

**REPORT TO THE
VICTORIA REGIONAL TRANSIT COMMISSION**

BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program

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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 non-profit agencies, developed an efficient and effective process to double the number of tickets that are 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 50,000 free transit tickets per year are distributed through the BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program (BCTTAP). Agencies purchase transit tickets through the Community Council. Purchased tickets are matched on a 1:1 basis with free tickets from the Transit Commission, with a maximum allocation of 25,000 free tickets per year and 120 monthly passes.

Participating agencies report on 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. This 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.

Observations from 2006

1. Current Ticket Use

In 2006, 39 agencies participated in the BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program (BCTTAP). A list of participating agencies is attached.

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

Information gathered from agencies demonstrates that ticket usage has remained relatively consistent over the past years.

At their annual meeting in November 2006, the participating agencies commented on ticket use trends:

“With the lower unemployment rate, employment counselors are noticing a large increase in clients who face multiple barriers to employment; there are more homeless people especially. For these people who face more challenges, it takes longer to find long term employment.”

“Most of the people who use the tickets are young mothers with small children who otherwise wouldn’t be able to attend ESL classes.”

“With the population boom in the Western Communities, where there is more affordable housing and rentals, people end up having to take the bus downtown in order to access needed services such as visiting government offices or going to the food bank. Without tickets or passes, people become more isolated in these communities.”

Agencies were asked to estimate the times of day that most of their clients used transit. The majority of agencies confirmed that their clients travel in “off-peak” hours: during the day for appointments, interviews, visits to food banks etc.; in the evenings for visits to family and friends, to seek housing. Peak hour travel was linked to getting children to school or getting to some training classes.

2. Monthly Passes

In 2005, the Victoria Regional Transit Commission included monthly passes in the BCTTAP, allocating up to 120 free passes a year to the program. Monthly passes, though costly, are very cost-effective for clients and participating agencies. Some agencies benefit from the cost effectiveness of purchasing monthly passes, especially if they have families with younger children. Participating agencies commented on the use of monthly passes:

“With bus tickets, people are only able to go to places they really need at the time, ie doctor’s appointments, hospital visits. A bus pass allows people to move away from just emergency needs and they are actually able to participate in the community, take care of family matters and shopping needs, and become more active, contributing members of their community.”

“Mothers are usually dropping a child off at school, traveling to ICA, picking the child up from school and then traveling home, all by public transit.”

Bus passes provide opportunities for individuals to become more active and more connected in their communities, reducing the stress of isolation.

The need for monthly passes has grown beyond 240 annually distributed free of charge.

Recommendation:

That the Victoria Regional Transit Commission increase the allocation of monthly passes to 220 annually, resulting in up to 440 free passes to be distributed annually.

3. Impact of Fare Increase

Many agencies are already challenged to fund tickets purchased through the BCTTAP, and are still feeling the impact of the 2005 fare increases. Participating agencies have been creative and resourceful in addressing budget cuts and increasing need. Unfortunately some previously participating agencies have been unable to participate in the BCTTAP though community expectations are that they have transit tickets available. The next round of fare increases will further stretch and stress very limited budgets that have increasing levels of demand.

“At the end of the month, clients have no money left and so they have to prioritize and give up something – they have to buy food and they have to pay rent so it’s the bus tickets that they don’t buy in the end.”

- The Blanshard Community Centre currently has no funding for bus tickets, and thus has to go without tickets. They participated in the BCTTAP in previous years, but now have no tickets to distribute to people in need. They have applied for funding through a local foundation, which, if received, will go towards purchasing bus tickets.
- The Fernwood Neighbourhood Resource Group has no funding for bus tickets currently, but is looking for funding sources to take on more tickets.

The recent Victoria Regional Transit Commission decision to *increase allowable transfer time and allow multiple rides on one ticket* addresses one of the recommendations that emerged from the November 2006 Annual BCTTAP Meeting. Transfers that are valid for up to 2 hours will reduce the stress on clients as they can often complete errands and activities within that time frame.

All agencies agreed that an increase in fares will mean an increase in the demands on all agencies. Additionally, there was agreement amongst agencies that there is already enough demand for transit tickets that agencies could give at least twice as many tickets out as they are currently doing. However, agencies are in no position to double the number of tickets that they purchase.

