



City of
Peterborough

To: **Members of General Committee**

From: **Cynthia Fletcher**
Commissioner of Infrastructure and Planning Services

Meeting Date: **September 14, 2020**

Subject: **Report IPSTR20-027**
Post Secondary Transit Pass Agreements

Purpose

A report to recommend interim agreements with Fleming College Student Administrative Council and Trent Central Student Association.

Recommendation

That Council approve the recommendation outlined in Report IPSTR20-027, dated September 14, 2020, of the Commissioner of Infrastructure and Planning Services as follows:

That staff execute agreements with the Trent Central Student Association and Fleming Student Administrative Council for the implementation of interim Universal Transit Pass Agreements, which are contingent on the interim Transit routes remaining in place until the Transit Route Review consultation is complete and the long-term routes are approved by Council.

Budget and Financial Implications

The 2020 approved budget for Transit assumed that existing (U-Pass) agreements and levels of transit service typically delivered for Trent and Fleming Student Associations would generate approximately \$2,000,000 and \$1,020,000 respectively, for a total annual revenue forecast of \$3,020,000.

With the Provincial and Local emergency declarations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, post secondary transit services were suspended in mid-March 2020. Revenues of \$860,187 were received for post secondary services delivered between January and March 2020, approximately \$390,000 less than expected for the full semester.

With the cancelation of summer express services to the Trent and Fleming campuses, the revenue loss to the end of August 2020 was estimated at \$910,000, which was included in the total estimated revenue loss/additional cost for Transit of \$2,050,000 as presented to Council in Report CLSFS20-037.

The 2020 approved budget included \$1,250,000 in revenues for post secondary transit services for the fall 2020 semester. However, this will not be possible due to classes mostly going on-line and the inability of the transit service to run the express routes as they traditionally have and is a potential further loss.

Executing agreements with both financial institutions, is expected to secure approximately \$643,000, comprised of \$433,000 from TCSA and \$210,000 from FSAC, in base net funding for the fall semester of 2020 which will assist in reducing the extent of further revenue losses for Transit as the community continues to reopen gradually. No additional operating hours or costs are required to obtain this funding contribution beyond those already built into the Fall transit schedules.

Additional revenues beyond these base amounts may be generated for delivery of other services for post secondary students, such as late-night bus services or special exam services. These additional services would be billed to the respective student associations on a cost recovery basis, as we have done in the past, and would be subject to resource availability.

Background

Existing U-Pass Agreements

Peterborough Transit has had a longstanding and successful U-Pass arrangement with the Trent Central Student Association (TCSA). This U-Pass provides approximately \$1.9 million in operating revenue to Peterborough Transit (about 36% of total fare revenues collected) and generates about 1.48 million rides per year (about 31% of total annual ridership). Through the arrangement with TCSA, the student association collects and

administers the pass revenue collected from students and pays for the enhanced transit service provided to the University campus.

Trent and Transit staff work collaboratively to develop service plans for each semester that meet the needs of students and can be supported operationally by Transit. Traditionally Peterborough Transit was able to offer two Express Routes serving the University, along with other special services tailored to serve student events, exam schedules, and convocation ceremonies at virtually no cost to City residents. Residents were also able to use these services by paying regular bus fares. Express routes typically continue to run during the summer semester albeit at reduced frequency of service. Service delivered to TCSA is billed on an hourly basis and is invoiced three times per year, following each semester.

Fleming express services began in the fall of 2016 modelled after the service arrangement in place with TCSA. The service launched with 1 initial express route and the second express route commenced in Fall of 2017. Typical fall and winter semesters service includes two express routes plus a late-night service. In 2019, Fleming generated revenues of \$1,100,000 (about 16% of total annual fare revenue) and generated 1.18 million rides (about 25% of total annual ridership).

