



City of
Peterborough

To: Members of the General Committee

From: Ilmar Simanovskis, Commissioner, Municipal Operations

Meeting Date: September 15, 2025

Report: Youth Transit Pass Program, Report MOTR25-005

Subject

To present Council with an update on the status of the Youth Transit Pass Program, aimed at increasing ridership, improving access and education, and supporting long-term transit use by young residents of Peterborough.

Recommendation

That Council approve the recommendation outline in Report MOTR25-005, dated September 15, 2025, of the Commissioner, Municipal Operations as follows:

That Council receive the report on the status of the Youth Transit Pass Program for information.

Executive Summary

- The Youth Transit Pass Program has been developed as a strategic initiative to support the long-term sustainability of Peterborough Transit, while advancing key objectives of the City's Transportation Master Plan (TMP). Although youth aged 13–18 currently represent a small share of total ridership, they hold significant potential to help shift travel behaviour, increase transit use, and build a culture of sustainable mobility within the community.
- Guided by best practices from municipalities across Canada and grounded in local operational capacity, the program aims to reduce transportation barriers for youth, improve access to employment and social opportunities, and encourage lifelong transit habits. In addition, it is designed to contribute to broader municipal

goals, including economic development, social equity, environmental sustainability, and increased transit mode share.

- Key program components include: complimentary transit access for youth aged 13-18 during evenings, weekends, and summer months; annual registration with structured pass distribution and orientation; education-focused program design to support independent, confident transit use; and phased pilot implementation through 2025 and 2026, followed by an annual program delivery and evaluation.
- The proposed program model aligns with current transit operations and supports future growth by targeting off-peak periods for initial implementation. This approach allows Peterborough Transit to build capacity, manage resources effectively, and evaluate program impacts without overextending the system. Over time, the program will expand and adapt alongside service enhancements, allowing for data-driven adjustments and continuous community engagement.

Background

Program Objectives

Youth ridership is a key demographic for the long-term sustainability of Peterborough Transit. While youth aged 13–18 currently make up a small share of total transit trips, they represent a significant opportunity to grow overall ridership in the short-term and support the City's mode shift targets outlined in the Transportation Master Plan (TMP).

The TMP recommends several strategies to increase ridership, including the integration of fare subsidies. In recent years, a growing number of municipalities across Canada have begun offering subsidized or complimentary transit to youth, reporting positive impacts on ridership, equity, and broader community outcomes.

Aligning with these best practices, the Youth Transit Pass Program has been developed to address a comprehensive set of objectives.

Youth access and education:

- Reduce transportation barriers to youth
- Lessen financial pressures on families
- Improve youth access to part-time employment, extracurricular activities, and social opportunities
- Educate youth on how to use public transit services safely and effectively
- Instill sustainable travel habits among the next generation of commuters

Transit ridership:

- Increase Peterborough Transit ridership among youth (ages 13-18)
- Boost evening and weekend ridership to improve run productivity
- Grow off-peak ridership to support more frequent service
- Introduce transit to youth to support the cultural shifts that will move the City towards its 12% mode share target, as youth who ride transit continue to use transit as adults

By meeting these objectives, the program has the potential to deliver wide-ranging benefits that expand beyond youth and transit. By creating increased understanding and interest in public transit, and with it, greater uptake in transit use, the program can strengthen community connection and engagement, support local economic development through participation in employment and recreational activities, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and traffic congestion.

Program Overview

Transit service providers across the country are implementing a range of pilot and permanent programs that offer complimentary transit to specific age groups, including youth, children, and older adults. These programs vary in design and delivery but share common goals of increasing transit accessibility and long-term ridership.

Informed by a review of these models, an assessment of Peterborough Transit's current and projected service capacity, existing youth-focused transit initiatives, and consultations with key staff and stakeholders, a draft program model and implementation timeline for a Youth Transit Pass Program has been developed. The program is designed to align with both operational realities and the City's strategic goals.

Key Components of the Draft Program Model:

- Complimentary transit access for youth aged 13-18 during evenings, weekends, and summer months
- Annual pass distribution through Peterborough Transit registration process
- Initial pass distribution to include an in-person, on-bus orientation to Peterborough Transit services.

Draft Implementation Timeline:

- Fall 2025 - During this phase, stakeholder engagement (e.g., school boards, student transportation services, youth organizations, families, and Transit staff) will be prioritized to further develop program specifics and arrive at the final

program model and delivery methods. Consultations will also take place with the transit pass provider to identify appropriate systems for registration and data tracking. Additionally, a comprehensive communications plan will be developed to support program awareness and rollout.

- Winter 2025 - The focus will shift to developing the operational aspects of the program. This includes creating registration processes and forms, as well as orientation materials and scheduling procedures. Communications materials will also be prepared, and the evaluation plan will be finalized to ensure effective monitoring and assessment
- Spring 2026 - Final testing of processes and systems will take place to ensure everything is functioning as intended. Internal staff will receive training to support the successful delivery of the program. Promotional materials will be distributed, and registration and orientation will begin for youth aged 13 to 14 (Intermediate Students).
- Summer/Fall 2026 – Phased expansion of registration and orientation to youth aged 15 to 18 (Secondary Students) will be completed to fully roll out the program to youth aged 13-18 in Year One. Tracking and evaluation of the pilot year begins to assess program delivery and impact.

