

2

YORK REGION TRANSIT FREE RIDE POLICY

The Transit Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, January 11, 2005, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The York Region Transit “Free Ride” Policy (*see Attachment 1*), which has been modified to provide free rides to any clients associated with accredited organizations who have a visual impairment, be adopted, and that staff be authorized to implement this policy commencing March 1, 2005.

2. PURPOSE

The subject report responds to a request from Transit Committee and Regional Council, when reviewing a report entitled “York Region Transit Complimentary Ride Policies”. The request was to obtain input from the Region’s Accessibility Advisory Committee, as well as the local municipal committees, as it applies to the provision of free rides for clients of the Canadian National Institute of the Blind (CNIB).

3. BACKGROUND

The purpose of the April 15, 2004 “Complimentary Ride Policy Report” was to seek Transit Committee and Regional Council approval to formalize a policy for the distribution of complimentary fare media for travel training, and also to adopt a free ride policy for emergency services personnel and CNIB patrons on York Region Transit (YRT).

At the time of amalgamation, York Region Transit assumed complimentary pass programs administered by the local municipal transit systems. The purpose of these programs was to allow groups to provide transit training to persons with special needs. The municipalities assessed groups on an individual basis and provided varying numbers of complimentary passes based on each request. Over the past few years, YRT staff has received several requests from groups and agencies for complimentary fare media to assist them with their program transportation requirements. Transit Committee reviewed the staff report and adopted the following recommendation:

- The Travel Training Policy be adopted to provide free transportation for individuals represented by agencies with special needs, including cognitive and physical disabilities, while conducting travel training programs in order to use conventional public transit safely and independently.

In addition to the complimentary pass programs, there was a need to consolidate and formalize a policy to identify when persons can ride free on YRT conventional transit services. Informally, YRT allowed emergency services (police, fire and paramedics) in uniform or with official identification, as well as CNIB patrons with identification, to ride free on all YRT operated services. After reviewing the report, Transit Committee made the following recommendations:

- The Free Ride Policy, as it applies to Emergency Service personnel, refer to Police Officers, Fire Fighters or Paramedics in uniform only.
- The Free Ride Policy, as it applies to members of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), be referred to the Region's Accessibility Advisory Committee for their input and comments.

Regional Council, at its meeting of April 22, 2004, requested that in addition to staff contacting the Region's Accessibility Advisory Committee, that the CNIB issue also be referred to the local municipalities' Accessibility Advisory Committees for their input and comment.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The "Complimentary Ride Policies Report" was forwarded on May 5, 2004 to the Accessible Advisory Committees of the Region and the local municipalities, requesting their input on the free transit ride policy and its application to members of the CNIB.

Based on the response and discussions held, staff are recommending that since not all visually-impaired persons are members of the CNIB, the "Free Ride Policy" be revised to include any clients of an approved organization operating within the Region that deals with accessible training of persons with visual impairments. The attached Free Ride Policy has been adjusted accordingly to reflect the above direction.

4.1 Relationship to Vision 2026

As part of Vision 2026, York Region has identified the need to improve the transportation opportunities for residents and businesses within the Region. The "Free Ride" and "Travel Training" policies support the goal of improved transportation opportunities by building transit ridership while encouraging positive community relationships.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As reported in the April 15, 2004 report to Transit Committee, the costs to provide free transit rides to uniformed emergency personnel and CNIB patrons will be minimal. It is also felt that the impact of adding any other additional organizations with visually impaired clients would also be minimal.

YRT staff will monitor the operating impact and costs created by the Complimentary Ride Policies - Free Ride and Travel Training, throughout 2005, as part of its normal service monitoring program, and report back to Committee and Council related to any future concerns.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

As reported earlier, the approval of these policies will foster positive partnerships with local agencies and groups and provide additional transportation opportunities.

7. CONCLUSION

York Region Transit will continue to support the goal of accessible transit for all residents and businesses within the Region through the implementation of policies such as those covered in this report. Although there is an overall cost to operate these policy programs, the benefits for both YRT and the community are viewed as greater. The revision of the “Free Ride” policy to include any clients associated with organizations involved with visual impairments ensures an equitable application of the policy with minimal cost impact.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is attached to this report.)