


HALIFAX

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Item No. 15.1.8
Halifax Regional Council
September 17, 2019

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by 
Jane Fraser, A/ Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: August 20, 2019

SUBJECT: Halifax Transit Fare Strategy 2019 - Youth Free Transit Pilot

ORIGIN

August 13, 2019, motion approved that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Give First Reading to By-law U-105, the purpose of which is to amend Schedule 1 of By-law U-100, the User Charges By-law, establishing changes to the existing fare structure and fares as set out in Attachment 2 of the Transportation Standing Committee report dated July 29, 2019, subject to retaining the senior fare category and increasing the senior's fare proportionate to the proposed increases to the general fare.

5. Identify funding for the youth free transit program pilot prior to implementing the pilot.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, subsection 69(1): "The Municipality may provide a public transportation service ..."

By-law U-100, the User Charges By-law (Schedule 1 - Halifax Transit User Charges), section 3: "Council hereby establishes user charges to be paid by the person using the service in the amount as set out in each Schedule to this By-law."

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council approve the Youth Free Transit Pilot as described in the Discussion section of this report.

BACKGROUND

On July 25, 2019, staff provided a report to the Transportation Standing Committee, outlining proposed changes to the transit fare structure and fares. As part of this proposal, the report described a potential pilot program:

The first major change is to implement a pilot program whereby the age limit for free travel on Halifax Transit is raised from 4-and-under to 12-and-under. The pilot would begin on September 30, 2019 along with the new fares. The pilot would last 6 months, allowing Halifax Transit staff to gauge the long-term impact to both ridership and to Halifax Transit's operating budget.

On August 13, 2019, Regional Council gave first reading to By-law U-105, the purpose of which is to amend Schedule 1 of By-law U-100, the User Charges By-law, establishing changes to the existing fare structure and fares. The revised Schedule 1 includes the ability for Council to create a pilot program:

Youth Free Transit Pilot Program

8C. (1) A person who meets the eligibility requirements of the Youth Free Transit Pilot Program as adopted by Council, by resolution, may use the program.

By-law U-105 is anticipated to have second reading on September 17, 2019 and the revised User Charges By-law to come into force on September 21, 2019.

DISCUSSION

The Youth Free Transit Pilot program will see the age for free transit ridership rise from 4-and-under to 12-and-under for the duration of the pilot. All youth under the age of 13 will be eligible to ride any Halifax Transit service at no cost, including ferry, premium and special services, e.g. MetroX or Access-a-Bus. This six-month pilot will begin on September 30, 2019, to align with the roll out of new fares, and finish March 31, 2020. For the duration of the pilot, all transit users under the age of 13 will be eligible to ride free.

The purpose of the six-month pilot is to allow Halifax Transit staff to better understand the impact of the program on transit ridership and fare revenues.

The program is designed to increase access to public transit for more children and encourage the use of public transportation by youth, which will ideally lead to continued use of sustainable transportation into adulthood. This is consistent with the goals of the Integrated Mobility Plan and aligns with the Council priority of building a more healthy and livable community. At the end of the pilot, Halifax Transit staff will analyse the impact of the pilot on ridership and revenue and provide a recommendation to Regional Council on the continuation of the program.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The six-month pilot is estimated to reduce fare revenues by \$300,000 in 2019/20. This pilot can be accommodated within the current operating budget for Halifax Transit, which has seen recent increases in ridership and fare revenues, including a growing program with the Department of Community Services. Budgeted fare revenues of \$35,192,000 are expected to be achieved in 2019/20, notwithstanding the six-month youth free pilot.

If the Youth Free Transit program is continued, annual fare revenues would be reduced by \$600,000 in subsequent years. However, in the long term, this initiative could have a positive impact on teenage and adult ridership, which could result in increased fare revenues in those categories.

RISK CONSIDERATION

There is a risk that the pilot will have a greater (negative) impact on revenue or a lesser impact on ridership than estimated or anticipated. The relatively short duration of the pilot and the program review, after the six months, will contain these risks.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A communications plan for the fare structure and fare changes is in place and includes information on the planned Pilot.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

This project is supportive of the Council Priority Outcome of building Healthy, Livable communities, as it aims to make it more convenient for residents to choose sustainable transportation options for everyday transportation purposes. This is reflected in the enhanced access to transit service which in the long term could result in higher transit ridership, and reduced dependence on single occupancy vehicles.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Halifax Regional Council could decide not to implement the Youth Free Transit Pilot.
2. Halifax Regional Council could decide to delay the implementation the Youth Free Transit Pilot.

ATTACHMENTS

None.

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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