During the summer semester, additional buses would typically be put in service on the former Lansdowne route to provide extra capacity to service the campus, and these additional services were billed to Fleming Student Administrative Council (FSAC) on a cost recovery basis. The Fleming agreement acknowledges the existing base services that are provided to the campus (regular routes) and acknowledges that base services will continue to be delivered to the campus. Service delivered to FSAC is also billed on an hourly basis and is invoiced three times per year, following each semester.

The City benefits from the additional ridership that is generated from the U-Pass agreements in the following ways:

- The ridership increases that result from the U-Pass agreements contribute to the City's annual Provincial Gas Tax allocation as the formula used to calculate the Provincial Gas Tax allocation is 30% based on population and 70% based on ridership. With approximately 56% of total annual ridership attributed to post-secondary students, it is estimated that approximately \$760,000 of the City's 2019-2020 allocation of \$1,896,894 (40%) can be attributed to the ridership generated by post-secondary students.
- Similar ridership-based funding allocations were used to establish funding allocations the City recently received for the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program - Transit Stream, and the recent Safe Restart Funding (Transit Program) announced in August 2020 to support municipalities as they deal with budget shortfalls due to COVID.

- The increased ridership significantly contributes to the City's Transportation Master Plan goal of increasing transit use from 4% of peak period travel to 6% of peak period travel by 2031. Providing a service that is convenient for students is a proven way of building ridership patterns that can last beyond their student years. The ability to reduce auto travel demand to and from the Fleming College Sutherland Campus and the Symons Campus at Trent University has helped to limit the growth in traffic on area roads, such as Brealey Drive, Water Street and Armour Road and continued growth in ridership on these routes can help to avoid or defer costly capital improvements to widen roads in the future or additional student parking facilities within the campuses.
- Shifting students from auto modes of travel and increasing the share of student trips made by transit can also play a noteworthy role in meeting the Community Greenhouse Gas Emission reduction targets outlined in the City's Climate Change Action Plan.
- The introduction of stable sources of revenues for Peterborough Transit can allow for service delivery to be enhanced to the benefit of all residents without increasing the tax burden, and can allow for existing service delivery and resources to be allocated where they best meet service needs without adding to operating budgets.

Implications During COVID Pandemic

With the Provincial and Local emergency declarations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, post secondary transit services (express routes) were suspended in mid March 2020, and special services typically delivered during exam periods throughout April were also suspended. Until the suspension of service, the City collected revenues of \$860,187 for post secondary services delivered in 2020, which was approximately \$390,000 lower than forecast for the entire semester.

With the cancelation of the summer semester classes at both institutions, summer express services to the Trent and Fleming campuses were also cancelled, representing a revenue loss of approximately \$520,000.

In total, the revenue loss from post secondary service delivery to the end of August 2020 was estimated at \$910,000, which was included in the total estimated revenue loss for Transit of \$2,050,000 as presented to Council in Report CLSFS20-037 – COVID-19 Response and Financial Impact.

Report CLSFS20-037 also noted that Transit Operating costs during this period did not reduce to the same extent as revenues, as the new operating parameters for all transit agencies established by the Province and in consultation with Public Health officials resulted in additional costs estimated at \$338,600 due to:

- the need to redeploy staff for enhanced cleaning of buses between runs
- reduced passenger capacity (requiring additional standby buses to be deployed for overflow situations)
- the deployment of resources to provide special services to ensure transportation was available for essential service workers after hours.

Fuel savings of approximately \$100,000 and provincial funding of approximately \$77,500 were offset by the increased costs estimated at \$338,600 to the end of August, to maintain service delivery at reduced levels.

Trent / Fleming Fall Semester Outlook

There has been uncertainty with the fall return to school for Trent University and Fleming College in terms of enrolment and how to deliver classes.

