

**TRANSIT FARE ADJUSTMENTS
REGINA CITY COUNCIL
JULY 13 2022
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I will begin by thanking City Council for passing the 2022 Transit Master Plan. I especially appreciate the Plan's commitment to equity and to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

However, the recommendation to "eliminate transit fares for children 13 years and under....when accompanied by a fare paying adult," while an improvement over the current situation, is insufficient both in terms of equity and addressing the climate crisis.

Let me start with equity. There are two issues here.

First, insisting that children be accompanied by a fare paying adult: Ten year olds often move about the city independently. That was true even back in the day when I was a ten year old riding the bus, though I can't remember whether I paid a fare or not. So please drop the "when accompanied by a fare paying adult" requirement for fare free access for those 13 and under."

Second, high school students are excluded from the free access to Transit service recommendation. School attendance often hinges on access to transportation. At a meeting I attended not too long ago, we were told that some Regina high school students are unable to get to school, especially in winter when it is too cold to walk or bike, because their families cannot afford the \$64 a month youth bus pass.

This is unconscionable! Regina high school students need equal access to education!

Please, in the name of equity, make Regina Transit fare free for everyone 18 and under, plus anyone, regardless of age, attending high school.

In terms of addressing the climate crisis, the exclusion of 14 – 18 year olds from free access to Transit service is also a problem. As the Transit Master Plan says: "Public transit plays an important role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions." This is because, as many studies show, the private passenger vehicle is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. As the plan also states: "Sustainable travel behaviours are best established at an early age."

I will repeat what I said in my May 4 2022 presentation to City Council: If fare free transit is only offered to those 13 and under, teenagers are likely to view riding the bus as only for children—as something to be put away with other childish things.

In the name of climate action, please make Regina Transit fare free for everyone 18 and under, plus anyone attending high school.

How to pay for it? That is, of course, the big question. As the report before you today states: The cost of providing fare free service to all high school students would be about \$1.9 million annually in lost revenue and to purchase additional buses.

Regina's 2021 budget reduced transit's operating budget from \$40 million in 2020 to \$39 million. In the name of equity and climate action, how about adding \$2 million to the 2023 transit budget?

I will end by making one more appeal to Regina City Council, though it is only indirectly related to the report you are considering.

As we all know, the price of gas has risen sharply in the last few months, making it even more costly to drive a car. Many individuals and families are feeling the pinch. This might be an opportune moment for the City of Regina to launch a Get On The Bus campaign.

Here are a few selling points for the campaign:

- Riding the bus is cheaper than driving a car. You will save money, not only on gas, but also on parking, vehicle maintenance, new tires...the list goes on.
- Riding the bus helps the climate. Transit is a low emissions alternative to driving.
- Contrary to what some may think, riding the bus is also a real pleasure.
 - There are many things you don't have to worry about when you use transit. For example: finding a parking space, getting a parking or a speeding ticket, having an accident.
 - There are also many positive pleasures. For example: You can visit with your fellow passengers. You can look out the window and admire the scenery. You can daydream. You can read. You can even text to your heart's content.
 - Another plus is that you can get some of your daily exercise walking to the bus stop.

So let's all get on the bus. Let's also make it easier for high school students to get on the bus by including them in the fare free transit recommendation.