

**INTERIM REPORT TO THE
VICTORIA REGIONAL
TRANSIT COMMISSION**



**BC Transit
Ticket Assistance
Program
(BCTTAP)**

Prepared by
Community Social Planning Council

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COMMUNITY SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL
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Executive Summary

The BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program provides free tickets to eligible participants living on low-income across the Capital Region managed by the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria, through a network of sixty accredited community social service agencies. Demand for the subsidized tickets has exceeded supply and at the May 17th Victoria Regional Transit Commission meeting the Commission approved a 25% increase in tickets and monthly passes, retroactive to April 2011. The Commission further requested for an interim report in September. The Council had requested a 50% increase in subsidized tickets and a 100% increase in monthly passes based on demand. Delays of six months in being able to report to the Commission meant that a portion of the approved increase had already been allocated (advanced) based on temporary agreement so that the actual product available for 2011-2012 year is less than the previous year's allocation.

The BCTTAP is promoted as a best practice in poverty reduction and prevention by national non-governmental organizations (the Caledon Institute, Vibrant Communities) and has been replicated in several B.C. regions. Because of this program many agencies have received funds for transportation they might not have, if it were not for the buy one get one free program.

Demand continues to exceed supply on the basis of the current allocation, with resulting difficulties for residents on low-income in the Region for health, employment, access to food, and community service reasons. Access to transit for low-income residents is one of the major issues that agencies report as being significant to their quality of life. The 2008-09 recession increased unemployment, poverty and demand on social service agencies throughout the region. Poverty affects residents of every community in the Capital Region.

Over 23% of our residents live below the poverty line. Many more households experience an affordability crunch because of the high costs of housing, childcare and other basic needs relative to their earnings. B.C. has the highest rate of child poverty in Canada and the Capital Region has one of the highest levels of income inequality in B.C.

Just 5 months into the fiscal year, **64%** of the maximum allotted monthly passes have already been distributed.

British Columbia was among the provinces most affected by the recession, losing 51,800 jobs between October 2008 and 2009. In 2009, the food prices in B.C. rose by 4.3%. Within the province, Victoria saw one of the highest declines in rental affordability and had the third biggest rent increase (5%) in the country. In addition, demand increased as more agencies budgeted for transportation based on knowledge of the program, and geographic demand from communities (peninsula, western communities) with participants needing to attend programs and appointments outside their neighbourhoods.

In the current 2011-2012 fiscal year it is projected the BCTTAP maximum allotments will fall short by **17%** for tickets and **42%** for monthly passes.

The Community Council has instituted rationing of product, since the Transit Commission decision in May 2011, in an effort to control allocation relative to supply. This has ensured at least that a fair distribution of limited tickets and passes are available across

the accredited agencies and their respective populations and geographic locations. A handful of agencies, which are able, have been ordering some unmatched product above and beyond the Program.

Agencies report some difficulty with this rationing, especially as it coincided with the loss of the return transfer program. The discontinuation of the return transfer program essentially doubles their need for tickets for return trips to attend shorter medical appointments and other short errands such as picking up a cheque and going to the food bank. We had hoped that when the new fraud-resistant transfer design was introduced that the return transfer program would be reinstated. This did not happen.

Given the low-income of users of the program, it is very unlikely that the limit on supply of subsidized tickets would be replaced by individual retail purchases¹. The program clearly leverages purchase of BC Transit product, that agencies would not otherwise purchase, contributing to a net increase in paid ridership. At its current volume and management system it is a Win-Win for the Commission, and the residents of the Region.

Request

We request that the Victoria Regional Transit Commission:

- Increase the allocation of product for the BCTTAP to 136,000 tickets and 1700 monthly passes as requested in May 2011 for the 2011-12 program year.
- Review the allocation in February 2012 for the 2012-13 year.

Background

For almost 15 years, the Victoria Regional Transit Commission has provided free bus tickets, and more recently monthly bus passes, to the Community Social Planning Council to distribute to people with essential transportation needs. The Community Council, through an innovative partnership with social service non-profit 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 phenomenally since its inception. While number of participating agencies have remained relatively consistent in recent years, the need and use of the BC Transit Assistance Program has continued to grow.

In the fall of 2010, it was projected that we would have a shortfall of product and a meeting with BC Transit was requested. Due to personnel shifts and scheduling conflicts both at BC Transit and at Community Social Planning Council, this meeting did not take place until February 2011. At the time of the meeting, the program had exceeded the maximum allotment of free monthly bus passes and was almost at the maximum allotment of free tickets.

While we were quite concerned that the meeting couldn't happen any earlier, we knew that the Victoria Regional Transit Commission strongly supported the program and in the past had permitted us to advance from the next year's allotment before we formally requested an increase to the allotment of free product.

In May 2011, we formally requested an increase of product to 136,000 tickets and 1700 monthly passes. These amounts would match the 2010-2011 actual usage, *plus* cover the advance on product that we made in that fiscal year. This rationale with additional arguments was outlined in the attached letter of May 2, 2011 to Michael Davis, COO of BC Transit from Rupert Downing, Executive Director of Community Social Planning Council.

¹ Gathered by consultation, Annual BCTTAP Agency meeting, April 18, 2011.

