

**REPORT TO THE  
VICTORIA REGIONAL  
TRANSIT COMMISSION**



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

Prepared by  
Community Social Planning Council

Presented by  
Brian Hill, President,  
Community Social Planning Council

May 2011



COMMUNITY SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL  
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## Context

Since 1997, the Victoria Regional Transit Commission has provided free bus tickets to the Community Social Planning Council to distribute to people with urgent transportation needs. The 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 over the last few years, the need and use of the BC Transit Assistance Program has continued to grow.

In 2010<sup>1</sup>, up to 90,000 free transit tickets and 800 free passes per year are available for distribution through the BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program (BCTTAP). Agencies purchase tickets and passes through the Community Social Planning Council. BC Transit products purchased by agencies on a two for one basis up to a maximum allocation of 45,000 free tickets and 400 free monthly passes per year. This program has increased paid ridership as well as subsidized. BCTTAP follows the values of BC Transit as stated in the 'Shaping Our Future' strategic plan, in particular the values of safety, innovation and collaboration.

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. It has been reported on at a national level by the Caledon Institute (March 2010).

## Observations on Ticket and Monthly Pass Uses

### 1. Current Ticket Use

In 2010-11, 57 agencies participated in the BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program, distributing 112,170 tickets in BC's Capital Region.

The data collected provides a good snapshot of the transportation needs of people living on low-income. Health-related and employment-related travel are consistently the top two transportation needs.

### Ticket Usage Statistics

Description	2010-11	2009-10	2008-09	2007-08	2006-07	2005-06
Health/medical/ Counselling	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

<sup>1</sup> Victoria Regional Transit Commission meeting, 9 March 2010 – decision to increase number of free tickets and free passes available to BCTTAP effective January 2010.

From the agency perspective:



- Access to transit is a safety issue with a number of agencies, especially those who work with women and youth.
- 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.
- Youth and family counsellors report that tickets are useful for students not attending school due to lack of

transportation. Students no longer attend the nearest school, but the one best suited to their aspirations.

- Tickets are useful for people looking for housing 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.
- Social services are now spreading outside the urban centre as well, necessitating the use of transit. *(for example, the Residential Tenancy Board, has moved up near Uptown Centre. BC Housing is up in the same neighbourhood as well.)*

## 2. Current Monthly Pass Use

Since 2005, monthly passes have been included in the BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program. In 2010<sup>2</sup>, the Transit Commission has increased the maximum allocation the current 400 passes. This, when matched with passes purchased by social agencies for distribution to their clients, means that a potential 800 free passes were available to the program.

Over the years, there has been a marked increase in the number of passes ordered as agencies have realized the advantages of a monthly pass over tickets to support participation in their social, health and employment-readiness programs as well as to participate more fully in community life.

*...from a letter written by a woman currently living in a shelter.*

*At the end of February,... individual passes were reduced to 3 for the house, and now there are 2 bus passes to circulate among 15 residents. The use of these coveted passes is restricted to urgent medical concerns, and job interviews. Supplementing resident needs with extremely limited number of bus tickets, the staff adheres to stringent screening regarding every ticket.*

<sup>2</sup> Victoria Regional Transit Commission meeting, 9 March 2010 – decision to increase number of free tickets and free passes available to BCTTAP effective January 2010.

## Growth of Monthly Pass delivery

	2010-11	2009-10	2008-09	2007-08	2006-07	2005-06
Free passes available from BC Transit	400	400	220	220	120	65
Free passes requested from agencies	619 <small>(219 advanced from 2011-2012)</small>	329	198	144	79	32

In the 2010-2011 cycle, 1238 monthly were distributed. This almost doubles the 2010-2011 amount of 658 passes distributed.

From the agency perspective:

- Passes help in the time gap between the start of the Person with Disability application process and receipt of their yearly transit pass.
- The biggest users of monthly passes are teen and women's shelters, educational programs and employment-readiness programs.
- A monthly pass provides the opportunity to participate more fully in life, which means the pass is used for a large number of activities such as visiting friends and family, attending school events, volunteering and not just the most basic of needs. These activities can help reduce the isolation of poverty.
- 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 monthly passes because youth aged 12 and younger can travel at no cost with their parents or a guardian.



*...from a letter written by a woman currently living in a shelter.*

### *Why (we) need bus transport:*

- *"The bus passes motivate me."*
- *"I love to walk in parks, along the seawall. Sometimes I can get there walking. But I get too tired to walk there and back, so now I do not go if I cannot pay for bus fare back. Once a month, for a treat, maybe."*
- *"Enables me to get to school, appointments, search for employment. Before, I could go to more programs and meetings. Without consistent attendance at my programs and meetings, I don't always feel like I can go to school, go to appointments or look for work."*
- *"I miss programs and meetings without the bus pass. Sometimes I get a ride, but I don't feel comfortable asking. I cannot afford to help with gas."*
- *"Freedom to get out in the community. Fun is important."*
- *"Prevents isolation."*
- *"Able to access all the resources that are necessary day-to-day. Stores, library, friends."*
- *"Creates opportunity to visit family or friends that live too far to walk, e.g., Langford, Sooke."*
- *"Living."*

### 3 Emerging Needs

Some challenges mentioned in earlier reports remain, such as the problem of government family assistance staff sending clients to agencies to get bus tickets for Ministry appointments or to pick up cheques, even though they have tickets available for this purpose. Also, the YouthPass, while a money-saving product, is out of reach of low-income families. As one parent puts it, *“The deal that you must buy the pass at 6 month increments to get the discount is absolutely ludicrous to me. If I can’t come up with the monthly (payment) how do I come up with \$125?”*

BC Transit and the BCTTAP program in particular is vital for low-income people going through the arduous process of receiving persons with disability status, then the onerous process of paperwork to obtain a provincial BC Bus Pass.

