BC TRANSIT TICKET ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



REPORT TO THE VICTORIA REGIONAL TRANSIT COMMISSION

A report of the



Executive Summary

The BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program makes the public transit system across BC's Capital Region accessible and available to participants living on low-income through free tickets and passes. The program is a partnership between the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria (CSPC), local non-profit agencies, BC Transit, and the Victoria Regional Transit Commission. CSPC has been administering the program since 1997, providing access to affordable transportation to agencies serving low-income clients. The program has been adopted in several B.C. communities and is considered a best practice model in poverty reduction and prevention by national and non-governmental organizations (the Caledon Institute, Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement).

The leveraged value of the program has made it possible for the participating agencies to have transportation as a budget item. This increased investment in transit for people in need means that the program has almost certainly increased expenditure and ridership on transit in the region. While the Victoria Regional Transit Commission is subsidizing 50% of the tickets and passes allocated to the program, the remaining 50% earn revenue and ridership for the Commission. Such revenue, unlikely to have been otherwise realized, will amount to over \$170,000 in retail sales from April 2014 to March 2015. This represents a "win-win" for social and economic returns on investment in our Transit system.

In May 2012, the Commission increased ticket and passes allocation for the program to 135,000 tickets and 1,500 passes. This has helped ensure an equitable and sustainable supply of accessible transportation to participating agencies for the past two years (2012-2013, 2013-2014). Over the past year, the program has experienced an increase in demand from the participating agencies. Limits on ticket and passes allocation for agencies were applied in order to remain within the allocated number of passes and tickets. Even with these limits, the supply of passes was exhausted by January 2015. When consulted, the participating agencies report an increase in demand for tickets and passes from their clients.

Given financial constraints for the Commission, we are proposing to continue to manage supply of tickets within the program for 2014/15 at the same level as 2013/14 at 135,000 tickets. We are however requesting an increase in passes to partially meet the increased demand. The increase requested is from 1,500 to 1,875 (25%).



Introduction

Since 1997, the Victoria Regional Transit Commission has been addressing the urgent transportation needs of low income people in the Capital Region through the BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program (BCTTAP). The program is a partnership between Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria (CSPC), local non-profit agencies, BC Transit, and the Victoria Regional Transit Commission. The CSPC has successfully run the program since 1997 acting as a central agency in distributing free tickets to the agencies dealing with people in poverty. More than 60 agencies participate in the program. The BCTTAP is considered a model of best practices in reducing and preventing poverty in Canada by making transit more affordable to people living on low-income.

The program's "buy-one-get-one-free" model provides community social services the ability to double their capacity to address the transportation needs of their clients. The free tickets and passes provided for every purchased product has resulted in an increase in funding for transportation supports from a number of charitable funding sources. This increase in funding translates into an increase in the budget lines for that expense for the participating agencies. This increased investment in transit for people in need means that the program has almost certainly increased expenditure and ridership on public transit in the region beyond the costs associated with the subsidized tickets which represents a "win-win" for social and economic returns on investment in our transit system.

Program History

In 1997, the CSPC brought together local community social service agencies to find a solution around addressing the transportation needs of the low income people they served. The bus ticket allocation from BC Transit in the first year was 5,000 tickets to distribute to 10 community agencies. In 1998, the allocation was doubled to 10,000 tickets and the number of participating agencies increased to 27.

Between 1999 and 2000, 11,700 free tickets and 12, 620 purchased tickets were distributed to 37 agencies along with 287 day passes (142 free and 145 paid). Between 2003 and 2004, 32 agencies participated in the program. In 2006, 50, 000 transit tickets and 120 monthly passes were distributed to 39 agencies.

In 2010, 90,000 transit tickets and 800 monthly passes were distributed and in 2012 due to high demand from the participating agencies and a change in the transfer time policy, the allocation was increased to 135,000 transit tickets and 15,000 monthly passes to about 50 agencies. Currently, the allocation is not sufficient to support the needs of the 65 participating agencies. The CSPC limited the maximum number of tickets and passes available to each approved participating agency to ensure an equitable and sustainable supply within the program. Even with these limits, the supply of passes was exhausted by January 2015.



What agencies are saying

The program distributes tickets and passes to a number of agencies serving a wide spectrum of populations, including vulnerable men and women, youth, Aboriginal people, recent immigrants, and single parents with low incomes. These valuable tickets and passes are used to attend essential services such as medical appointments, counseling, training, employment, education, and getting to food banks. In most of the cases, demand for the transit tickets and passes are higher than the agencies could provide financially. We received a number of testimonials supporting the community need for this program, and explanations for the recent increase in the demand. Some stories are given below and support letters are provided in Appendix 1.