Recommendation:

That the 1:1 ratio of free/purchased tickets shift to 2:1, thereby increasing the number of free tickets provided through the Victoria Regional Transit Commission to 50,000 annually. With this increase, up to 75,000 free transit tickets would be distributed throughout this region annually.

4 Emerging Needs for Children and Youth

“Let’s get ALL children to school – no matter what financial background they come from.”

Diverse voices in the community have raised the concern that the children of low income families are at times unable to attend school because they cannot afford the bus tickets to get there. This concern has been raised by school principals, parents, and Youth and Family counsellors.

According to one middle school Youth and Family counsellor, 70% of the at-risk youth he works with are facing poverty issues at home. Many of these students at some time are forced to miss school because they cannot afford the cost of travel to school. It is these at-risk youth that can least afford to not be at school.

Bus travel is usually unavoidable for these students either because they live too far to walk to their district school, or are forced to attend a school outside the district they live in due to circumstances beyond their control.

The families of students living on low income cannot afford the minimum 6 month to one year payment to access the YouthPass program offered by BC Transit. The passes would become a viable option for more families if they could pay the amount monthly rather than in one payment.

“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?”

It is believed that the overall number of ‘sick’ days at schools would greatly decrease if there were better access to transit for these students.

Recommendation:

That payment for a YouthPass be permitted on a monthly basis, allowing families living on low income to benefit from the discounted rates without needing to come up with a lump sum payment at the outset.

Summary and Recommendations

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

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

Based on the November 2006 annual meeting of participating agencies, there are 4 recommendations to the Victoria Regional Transit Commission:

- That the Victoria Regional Transit Commission increase the allocation of monthly passes to 220 annually, resulting in up to 440 free passes to be distributed annually.
- That the allowable transfer time for ticket users be increased to up to 2 hours.
- That the 1:1 ratio of free / purchased tickets in the BCTTAP shift to 2:1, thereby increasing the number of free tickets provided through the Victoria Regional Transit Commission to 50,000 annually. With this increase, up to 75,000 free transit tickets would be distributed throughout this region annually.
- That payment for a YouthPass be permitted on a monthly basis, allowing families living on low income to benefit from the discounted rates without needing to come up with a lump sum payment at the outset.

**BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program
Participating Agencies**

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| Action Committee of People with Disabilities | Nil/Tu,O Child and Family Services |
| AIDS Vancouver Island | Our Place |
| ASPECT | Parent Support Services Society |
| Beacon Community Services | PEERS |
| Blanshard Community Centre | Rainbow Kitchens - St. Saviour's Anglican Church |
| Boys and Girls Club Services of Greater Victoria | REES Network Community Casual Labour Pool |
| Bread & Roses Collective | Salvation Army |
| Bridges for Women Society | Sandy Merriman House |
| Burnside Gorge Community Association | Single Parent Resource Centre |
| Capital Families West Shore | Sooke Family Resource Society |
| Capital Mental Health/Sara Spencer Foundation | Sooke Residents in Need Society |
| Citizen's Counselling Centre | Sooke Transition House, Annie's Place |
| Cool Aid Community Health Centre | St. Saviour's Anglican Church |
| Cridge Centre, Hill House Transition House | St. Vincent de Paul |
| Epilepsy and Parkinson's Centre | Streetlink |
| Esquimalt Neighbourhood House | Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family Services |
| Fairfield Community Association | Swift Street Medical Clinic |
| Fernwood Community Centre | TAPS |
| Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Foundation House | The Open Door |
| Greater Victoria Victim Services | Together Against Poverty Society |
| Hulitan House/M'akola Group of Societies | Upper Room |
| Inter-Cultural Association | Victoria Cool Aid/Streetlink Shelter |
| Island Deaf and Hard Of Hearing Centre | Victoria Epilepsy and Parkinson Centre |
| Island Metis Family & Community Services Society | Victoria Human Exchange Society |
| James Bay Community Centre Society | Victoria Native Friendship Centre |
| John Howard Society of Victoria | Victoria READ Society |
| Kiwanis Emergency Youth Shelter | Victoria Women's Sexual Assault Centre |
| La Société Francophone de Victoria | Victoria Women's Transition House |
| Laren House Society | Victoria Youth Empowerment Society |
| Margaret Laurence House | Volunteer Victoria |
| Mental Health and Addiction | Women's Sexual Assault Centre |
| Mustard Seed Street Church | Worklink Employment Society |
| | YM-YWCA of Greater Victoria |
| | Young Parents Support Network |