Allotment Status

At the Victoria Regional Transit Commission meeting of May 17, 2011, we learned that the staff of BC Transit did not recommend the requested increase of 50% for tickets and 100% for monthly passes. This was the first time in current memory that the program allotment increases did not keep pace with the growth of the program.

The Victoria Regional Transit Commission, taking into account the staff recommendation, approved a lesser increase of 25% for both tickets and passes and invited Community Social Planning Council to send a delegation and present again at the September Commission meeting.

In May 2011, the maximums were increase to the following: (retroactive to April 1, 2011)

Program tickets to 112,500
Program monthly passes to 1000

From these figures, we must deduct the free product advanced in 2010-2011, reducing the product available for distribution in 2011-2012 to:

Program tickets to 96,100
Program monthly passes to 676

Growth of the Program

The BCTTAP has grown faster than anticipated in the last few years and this was a major topic of discussion at the April 18th annual meeting of participating agencies. The main three reasons for the rapid growth are:

- Increased need – one agency reports serving twice as many clients as the year before.
- Agencies are adding transportation – purchased through this program – into their budgets.
- Government downloading of transit cost to patients and social assistance clients.

Projections

An analysis based on a year-over-year trend analysis of ticket need, projected that the 2011-2012 program year ticket need will exceed the current ticket allotment by approximately 17%. The estimated need for monthly passes is more than double the projected need for tickets. Based on a year-over-year trend analysis, it is estimated that the demand for passes will exceed the current allotment by 42%.²

Setting Limits

Agencies are now limited to a maximum of 300 tickets (30 sheets) and 6 monthly passes per month. They are however permitted to order additional full-price product, outside of the program allocation.

In the three months since rationing began, several agencies have had to make significant changes to their orders and assumingly to their program budgets. Five agencies, Beacon Community Services, Esquimalt Neighbourhood House, Young Parents Support Network, Victoria Native Friendship Centre and John Howard

² Analysis of BCTTAP order data over the last three years.

Society have had to order a significant amount of tickets outside the program (*paid with no matching free product*) as shown in the following table.

Table 1

Organization	PAID tickets ordered	FREE tickets ordered	TOTAL tickets ordered outside of the program (paid only, no matching free product)
Beacon Community Services	950	950	750
Esquimalt Neighbourhood House	150	150	1350
Young Parents Support Network	350	350	100
Victoria Native Friendship Centre	830	830	400
John Howard Society	550	550	200

Three other agencies, Mustard Seed Street Church, Our Place and PEERS, have had to decrease their regular orders, as they are unable to make up the difference in full retail/unmatched product.

For Nil/Tu,O Child and Family Services 35% of their monthly passes have had to be purchased outside of the Program (*paid with no matching free product*).

The following tables show the growth of the program over five years as well as the year-to-date numbers.

Table 2

TICKETS	2011-2012 to date (5 months)	2010-11	2009-10	2008-09	2007-08	2006-07
Tickets available from BC Transit	96,100 (amount available from 112,500 allotment)	90,000	80,000	80,000	60,000*	50,000*
Tickets ordered by agencies	30,060 31% of years allotment (plus 3,220 outside the program/no matching free tickets)	112,170	82,460	75,826	62,120	53,970

*Some program files are in storage. Electronic files indicate these program maximums.

Table 3

MONTHLY PASSES	2011-2012 to date (5 months)	2010-11	2009-10	2008-09	2007-08	2006-07
Monthly passes available from BC Transit	676 (amount available from 1000 allotment)	800	800	440	440*	220*
Monthly passes ordered by agencies	436 64% of years allotment (plus 42 outside the program/no matching free passes)	1238	658	396	288	158

*Some program files are in storage. From current electronic files we believe these are the correct program maximums for these years.

Table 4

TOP REASONS FOR USE						
Description	2010-11	2009-10	2008-09	2007-08	2006-07	2005-06
Health/medical/ Counseling	39%	32 %	37%	45%	35%	32%
Employment related	28%	32 %	25%	20%	24%	29%
Basic Needs	9%	11 %	15%	12%	9%	13%
Financial Assistance Worker	5%	7 %	8%	8%	8%	7%
Children/family	4%	5 %	4%	4%	6%	4%
Court	2%	2 %	2%	2%	2%	2%
Other	14%	11 %	10%	9%	15%	12%

Source: Participating Agencies' Ticket Tracking Data

Effect of not keeping pace with demand

Decreased access to transportation for the Capital Region's most vulnerable citizens.

Given the low-income of users of the program it is very unlikely that the limit on supply of subsidized tickets would be replaced by individual retail purchases. In reality, many recipients would not have the option of taking the bus without this program.³ If not for the tickets and passes received through the BCTTAP:

- they may go hungry, instead of going to a food bank
- they may miss medical and ministry appointments if they can't get there or get back
- they may put themselves in harm's way by hitchhiking
- they may miss school because the family cannot afford tickets in the days leading up to social assistance 'cheque day'
- they may not attend their employment-readiness training or job interviews for lack of transportation
- they may not accept a job without the tickets or a pass to bridge the transportation access before the first paycheque arrives.

NOTE: Medical and basic needs travel is usually off-peak hours travel. Clients that have a ticket or pass do not place the bus driver in the awkward position of accepting or rejecting a traveller in need who begs for a free ride.

Conclusion

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