Burnside Gorge Community Association

"The demographics in and around the neighborhood of Burnside Gorge Community Association are that of many low income families. The bus tickets help our clients to find or maintain housing, access job interviews or meet with their counselors. We don't have the budget to purchase the number of bus tickets needed to assist our families and rely on the buy 1 get 1 free model that BCTTAP provides. One of the biggest users of bus tickets is our Homeless Family Outreach Program. Over the past year, we have seen the number of families who access this program increase dramatically and the kinds of crisis they are in increase in severity. More and more families are presenting to us as "homelessness" as their issue and not just being at risk of homelessness."

Cridge Transition House for Women

"The individuals we serve have been displaced from their homes because of abuse. Most women have very limited access to the family finances when they come in; in fact, many come with virtually no money. Often times, they have to travel to areas of town that are far away from the House to attend legal meetings, apply for income assistance, attend to their children's needs, and apply for housing. It is essential for them to have transportation to these locations, and we rely heavily on tickets purchased through the BCTTAP program to make this happen. The impact of poverty in the lives of the women that we serve is becoming more and more significant with each passing year. Income Assistance rates remain at such a low level that women cannot survive without support from outside sources. A single woman living on \$590 per month, for example, simply does not have enough money to pay for food and rent, yet alone transportation."

Victoria Disability Resource Centre

"The program allows us to provide tickets to our volunteers, most who are on a limited income, to travel to and from their homes to volunteer with us. Our volunteers are a core piece to ensure the successful running of our centre. We also provide tickets to clients in crisis, if a need is expressed. We order bus passes for each of our staff, two of whom have just begun to work for us. As a non-profit organization which employs persons with disabilities, staff are not able to afford their own passes as most are on limited income as well."



Hulitan Family and Community Services Society

"I would like to share a story about a young family who has been provided free bus tickets for the past three years to get to our Journeys of the Heart (JOH) program in the Westshore. This family is struggling with poverty, the mom works part-time and dad does cultural sharing and he is an artist which means his monthly income is never reliable. This family has three children, their youngest son James has been coming to our program since he was a year old. In the beginning of this year James was not able to talk in class, because of his shyness and he was behind developmentally for his age. In the last few months this little boy has blossomed into a happier more confidence child due to the program's safe and friendly environment and the devotion his parents who brings him to class come rain or shine. Now James can sit quietly while working in his workbook, he can sing the cultural song and participate in the wing chief role with great pride.

This family would not be able to attend JOH without the bus tickets your agency provides Hulitan on a monthly basiss. This Aboriginal child will have a greater chance to complete his grade 12, because of his positive early years' experience and the devotion of his parents who learnt in program that education is an important part of a child's rearing to become a more successful and healthy adult."

Victoria Child Abuse Prevention & Counselling Centre

"We see many families at the Centre who do not own vehicles and would not normally be able to cover the costs of weekly travel to and from the agency due to their restricted budgets. Thankfully the BCTTAP program enables clients and their families to come to our Centre for the services they so desperately need. We expect to see a further increase in our ticket usage in 2015 as a number of inquiries have been made by current and waitlisted clients/families."

Quotes From Clients

"I am suffering from a lot of health issue but only hope for future is education. ICA has helped me a lot to achieve confidence in improving and learning English; low income family budget does not allow me to buy tickets. I appreciate the way ICA helps us for transport and education. Kindly allow me to continue to receive free tickets." (single parent)

Inter Cultural Association

"I am writing to thank you for helping me out for the monthly bus pass which is very helpful for me in my everyday living, as for now I was relying only on the spousal support of \$500 a month. I don't have any source of income yet until I get my permit for work. I am still waiting for it, for now I am doing volunteering work. The rest of the week I use it to get to appointments. Having a monthly bus pass is really a big help for me and means a lot. It lessens my stress as well."

Cridge Centre

"I am grateful for the opportunity to attend the programs offered at Bridges for Women. The skills and understanding I've learned here have already helped me change positively some trauma affected areas of my life. For this reason the bus passes provided through Bridges has been invaluable. Without it I would not have the financial mean's to attend."

Bridges for Women's Society



Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society

"Without the bus ticket program, my clients could not go to job interview, hospital appointment, income assistant interview, counselling and run away from domestic abuse. The bus ticket program not only provides new comers with opportunities to access community services but also learn about BC transit systems. We have been providing clients with bus tickets to attend a number of workshops which have increased their self-esteem and sense of belonging in Canada."

