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YORK REGION TRANSIT COMPLIMENTARY RIDE POLICIES

(Regional Council at its meeting on April 22, 2004 amended the following Clause to provide that The Free Ride Policy, as it applies to members of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), also be referred to the area municipalities' Accessibility Advisory Committees for their input and comment.)

The Transit Committee recommends:

1. The following report, April 1, 2004, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works be received and Recommendation 1 contained therein be adopted;
2. The Free Ride Policy as it applies to members of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) be referred to the Accessibility Advisory Committee for their input and comments; and
3. The Free Ride Policy as it applies to Emergency Service personnel refer to Police Officers, Fire Fighters or Paramedics in uniform only.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. That the York Region Transit 'Travel Training' Policy (*see Attachment 1*) be adopted and that staff be authorized to implement this policy beginning May 1, 2004.
2. That the York Region Transit 'Free Ride' Policy (*see Attachment 2*) be adopted and that York Region Transit be authorized to implement this policy beginning May 1, 2004.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is 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).

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Complimentary Fare Media for Travel Training

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. In total, three groups were provided with complimentary fare media by the local municipal transit systems. The combined annual value of the complimentary fare media amounted to approximately \$15,000.

Over the past few years, YRT staff has received several requests from groups and agencies for complimentary fare media to assist with their program transportation requirements. YRT staff assessed each request on an individual basis and provided another 11 groups and agencies with complimentary tickets and passes. In the absence of an official policy on the distribution of complimentary fare media, groups were accepted on the basis that the complimentary fare media would be used for transit training purposes only.

3.2 Free Ride – Emergency Services and CNIB Customers

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 services. Informally, YRT allowed emergency services (police, fire and paramedics) in uniform or with official identification, as well as CNIB passengers with identification to ride free on all YRT operated services.

YRT staff conducted a survey of several other transit systems in the province to determine whether they had a formal policy for the provision of complimentary fare media or free rides to any individuals or groups. Five categories were highlighted relating to free rides during the survey which included emergency services (police, paramedics and firefighters), postal workers and CNIB patrons. In addition, a question was asked as to whether the transit system offered complimentary or discounted passes to any individuals or groups. Survey results are summarized in the following section.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Complimentary Fare Media for Travel Training

4.1.1 Survey and Program Review Results

Results from the survey indicate that the majority of transit systems do not have a program or policy which addresses complimentary fare media for transit travel training. However, a few transit systems did indicate that a discount was made available to social service agencies in order to encourage transit travel opportunities for such groups.

A further needs evaluation of the current YRT complimentary fare media programs was completed by staff to assess the foundation and application for such a program in York Region. Findings indicate that 90% of the current participants utilize the complimentary fare media in order to train persons with cognitive and physical disabilities to use public transit independently and safely. Some of the larger participant groups using this program include the York Region School Boards, the Autism Society, York South Association for Community Living and other summer camp programs for youth. Further evaluation of the program also indicates that there is not currently a consistent registration or fare media distribution process for participating groups. As a result, there is a necessity to establish both a registration process and policy in order to formalize the YRT complimentary pass program.

4.1.2 Benefits of the Program

YRT encourages the safe use of public transit for all segments of the community and recognizes that some individuals with special needs, including cognitive and physical disabilities, may need a certain amount of training in order to use conventional public transit services safely and independently. Programs such as these provide a benefit to YRT as a community partner. Some of the key advantages to the program include:

- Fosters positive community relationships.
- Builds community awareness.
- Shows leadership in the transit industry.
- Encourages the safe use of public transit through training programs.
- Allows individual with special needs to become independent transit users.
- Builds ridership.

4.1.3 Next Steps

Given the benefits of the program for YRT and the community, it is felt that this program should continue in order to maintain positive community partnerships. YRT staff recommends that the program be formalized in order to develop a consistent approach for all participating agencies and future applicants. Attachment 1 outlines the proposed policy and criteria for adoption and implementation beginning May 1, 2004.

4.2 Free Ride – Emergency Services and CNIB Patrons

4.2.1 Survey and Program Review Results

4.2.1.1 Emergency Services

Results from the survey of other transit agencies throughout the Province shows that there is a blend of policies for emergency services personnel (police, firefighters, paramedics). The majority of transit systems surveyed allow police to ride free on the transit service while in uniform or with presentation of police identification. For firefighters and paramedics, the surveys showed that a few transit systems allow them to ride free in uniform but the majority indicated that they would pay full fare or did not have a policy in place.

4.2.1.2 CNIB Patrons

In addition to emergency services personnel, the survey addressed CNIB patrons. In all cases, other transit systems had a policy that allowed CNIB patrons to ride free with CNIB identification. This arrangement between transit systems and the CNIB has existed for many decades.

4.2.2 Next Steps

In order to be consistent in York Region, staff recommends that all emergency services personnel (police, firefighters and paramedics) be allowed to ride free on all YRT operated services while in uniform or with official identification when travelling to/from work or while on duty.

YRT currently allows CNIB patrons to ride free on conventional transit services and recommends that this continue on a formal basis. Attachment 2 outlines the proposed free ride policy for emergency services personnel and CNIB patrons.

4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026

As a part of Vision 2026, York Region has identified the need to improve transportation opportunities for residents and businesses in the Region. Programs such as these will encourage positive community relationships and build transit ridership opportunities in York Region.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Current Program Costs

YRT now partners with 14 groups and agencies to offer complimentary fare media for transit travel training purposes. The current distribution of fare media amounts to approximately \$75,000 annually. The complimentary value currently varies with each agency depending on the number of participants in the program and the length of time required for training. In the absence of a formal policy, agencies have not been limited to the amount of fare media or length of training.

5.2 Future Program Costs

The new policy provides a limit to the number of tickets (20 tickets) per person trained at a current value of \$28.00 per student and \$40.00 per adult. In addition, it limits each agency to a maximum of 50 persons (trainer and trainee combined) per month. Any fare media requirements above the limit would be purchased at the current YRT fare media value.

It is difficult to assess the future overall costs at this time since the number of persons being trained was not previously identified. The future application form will provide us with the number of individuals (trainees and trainer) who will utilize the program on a monthly basis and therefore staff will be equipped to track the overall costs. It is estimated however, that there will be some reduction in costs due to the new limits of the

program and the requirement to purchase YRT fare media for the additional training of each individual over the allotted amounts.

Costs will be minimal for emergency services personnel and CNIB patrons.

YRT staff will report back to Transit Committee and Regional Council on the costs associated with these new policies.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

This program will foster positive partnerships with local agencies and groups who provide transit training to persons with special needs.

7. CONCLUSION

YRT has taken a leadership role in the transit industry by implementing programs such as these for the benefit of the community. Although there is an overall cost to operate the programs, the many benefits for both YRT and the community are viewed as a greater benefit. It is therefore recommended that the attached policies be approved and implemented beginning May 1, 2004.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(A copy of the attachments referred to in the foregoing is included with this report and is also on file in the Office of the Regional Clerk.)