Trent University has developed a multi-access approach for the fall semester to ensure uninterrupted learning for students during this period of uncertainty. Because of the capacity constraints imposed by the need for physical distancing and the occupancy limit of 50 people for indoor settings, the majority of fall classes will be delivered through online formats. Nevertheless, Trent has indicated that a large majority of Trent students continue to reside close to campus and they are still expecting approximately 1000 students to be living in residence buildings on campus in the fall in order to access the array of campus services available to support students. A limited number of programs that require in-person instruction, use of lab space, or require specialized hands-on or small cohort courses, workshops, seminars, etc. will resume in the fall as well.

Fleming College has developed a similar plan for gradually reopening their Sutherland Campus, with a mixture of online program delivery and hybrid programs, where some portions of the program are delivered in classrooms or labs where physical distancing and occupancy limits can be respected. Residence buildings at Fleming will also re-open with reduced occupancy limits in place.

Public Health and MTO restrictions on COVID safety measures such as enhanced cleaning, the wearing of masks on Transit Vehicles (and other locations where 2m distancing cannot be achieved) and reduced passenger capacity on buses means that delivery of transit services to the Trent and Fleming campuses cannot continue as it did in the past. The City would require many more buses and certified drivers to deliver former routes at the same level of service, while meeting the regulatory requirements intended to ensure community safety. In the past, many post secondary school runs would see passenger loads of 50-60 students per bus during peak periods, but current restrictions impose limits of 18-20 passengers per vehicle. On many regular routes, these limits already require the need to provide for standby buses to ensure riders are not left at on-route bus stops. This reduces the resources available to provide express buses to the campuses, and as a result, Peterborough Transit could not commit to run the traditional post secondary express services without significantly increasing resources.

In reviewing the transit route system put in place as part of the City's COVID-19 response, the Trent and Fleming student associations have recognized that by relocating the main transfer hub from the downtown terminal to four hubs, two of which are located at the respective campuses, the capacity of the base service provided to each campus has been improved. They have sent letters to the City recognizing the improvements which are attached as Appendix A. The student associations are confident that the current route system can support the travel needs of students, not only to the campuses, but the new routes will provide improved access to new housing and employment opportunities across the City.

With the above points in mind, the TCSA and FSAC have approached the City to enter into interim U-Pass Agreements for the 2020-2021 school year to ensure that students are able to take advantage of the unlimited travel the U-Pass provides on the Transit system.

Interim U-Pass Agreement Framework

The proposed Interim U-Pass agreement is structured differently from past agreements with the student associations. In the past, the student associations paid the full operating costs for the express routes serving the respective campuses on a full cost recovery basis. In return, students were allowed to access any bus route across the City on an unlimited basis for the 12-month period covering the regular school year and summer months. As the City can not commit to running separate express routes to the two campus in the fall semester as has been done in previous years, enhanced base service is provided to the two campuses by virtue of using the campuses as new transfer points for the route system.

The proposed interim funding agreement for the fall semester is based on each student association providing approximately 50% of the fall semester revenue paid to the City in 2019 to cover the extension of the U-Pass agreement, which allows students unlimited rides on the current transit route system. Any additional services such as late-night routes, special exam shuttles, or other dedicated services would be billed to the respective student associations on an hourly basis as per the existing rates and would be provided by the City as resources allow.

During the fall semester, ridership monitoring will be undertaken to determine the need for any additional express services or increased frequency on the base route system. The framework for the contract contemplates an extension of this agreement into the winter semester, starting in January 2021.

The willingness of both student associations to enter into this agreement for the fall semester is based on their, and their student's, need for certainty and stability in the transit route structure and service plan over the school year and is contingent on the route remaining as they currently are. Both associations have stressed the importance of this to the students who have made housing and employment decisions for the upcoming year based on the transit route system that is currently in operation. This is not an issue

for the City as the intent is to leave these temporary routes in place until the full route review and consultation is complete and a more permanent route structure can be implemented. Reverting back to the original routes is not possible at this time due to continued COVID-19 concerns.