Victoria Cool Aid Society

"We work with adults that range from age 18 right up into their 80's, a group of people who are marginalized and living in poverty. Providing bus tickets to our clients allows them to attend appointments with health care providers, get to work, search for housing or attend training programs that increase their employable skills. Many of our clients also attend support groups and counselling sessions to help deal with issues arising from trauma they suffered in the past. We provide bus tickets to those who are staying with us here at the shelter but more and more we are also providing tickets to those who are housed in the community and are the "working poor".

Between Rock Bay Landing Shelter staff and Client Service Workers we give out 500 to 600 tickets a month and probably turn down about as many requests for tickets due to budget constraints. The increase in demand is likely due to the increase in numbers of people using Shelter services, both those who are homeless and those who are working poor."

Ticket Usage Statistics

Ticket usage statistics are presented in Table 1 below. The top reasons for ticket usage are: health, medical and counseling related from 2010/2011 to 2012/2013. Employment related activities are also increasing in the past two years as shown by the data below.

Table 1

Description	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Health/medical/councelling	35%	33%	40%	37%	39%
Employment related	35%	33%	22%	17%	28%
Basic Needs	10%	12%	9%	9%	9%
Financial Assistance					
Worker	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Children/family	6%	5%	5%	6%	4%
Court	2%	3%	3%	3%	2%
Other	7%	9%	15%	24%	14%

Source: Participating Agencies' Ticket Tracking Data,

2014-2015 data is until December 2014



Fraud prevention and control

The Council takes fraud very seriously and efficient mechanisms are in place to ensure fraud prevention and control. Any report of fraud is followed up without any delay with the participating agency to increase controls. The efficient system at the CSPC makes it easy to identify the tickets and passes issued from the program. In general, there are very few reports of fraud (1 case in 2014/2015) and prompt action is taken when Transit staff contacts the CSPC with such report. In addition, each agency has their methods of distribution which include tight controls. As the transit products are purchased by the individual agencies, they are extremely motivated to prevent fraud.

Recommendations

While the Commission is subsidizing 50% of the tickets and passes allocated to the program, the remaining 50% earn revenue and ridership for the Commission which would probably not otherwise be earned (i.e. the participating agencies would not be able to purchase tickets and passes without the availability of the subsidy to leverage funding for transportation costs). This amounts to over \$170,000 in retail sales from April 2014 to March 2015. Given financial constraints for the Commission, we are proposing to continue to manage supply of Tickets within the program for 2014/15 at the same level as 2013/14 at 135,000 tickets. We are however requesting an increase in passes to partially meet the increased demand. The increase requested is from 1500 to 1875 (25%).



Appendix 1: Support Letters from the Agencies



ARTEMIS PLACE Life Skills, Academics and Parenting t: (250) 598-5183 f: (250) 388-9153 www.artemisplace.org

Re: Ticket Assistance Program December 16th 2014

Dear BC Transit Commission:

Artemis Place Secondary School is a program that supports at-risk young women access academic, social, life-skills, counselling and parenting supports. Our most vulnerable students with the highest levels of poverty are given a bus pass that we access through the BCTTAP. This affords them the ability to get to and from school, not only to continue their education but to participate in the valuable life-skills programming as well as access counselling support and receive referrals to other resources.

The BCTTAP program provides an essential element in keeping these high-risk young women, young moms and their babies and toddlers safe. Not only do they use the bus passes to get to and from school but they have them for the duration of the month to be able to exit situations in which their safety may be at risk. Our population of vulnerable young women face challenges such as mental health, poverty, trauma-history, justice system involvement and sometimes early parenting.

As an organization, we are unable to afford to provide bus passes to all of our students and some are able to access theirs through their social worker or other supports. We carefully screen our students and provide bus passes to those who have the highest need. Our bus pass and ticket requests are always going up and we increasingly have to decline when our students ask. The impact of not having a bus pass is immense for the most vulnerable of our student population.

If you require any further information on the purpose and value of the BCTTAP to us as an organization, please contact me at the information below.

Sincerely,
Rachel Calder
Program Coordinator
Artemis Place
3020 Richmond Rd
Victoria, BC V8R 4V1
Rachel@artemisplace.org
f(250) 388-9153
www.artemisplace.org







BC Transit 520 Gorge Rd. E. Victoria, BC V8W 2P3

Re: Increase need for bus tickets

The Outreach Team at REES works with anywhere from 30 – 50 clients on a weekly basis. As a team we assist individual's struggling with mental health and addictions in identifying and accessing government and community based supports. Chronic poverty and the inability to pay for transportation greatly impede our client's ability to access these essential support services. Many clients at REES also struggle with mental health, physical health and addiction challenges which only augment the barriers they already experience as a result of poverty.