There are some emerging needs that have come to our attention.

- The hospitals are no longer giving tickets to patients to get home. Clients would receive one ticket from the agency to get to the hospital for their appointments and receive one ticket from the hospital to get home. Now the agency is providing both tickets.
- One transition house reports an increase in women with children, especially older children. Tickets are needed for the entire family.
- A settlement organization reports double the clients from the previous year.
- Government offices are spreading outside the downtown core and therefore additional transit is required to attend necessary appointments.

### 4. 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 18<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of participating agencies. The main 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.

*Dear Victoria Regional Transit Commission,*

*My name is Colette and I have been a member of the Epilepsy Association since 2009. When I first met with Isa, the Coordinator of the program at that time and since retired, she advised me that if I needed any help with transportation that she would mail me a sheet of bus tickets. I needed help. I couldn't afford to pay the initial \$45.00 for the yearly pass so she graciously and with compassion gave me bus tickets.*

*In February and March of this year, I was still struggling to get to different venues. I wanted to meet Jennifer and asked her in an email if she can send me a sheet of bus tickets. She did so immediately.*

*Without this bus program, a lot of us myself included would be in a bind. Since I don't have my driver's license I depend on the bus. It is quite discouraging when you need to go somewhere and you have no funds. It is crucial that this program continue in full force. Speaking on behalf of other people with Epilepsy transportation by bus is necessary unless you have someone to drive you to appointments.*

*I can't thank Isa and Jennifer enough for being so kind in helping many others and me.*

*Thank you also to BC Transit for their continued generosity and everyone involved at VEPC.*

- Government downloading of transit cost to patients and social assistance clients.

The pronounced growth in 2010-2011, necessitated the program dip into the following year's allotment of product.

Community Social Planning Council is working with the participating agencies to develop a method of better projecting the annual product need. It is still early in the process, but a number of agencies have noted they expect their need to increase by 10%-20% per year. So far only one agency has stated they will have a reduction in need and only because they lost funding for transportation.

## Summary and Recommendation

The Victoria Regional Transit Commission continues to demonstrate leadership and innovation in supporting people living on low-income to access BC Transit.

BC Transit values as outlined in the strategic plan, **Shaping our Future**, are well reflected in these recent outcomes:

**Safety** – Women and youth who might have accepted an unsafe ride, get home safely with BC Transit.

**Innovation** – By opening the program to monthly bus passes this greatly assisted the social needs of low-income residents who require assistance for transportation to help them meet their most basic needs *and* to live and participate in a healthy community.

**Collaboration** – BC Transit, unique in the transit industry, continues to build collaborative relationships and provide a shared-services partnership model which delivers excellent value for the dollar, and is in the long run more sustainable than other models.

**Customer Service** – Removing the zoned-ticket system demonstrated excellent customer service by realizing the growth of the Westshore and that many move there for less expensive housing. The unfortunately abused and discontinued extended transfer program was an extremely helpful program especially for people on low income who making short trips.

**Sustainability** – Excellent social programs are supported by the buy one get one free purchase of BC Transit product. Agencies have changed the way they budget and fundraise for programs. Their association with the BCTTAP gets a transit line item on their budgets, where it would not have been included before. This provides a more accurate cost of program delivery and increased participation for the agency and increased ridership for BC Transit.

### Recommendation

Based on the April 18, 2011 annual meeting of participating agencies, the Community Social Planning Council recommends that the Victoria Regional Transit Commission increase the free product available on the buy one, get one free basis to 68,000 for tickets and 850 for monthly passes.

## Appendix 1

### BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program Participating Organizations List 2010-2011

Action Committee of People with Disabilities	Nil/Tu,O Child and Family Services
Access Health Centre	Our Place
AIDS Vancouver Island	Pacific Centre for Family Services Association
Artemis Place/VSEA	PEERS
Beacon Community Services	Saanich Neighbourhood Place
Blanshard Community Centre	Single Parent Resource Centre
Blanshard Community Centre-GAP	Saanich Neighbourhood Place
Boys & Girls Club	Sooke Residents in Need Society
Bread & Roses Collective	Sooke Transition House, Annie's Place
Bridges for Women	St. Vincent de Paul - St Josephs Conference
Burnside Gorge Community Centre	St. Vincent de Paul – Social Concern office
Citizen's Counselling Centre	Surrounded by Cedar
Cool Aid - Shelters	Threshold Housing Society
Community Casual Labour Pool	Together Against Poverty Society
Cridge Transition House	Umbrella Society for Addictions and Mental Health
Epilepsy and Parkinson Centre	Vancouver Island Addiction Recovery Society
Esquimalt Neighbourhood House	Victoria Disability Resource Centre
Fairfield-Gonzales Community Association	Victoria Native Friendship Centre
Fernwood Best Babies	Victoria PWA Society
Hulitan Family and Community Services	Victoria Women's Sexual Assault Centre
Inter-Cultural Association	Victoria Women's Transition House
Island Deaf & Hard of Hearing	Victoria Youth Empowerment Society
Island Metis Family & Community Services Society	VIPIRG
James Bay Community Project Youth Clinic	Volunteer Victoria
John Howard Society	White Crow Village - FASD Society
La Société Francophone de Victoria	Worklink
Laren Society/Bill Mudge House	YM-YWCA of Greater Victoria
Margaret Laurence House	Young Parents Support Network
Mustard Seed Street Church	