Given the importance of this to the students, the TCSA and FSAC is requesting a commitment from the City to maintain the current route structure and service levels until such time as the City has completed the Transit Route Review Study and has obtained Council approval of a permanent Transit Route system.

Next Steps

Upon approval of this report, staff will continue work to finalize the specific terms of the respective agreements with FSAC and TCSA for interim U-Pass programs with execution of final agreements in early October.

By the winter semester, barring any community rise in COVID-19 outbreaks or increased restrictions, both institutions expect a continued shift to more in-class learning, which will further increase the number of students using the transit system. The student associations at both institutions are collecting partial ancillary fees as part of student tuition for transit/transportation services in the winter semester in order to continue to support the U-Pass program the students rely on.

Longer-term Route Review

The Transit Route Review and Long-Term Growth Strategy Study was paused in the spring due to the restrictions placed on public gatherings due to COVID-19. The study was at the stage where 2-3 alternative transit route systems had been developed at an initial level, and the study team was preparing to start public consultation on the alternatives. Based on feedback received, one alternative would be refined and presented to Council for approval, along with an implementation plan.

Further consultation with all riders including post-secondary student input is an important consideration in developing this new plan. Both students and community riders are going through a period of adjustment related to the revised routes and will be able to provide meaningful feedback on the alternatives this fall. It is expected that the consultation work and refinement of alternatives developed to date will extend through the fall, with a recommendation brought to Council in Q1 of 2021.

It is recognized that there remains some concern with the new routes for some riders. Additional changes were made late in August to adjust and add frequency to address some of these concerns and staff will continue to monitor and adjust as needed and as the City is able.

Summary

The post-secondary U-Pass agreements with Trent Central Student Association and Fleming Student Administrative Council represent an important source of fare revenue for Peterborough Transit. The significant ridership boost generated by these agreements also provides the City with higher allocations of Provincial Gas Tax revenue and capital funding grants from senior levels of government than the City would otherwise receive.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the MOT/Public Health mandated measures put in place to protect transit users in the Community during the past 6 months has resulted in a major drop in ridership and associated fare revenue from Transit, with almost half related to cancellation of express routes serving the two campuses. The continued uncertainty related to the impact of COVID-19 on student ridership demand and the capacity of Peterborough Transit to provide traditional express routes to serve the Trent and Fleming institutions over the next 8 months has required a new approach to the traditional U-Pass funding model, which recognizes the critical role transit plays in serving the students.

The proposed Interim U-Pass Agreement Framework provides an important and stable source of fare revenue to Peterborough Transit over the upcoming months while non-student ridership and revenues slowly recover but is contingent upon the temporary route structure remaining in place. This revenue will allow for the continued delivery of transit service that the entire community depends upon.

Submitted by,

Cynthia Fletcher
Commissioner of Infrastructure and Planning Services

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Attachments

Appendix A - Correspondence dated July 16, 2020 from Trent Central Student Association

Appendix B - Correspondence dated July 27, 2020 from Fleming Student Administrative Council



July 16, 2020

To the honorable Mayor Diane Therrien and Councillors
Mayor's Office
500 George Street North
Peterborough, ON
Canada K9H 3R9

It has come to our attention that the City Council has been discussing the recent changes to city transit and the impacts those changes have had since inception on June 24, 2020. I was hoping to address the City Council on this matter in writing before any decisions were made on how to move forward, especially if reverting back to the old terminal hub system way was an option on the table.

I am addressing you as the Operations Manager on behalf of the Trent Central Student Association (TCSA). Since 2012 the TCSA has been entrusted by Trent University, and the students of Trent, with the responsibility of ensuring adequate transit service for Trent students. This responsibility was not taken lightly and the TCSA, in working closely with transit staff, have developed and maintained a highly successful and enviable system for Trent.

With that said, the system has not been without its growing pains and need for constant readjustment and placement of additional service where required. The most significant factor dictating service delivery changes has been the increase in Trent's population. It feels although we were always playing catch-up with demand.