The majority of our clients require support in accessing and maintaining provincial and federal financial assistance. This process is long and can take anywhere from two weeks to four months before clients receive any financial assistance. With recent changes to the provincial support system we find that this wait period is only getting worse. Throughout the process clients are required to travel to REES and government offices for appointments as well as to gather essential documentation. For example, many clients do not have phones and come to REES to receive messages regarding their application. Often clients are also asked to provide doctor's notes in regards to their application.

In addition, REES provide clients with bus tickets so that they can search for employment, go to work, and travel to appointments with doctors, mental health workers, parole officers, and other support workers. Our ability to supply bus tickets allows clients to successfully acquire the supports they need to meet their basic needs and lead healthy and productive lives. As a result of the bus tickets we provide our clients have successfully been able to maintain their housing, acquire food, shelter and financial assistance, gain employment and increase their physical and mental health.

We respectfully request that BC Transit maintains the number of bus tickets they provide to our program so that we can continue to effectively support our clients in need.

Sincerely, Kelly Franklin



S. O. L. I. D.

Society of Living Intravenous Drug Users

857 Caledonia St. * Victoria, B.C. * V8T 1E6 * 250 – 298 – 9497 * solidinfo@shawbiz.ca

To whom it may concern,

This letter is to highlight the critical role the BCTTAP program plays in SOLID's HIV/HCV engagement and educational work.

Over the past seven years SOLID has developed a highly successful model of peer outreach, based in a critical interconnection of harm reduction services, low-barrier peer-led health education, and peer-led advocacy. A primary aim has been to engage individuals with minimal connections to formal health services, such as people who use illicit drugs by injection or inhalation, people living with HIV/AIDS and/or HCV, Aboriginal people, homeless or street involved individuals, and sex workers as a first step in promoting safer use and practices to prevent and reduce transmission of HIV and HCV.

Best practices for engaging at-risk populations involve providing 'low threshold' or 'low barrier' services, and subsidized transportation to our services and health education programming are critical components of ensuring these are accessible to people with very low incomes, and for fulfilling our mandate for providing and referring individuals to relevant health services. We also provide bus tickets to individuals who access our programming to support them in immediately following up on referrals to health services and associated services, as well as for individuals to access employment.

The need for bus tickets has always far exceeded our financial capacity to buy more than two sheets monthly, though we do purchase additional tickets whenever we have a surplus, or obtain additional funds to support one of our community health education events. For this reason, demand for tickets will become more obvious at moments when we have adequate funding to support our low-barrier community health events, though the demand is always there for individuals to access these events, services and health programs.

Sincerely,

Mark Willson Programs Coordinator

Empathy * compassion * education * peer support * harm reduction * acceptance





BC Transit 520 Gorge Road East Victoria, BC V8W 2P3

The John Howard Society of Victoria is very grateful for the bus ticket/bus pass program administered by the Community Social Planning Council and for the participation and support of BC Transit in making the program happen.

Some of the work we do is with inmates who are being released from the provincial and federal prisons in Victoria (Vancouver Island Regional Correctional Center and William Head Institution). We know that the period following release is a very challenging time as there are many things that need to be done as they re-integrate into the community. Finding a place to live, getting to appointments with probation, parole, welfare workers, and counselors, as well as re-connecting with family and friends. Many are released with hardly any money, and often have to wait to receive any assistance from welfare.

Those who make it into our office are grateful for the support that we can provide – a cup of coffee, use of computers with internet access, and friendly welcoming staff. Being able to provide a few bus tickets so that they can get around to their appointments, find a place to live that is affordable and appropriate, and attend to the things that need to get done, helps to remove some of the stress during a very crucial time of their release.

Often the stresses that they are dealing with are manifested in their interaction with people in the community, and frustrations will emerge. Raised voices and angry gestures do not help to achieve the help and assistance they need. Being able to provide a couple of bus tickets means that they will arrive at their appointment or destination with a more positive attitude which makes everyone's day a little better.

Having worked in my position for over 30 years, I know how tight our program budgets are, and how much our funding sources have restricted the ability to provide essential items to our clients. Over the years our administrative costs have been reduced or removed along with core funding dollars. This has meant that we have virtually no resources to assist with items like food and transportation. While we have a wide variety of services in our community, in order to get them our clients need to go to a number of locations. Being able to provide some bus tickets means that we are able to get them to the next service they need.

