetlink
Esquimalt Neighbourhood House	Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family Services
Fairfield Gonzales Community Association	Together Against Poverty Society (TAPS)
FASD Community Circle	Umbrella Society for Addictions and Mental Health
Fernwood Neighbourhood Resource Group Best Babies Program	Vancouver Island Persons with HIV/AIDS Society
Hill House Transition House	Vancouver Island Public Interest Research Group
Hulitan House/M'akola Group of Societies	Victoria Cool Aid Society Community Support Worker
Inter-Cultural Association	Victoria Native Friendship Centre
Island Deaf and Hard Of Hearing Centre	Victoria Society for Educational Alternatives
Island Metis Family & Community Services Society	Victoria Women's Sexual Assault Centre
James Bay Community Centre Society	Victoria Women's Transition House
John Howard Society of Victoria	Victoria Youth Empowerment Society
Kiwanis Emergency Youth Shelter	Volunteer Victoria
La Société Francophone de Victoria	WorkLink Employment Society
Laren House Society	YM-YWCA of Greater Victoria
Lifecycles Fruit Tree Project	Young Parents Support Network
Margaret Laurence House	
Mustard Seed Street Church	
Next Steps Shelter	
Nil/Tu,O Child and Family Services	
Our Place	

Appendix 2 – Map of Current Participating Agencies CAPITAL REGION



CORE MUNICIPALITIES



² *Not applicable*—This indicates a satellite location. Currently number of tickets distributed at satellite locations or facilities is not known; all tickets distributed are linked to head offices/main locations.