Despite our continued efforts we knew things were reaching a tipping point. We simply could not continue to provide a high level of service with only the Trent East and West Bank buses making their way to campus. Yes there was the George North (which students lovingly nicknamed the G-No (emphasis on the NO) and the Nichols Park which never made it to campus but stopped a good twenty minute walk from any classroom. The result was students were either unwilling or unable to use the city route buses coming to Trent. Financially this also meant student money didn't extend past the East and West bank buses. Our financial contributions were confined to supporting only the service our students were utilizing; contributions were not being made to the bigger picture.

The lack of alternative routes left only two options for the 8000 plus students (and the faculty and staff who could also take advantage of those routes) to get to and from campus and ultimately to navigate the city. This also forced those students to live in and along the service corridors those buses travelled. What did this look like? Packed buses travelling to campus, sometimes three in a row, before they even passed Parkhill. Students trying to navigate shops and services in the city having to first enter the terminal before making their way to Walmart or Lansdowne. With most

choosing not to bother. Housing options severely restricted (east city rentals were not even a possibility).

When the city approached the TCSA back in 2016 to discuss how things could be improved, we were excited. We attended meetings and feedback sessions and looked at route and schedule options put forward by outside contractors hired to help get the service into a new decade. Yet none of those discussions ever lead to change and we continued year after year playing catch-up with numbers, while actually providing a restrictive service for Trent students, and Peterborough residences.

So when COVID emerged, and change was made mandatory, the TCSA accepted the new system with mostly open arms. Were there some concerns and issues to hammer out? Absolutely. Are there still tweaks to stops and flow of traffic to consider? Yes. But we went from a system run on how people felt comfortable to a system that changed the game and that may take some time to get comfortable with. In some ways having to introduce the change during COVID was problematic as the level of service was low and buses limited to the number of riders, so the learning curve and impact may have felt even more severe than in “normal” times. But with all things, it takes some time to learn the new way of being and doing.

The transit system in Peterborough needs to grow and stop forcing bodies into a downtown terminal. The system needs to recognize that housing shortages could be positively impacted with just the change of having the bus travelling up Armour Road actually stop in a residential area and not turn around in a dirt parking lot. It is my hope that the City Council give this system the time it deserves. Transit staff have put forward a plan they believe will work and one that addresses the issues that have for far too long been ignored. I believe transit staff, your city staff, should be allowed the opportunity and quite frankly the respect, to demonstrate the potential success of the new system. And there is no better time to give the new system this space, while we are all having to make adjustments to what we used to know, and how we used to navigate ourselves through life.

The TCSA fully supports the new system in place. Our students perhaps have the most adjustments to consider come September. But we are confident that this move is a move forward.