The bus ticket program is helping to make our community a safer place to live. Thank-you for your continued generosity.

Dave Johnson, Executive Director





BC Transit 520 Gorge Road East Victoria, BC V8W 2P3

Money is a big factor when inmates are released to the community. While we provide a living allowance at Manchester House (our halfway house), residents would need to be at the house a full month, and save a minimum of \$20 out of their allowance each week before they would have enough money to purchase a bus pass. That would leave them with \$57 each week to cover the cost of food, personal hygiene products and other necessary essentials needed to start their new life in the community.

One of our residents JS, has severe social anxiety and a permanent nerve injury to his foot. Thanks to the bus ticket program we have monthly bus passes that we allow our new residents to use. Taking the bus during the initial days of his release was difficult and caused panic attacks for him, but he needed to take the bus to get to his appointments. JS explained that his experience being in a crowded bus allowed him to work through certain aspects of his social anxiety, and he feels more confident now in crowds. Also, due to his foot injury, JS would not be able to walk to his mandatory appointments without taking the bus.

Very few of the men who come to Manchester House will ever have the means to buy a vehicle. If they had to wait the 4 to 6 weeks to purchase a bus pass their ability to look for work would also have to wait. Although walking is an alternative, it is not a practical solution for the guys in trades who have to carry their tools to work.

As our residents get full time, steady employment they are required to purchase their own bus passes as this represents taking on responsibilities of monthly expenses. Bus passes, however, are vital for our new arrivals, who at times come with very little, and it takes a while to begin making headway creating their own independent life.

We would like to express our appreciation to BC Transit for continuing to support this program.

Melinda Turner and Andeep Kang, Residential Counselors JHS Manchester House





December 17, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

This is a letter of support for the BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program run by the Community Social Planning Council.

I run programs for individuals experiencing homelessness, in order to privilege their voices in the work of the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness. I provide bus tickets to my program participants so they can attend regular meetings to offer input into the Coalition's research, housing policy, and communications initiatives. Without this ticket assistance program, the Coalition would not be able to engage as broadly or as meaningfully with the community of individuals who have lived experience of homelessness.

As the Coalition attempts to expand its crucial activities in engaging with those who have experienced homelessness, we are experiencing an increased demand for tickets, and as such we are supportive of the Council's request for an increase in tickets and passes. Without this program, the Coalition would not be able to afford to do the work we are doing in engaging with individuals with lived experience of homelessness in order to end homelessness in Greater Victoria.

Sincerely, Flora Pagan Social Inclusion Coordinator



Appendix 2

BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program

Participating Organizations List 2014-2015

Action Committee of People with Disabilities

AIDS Vancouver Island

Artemis Place

BC Schizophrenia Society Victoria Beacon Community Services

Boys & Girls Club

Bridges for Women Society

Burnside Gorge Community Centre

Citizens Counselling Centre

Community Social Planning Council

Cridge Transition House Dandelion Society

Esquimalt Neighbourhood House

Fairfield-Gonzales Community Association

Fernwood NRG - Best Babies

Fun Society

Greater Victoria Coalition to End

Homelessness

HeadWay Epilepsy and Parkinson Centre

Help Fill A Dream Foundation

Hulitan Family and Community Services

Inter-Cultural Association

Island Metis Family & Community Services

Society

James Bay Community Project

John Howard Society

La Société Francophone de Victoria Laren Society/Bill Mudge House

Lifecycles

Literacy Victoria

Lutheran Church of the Cross Margaret Laurence House Mary Manning Centre

Mustard Seed Street Church

Nil/Tu,O Child and Family Services

Our Place

Pacific Centre for Family Services Association

Pacifica Housing

PEERS

Phoenix Human Services

Quadra Village Community Centre

Ready to Rent

Saanich Neighbourhood Place Single Parent Resource Centre

SOLID

Sooke Family Resource Society
Sooke Residents in Need Society
Sooke Transition House, Annie's Place

St. Vincent de Paul
Surrounded by Cedar
Threshold Housing Society
Together Against Poverty Socie

Together Against Poverty Society

Umbrella Society

Victoria Brain Injury Society Victoria Cool Aid Society

Victoria Disability Resource Centre Victoria Native Friendship Centre Victoria Sexual Assault Centre Victoria Women's Transition House

Victoria Youth Clinic Society

Victoria Youth Empowerment Society

Victoria Youth in Care Network

Vancouver Island Public Interest Research

Group (VIPIRG)

Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre

Society (VIRCS) Volunteer Victoria

YM-YWCA of Greater Victoria Young Parents Support Network

