

**TRANSIT MASTER PLAN
REGINA CITY COUNCIL
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Regina's 2022 Transit Master Plan was, for the most part, a joy to read. There are so many excellent recommendations in it, including:

- More frequent service
- Earlier and later service
- Better Sunday and holiday service.

These are improvements that many Regina transit users have been requesting.

I was also pleased to see the recommendation that 11th Avenue downtown “continue to be accessible, with a high-quality bus stop” (30). As the Plan observes, downtown 11th Avenue remains one of the most popular destinations for transit users. Any other location would make downtown Regina, with its shops, businesses, and banks, much less accessible to those of us who use transit.

And it's not merely a matter of convenience. Many transit users have mobility issues which make having to move even short distances on foot or by wheel a big challenge, especially in winter.

On the subject of accessibility, I was especially thrilled to see the repeated commitment, not only to accessibility, but also to equity, and inclusion in both the City of Regina recommendation document (pages 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) and the Transit Master Plan itself (pages 11, 13, 14, 37, and 38).

When I got to the section on fares, however, I was more than a little dismayed. Most of the recommendations have to do with the digitalization of transit fare payment through smartphone applications and debit and credit cards. Such technologies assume a certain level of affluence—one that many transit users do not possess.

At this point in the plan, the commitment to accessibility, equity, and inclusion seems to have been thrown out the window. This is especially upsetting since several of the commitment statements explicitly include “regardless of their economic situation” (13 & 14).

To add insult to injury, the Plan then recommends that those who pay their fare in cash be charged more than those who pay digitally (41). Single fares are already more expensive per ride. This needs to be changed—unless Regina wants to be known as a city with a transit system that engages in anti-poor discrimination.

According to the Plan, “Regina Transit’s current fare system...present[s] challenges and barriers to accessing the system” (41). The main barrier to accessing Regina Transit for many people is the fare itself:

Youth 5 – 14 years of age or attending high school: \$2.75 per ride or \$64 for a 31 day pass
 Adults: \$3.25 per ride or \$88 for a 31 day pass

Approximately 47,000 Regina residents live below the poverty line (*Saskatchewan Child and Family Report 2021*, p 2). That’s 47,000 people with an income that is not enough to cover basic living expenses. And while some will be eligible for the \$25 monthly low income bus pass, \$25 is still a lot of money if you only get \$915 a month—the amount those on the Saskatchewan Income Support program receive.

On a more positive note, the Report also recommends fare free transit for children 12 years old and younger, an improvement over the current situation of fare free transit for children under the age of five. But on two counts this recommendation is not sufficient.

First, there is again the question of accessibility, equity, and inclusion.

Approximately 9,400 children live in poverty in Regina (*Poverty In Regina Public Schools*, p 3). If the Transit Master Plan is approved, children 12 and under will have fare free transit. But what about those aged 13 -18? They still need to get to school and other places.

A few weeks ago, I was coming home on the bus. When it stopped at the Golden Mile, a young girl, a teenager, got on. When she tapped her pass on the farebox, it registered empty. The driver told her to get off the bus and go and put money on her pass. She got off the bus and went and sat back down in the bus shelter. Clearly she didn’t have money to put on her pass.

Another passenger and I gathered our wits and paid her fare. When the girl got back on the bus she was crying.

No one should be refused service for lack of a fare!

In the name of accessibility, equity, and inclusion, please make Regina Transit fare free for everyone 18 years old and younger—**as a first step toward fare free transit for all.**

The recommendation that children 12 and under have fare free transit is also insufficient on another ground. As the report says: “Public transit plays an important role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by providing alternative mobility options that reduce reliance on single occupancy vehicles” (4). As the report also states: “Sustainable travel behaviours are best established at an early age” (42).

However, if fare free transit is only offered to those 12 and under, teenagers, rather than becoming transit users for life, are likely to view riding the bus as something only children do—as something to be put away with other childish things.

A climate crisis is at our door. Free transit is a way for Regina to meet its climate targets.

- In 2016, Kingston Ontario eliminated transit fares for all high school students.
- In 2019, Victoria BC eliminated transit fares for everyone 18 years old and under.
- This fall, Victoria will be having a city-wide referendum on fare free transit for all.
- Over 100 cities and towns around the world have introduced fully free transit.

These are the models Regina should follow.

How to pay for it? Regina Transit is subsidized by local taxes. But so too are private vehicles. It is, after all, Regina taxpayers who foot the bill for road construction and maintenance. Indeed, according to the 2017 Regina Transportation Master Plan, “Historically, a large portion of Regina’s transportation budget has been dedicated to roadways” (12).

Yet we aren’t charged a fee to drive down a Regina roadway. Why do we continue to encourage driving?

Fare free transit addresses so many issues, including accessibility, equity, and inclusion, along with the climate emergency. By encouraging people to get out of their cars and on to the bus, fare free transit also reduces traffic congestion and accidents, as well as air and noise pollution.

Fare free transit is also a way of improving efficiency, as it saves all the money currently spent on collecting fares. It also makes the boarding of buses more time efficient as there is no fare to be paid or card to be swiped.

In the name of accessibility, equity, inclusion, sustainability, health and safety, and efficiency, I ask you to please make Regina Transit fare free for everyone 18 years old and younger—as a **first step toward fare free transit for all.**

Indeed, if Regina acted quickly, we could go into the records as the first Canadian city to mandate fare free transit for all.

Florence Stratton