Best regards,

Tracy Milne
Operations and Services Manager
Trent Central Student Association



July 27, 2020

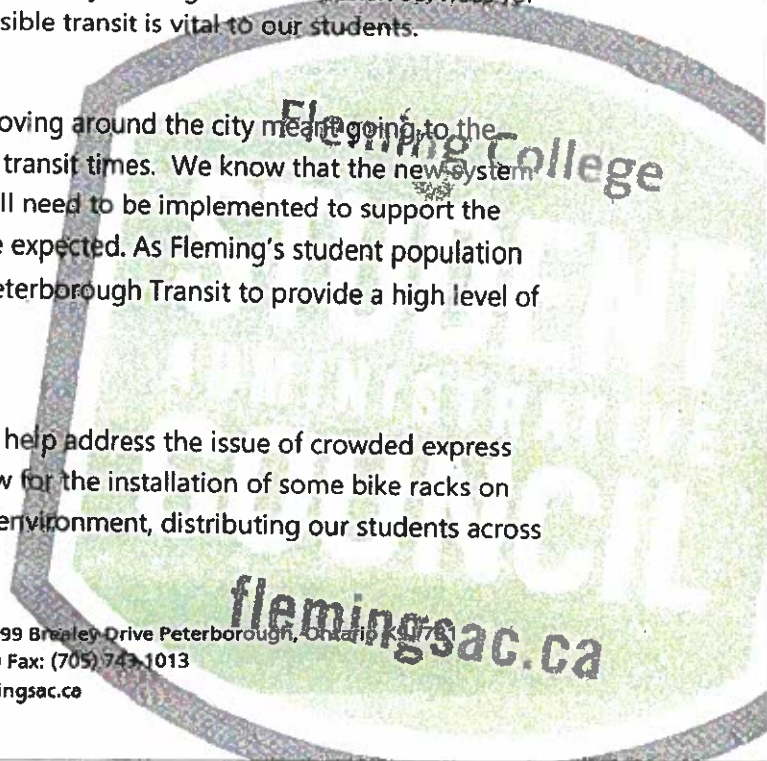
To the Honorable Mayor Diane Therrien and Councilors
The City of Peterborough
500 George Street North
Peterborough, ON
Canada K9H 3R9

The Student Administrative Council (SAC) at Fleming College is aware that City Council has been discussing the recent changes to the Peterborough Transit network and the affect that these changes have had.

As the General Manager, Fleming College Student Administrative Council, my role is to ensure that the students of Fleming College have access to appropriate levels of transit service. Since the implementation of the U-Pass agreement in 2016, Fleming SAC and Peterborough Transit have established a strong relationship built on the delivery of a high level of transit services for the students of Fleming College. Affordable, accessible transit is vital to our students.

Our students have long provided feedback that moving around the city meant going to the terminal and transferring, which often meant long transit times. We know that the new system will need to be adjusted and additional services will need to be implemented to support the requirements of Fleming students. Change is to be expected. As Fleming's student population continues to grow, our focus is on working with Peterborough Transit to provide a high level of service for our students.

Moving away from the downtown terminal should help address the issue of crowded express buses. I understand the new changes will also allow for the installation of some bike racks on buses, giving students the option to cycle. In this environment, distributing our students across the city on different routes makes sense.





STUDENT
ADMINISTRATIVE
COUNCIL

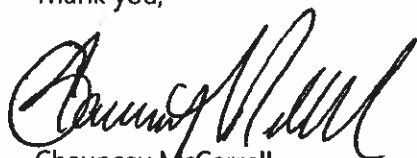
Fleming has been working with transit to implement the new change. We have had growing pains to be sure and we expect there will be more; however, the service delivery, with Fleming acting as a hub is a welcome change. The change will come with some frustration and new expectations for our students and city ridership, but change takes time and people will adapt to that change. The health crisis has compounded expectations for change and, understandably, people will feel that more keenly right now.

In addition to my role with Fleming, I am a long-time resident of the City of Peterborough. The transit system needed to grow and adapt. COVID highlighted the need to remove service from the downtown terminal and move to a city-wide network where people connect to other routes to more naturally meet the demands of more customers.

I would ask that the Mayor and Council support the work that has been done on the new routes and give it time to respond to tweaks and adjustments. To the benefit of Fleming staff, students, and faculty, we have relied on the subject matter experts in transit to plan bus service that will meet our needs. Transit staff has to make difficult decisions regularly, and no doubt this decision was not an easy one and required a significant amount of work to balance the health and safety of the community with the need to provide sufficient levels of bus service. Fleming supports taking time to assess the apparent merits of the new system and build on the early successes we see with reduced traffic to and at the downtown terminal and the new opportunities it provides for our students.

The Fleming College Student Administrative Council fully supports the new route network. We know that it will take time for our students to return fully to campus and that when they do, they will face the challenges of learning the new network. This is a work in progress and we are ready to partner with Peterborough Transit to move forward.

Thank you,



Chauncey McCarrell

General Manager

Fleming College Student Administrative Council

