

To: Mayor & Members of City Council

From: Mayor’s Community and Social Well-being Task Force

Re: Free Transit for Students Promotion

AIM

To recommend a free transit promotion for students.

BACKGROUND

Youth services and support have been identified as the focus of the Mayor’s Community and Social Well-being Task Force for 2024/2025. Youth transportation affordability and access have been recognized as items the Task Force supports.

COMMENTS

Free transit for youth can offer a range of community benefits, including:

- **Increased Accessibility:** It allows young people to travel to school, jobs, and extracurricular activities without the barrier of transportation costs, promoting equal opportunities.
- **Encouragement of Public Transit Use:** Early exposure to public transit can foster lifelong habits of using public transport, reducing reliance on cars and promoting sustainable travel.
- **Reduced Traffic Congestion:** By encouraging youth to use public transit rather than personal vehicles, communities can experience less traffic congestion and reduced wear on local roads.
- **Environmental Benefits:** Increased public transit use leads to lower greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to a healthier environment.
- **Economic Savings for Families:** Free transit reduces the financial burden on families, allowing them to allocate resources to other essential needs.
- **Enhanced Independence:** Free transit provides youth with greater mobility, helping them develop independence and life skills related to navigation and time management.
- **Community Engagement:** By facilitating access to community events, cultural activities, and social gatherings, free transit encourages youth participation in their communities.
- **Reduced Social Isolation:** Accessible transit options can help connect youth with peers and support networks, reducing feelings of isolation.
- **Support for Extracurricular Activities:** Free transit allows students to participate in sports, clubs, and other after-school programs, enhancing their overall development.

The idea of a free transit for students promotion was presented to the Transit Department for information-gathering and possible implementation details.

Current Student Ridership

Students make up 30% of current ridership and accounted for 167,167 rides in 2023, not including students who rode on group passes.

Current Fares

The cost of an unlimited student pass is \$53 per month. A single-ride cash fare is \$2.75. The transit system is heavily subsidized as the City's cost for a single ride is \$9.96.

Implementation Details

For ease of use during the promotion, Transit staff recommend allowing high school students and college students to simply present their student cards before boarding the bus. Elementary students would be deemed young enough for the bus driver to make a visual assessment that they are students. The driver would manually key in the ride on the TransitFare box when a student boards to track ridership during the promotion. This approach removes barriers by preventing students from having to attend a bus pass vendor location to obtain a free bus pass and makes the implementation easier for transit staff.

Cost

The estimated cost for such a promotion is \$35,000 per month. This calculation is based on average student ridership taken at the cash fare. Although student ridership is anticipated to increase with such a promotion, the cost is meant to compensate for normal lost revenue in the Transit budget rather than covering additional revenue generated by the promotion (i.e. making the system "whole").

The Community and Social Well-Being Reserve Fund has \$50,000 remaining for 2024. The Task Force recommends using \$35,000 from the Reserve to fund such a promotion for the month of November while students are still in class. The funds would be transferred from the Reserve Fund into the Transit Fares revenue line of the 2024 budget. Transit staff will work with Marketing and Communications to market the promotion. Staff could then report back to both the Task Force and Council on the outcomes (i.e. ridership, feedback, etc.) following the completion of the promotion.

RECOMMENDATION

That Woodstock City Council approves \$35,000 from the Community and Social Well-Being Reserve Fund to fund a Free Transit for Students promotion for the month of November 2024.

Authored by: Amy Humphries, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer/City Clerk & Harold deHaan, City Engineer

Approved by: Mayor Jerry Acchione