Following Year One, the Spring 2026 activities will be carried out annually to support new youth entering the eligible age group. A modified program of activities during the Summer and Fall of subsequent years will focus on supporting pass renewals for youth already enrolled in the program. Additional ongoing annual activities will include pass replacements, promotional efforts, and program evaluation.

Program Model and Implementation Timeline Rationale

In alignment with City Council direction and the objectives outlined in the City's Transportation Master Plan, the development of a complimentary transit pass program for youth has been explored. While the existing initiative for children under the age of 12 was implemented with minimal program infrastructure, a youth-focused program will benefit from a more structured approach.

Unlike younger children, youth are more likely to travel independently and make autonomous transportation choices. As such, the proposed program includes educational components (i.e., on-bus orientation, online materials) that aim to equip youth with the knowledge and confidence needed to navigate Peterborough Transit safely and effectively. This educational element fosters familiarity with the transit system, increases positive experiences with the service, and builds habits that support lifelong transit use. Jurisdictions that have implemented similar educational orientation components have seen high levels of youth participation, as well as strong support from families and community partners.

To ensure effective program delivery and evaluation, the proposed model includes registration and the issuance of a physical transit pass. This approach, most commonly used in other municipalities offering complimentary youth transit, enables the collection of detailed ridership data (e.g., usage by route, time of day, and season). This valuable information will allow Peterborough Transit to monitor program performance, assess its contribution to overall ridership growth, and report on outcomes with greater accuracy.

Additionally, a managed pass system supports operational efficiency by allowing for the replacement of lost cards, the renewal of passes, and age-based eligibility verification. These features contribute to a seamless experience for both riders and program administrators.

A phased approach is commonly adopted by municipalities when introducing complimentary transit programs. The specific method of phasing, whether by age group, geographic area, or time of service, is typically informed by the unique characteristics and strategic opportunities within each community.

For Peterborough, a phased model focused on evenings, weekends, and summer months has been identified as an effective way to launch the program. This approach enables the City to extend complimentary transit access to all youth aged 13 to 18 in the program's first year of operation. By targeting these time periods, the program provides immediate benefits: increased access to extracurricular activities, part-time employment, and social events for youth, while also offering families greater flexibility and affordability in managing transportation needs.

Operationally, this model supports ridership growth during off-peak hours, enhancing the productivity of runs, and aligning with anticipated increases in service frequency during these times. It also offers a valuable opportunity for Peterborough Transit to closely monitor program uptake, assess impacts, and refine services accordingly, while continuing to offer and grow regular transit services.

The program model integrates well into existing Transit Service Delivery, enabling the Youth Transit Pass Program to expand in step with broader service growth. As Peterborough Transit builds towards its long-term strategy, increased daytime service will support youth ridership throughout the day.

This long-term goal is currently impacted by challenges in fleet acquisition and the need for gradual investments in Transit staff. Importantly, this gradual and measured approach ensures that service expansion is both sustainable and efficient. It allows Transit to build operational capacity, maintain service quality, and deliver a positive rider experience, avoiding system strain or disruption as the program grows.

Strategic Plan

Strategic Pillar: Governance & Fiscal Sustainability

Strategic Priority: Support a culture of continuous improvement, safety, and innovation to enhance cost-effective delivery of City programs and services

The draft program model utilizes evidence-based best practices from peer municipalities to strategically and sustainably build upon existing transit programs and service levels, enhancing the accessibility, equity, and attractiveness of Peterborough Transit for local youth and families, while providing youth with lasting skills and confidence in navigating transit systems independently.

Strategic Pillar: Community & Well-being

Strategic Priority: Ensure the City's Transit system/network supports effective movement of people, and is cost effective, efficient, and works for all. Support opportunities for multi-modal transportation including walking, cycling, and transit services.

The draft program model provides a cost-effective strategy for growing youth ridership on transit as a way of meeting the City's strategic goals for transportation. The model makes efficient use of existing Transit systems, programs, and partnerships, and will be informed by national research, stakeholder consultations, and program evaluation to meet the needs of the community and effectively support new growth in ridership.

Engagement and Consultation

To date, key partners and delivery agents have been engaged in the exploration of a youth transit pass program and subsequent development of the draft program model and implementation timeline. The next stage of implementation will include consultation with a wide range of stakeholders who will provide input and guidance on best practices for program delivery to address the needs and opportunities found within our community.

Budget and Financial Implications

The draft program model is forecast to have minimal budget and financial implications for Peterborough Transit.

Transit may observe some loss of revenues from youth who currently purchase passes for evenings, weekends, and summers, however it is anticipated that these losses will be balanced by growth in Transit's regular programs, for example, potential increase in Province of Ontario Gas tax Rebate allocation with increased ridership, expansion of

programs that use Transit for student travel, and adult ridership growth in off-peak hours as service frequency increases.

Annually the draft program model could require an operational budget of up to \$30,000.00 to support orientations, produce and distribute promotional materials, and hold evaluation activities.

Conclusion

The Youth Transit Pass Program presents a timely and well-structured opportunity to advance the City's transportation, equity, and sustainability goals through targeted investment in youth ridership. By reducing financial barriers, supporting transit education, and encouraging early adoption of public transportation, the program can deliver immediate benefits to youth and families, while laying the foundation for long-term ridership growth.

Through a phased, manageable rollout that aligns with Peterborough Transit's operational realities and strategic direction, the program is positioned for both short-term success and long-term impact. As service levels improve and participation increases, the program will not only serve youth more effectively but also contribute to a more connected, inclusive, and climate-conscious transit system for the entire community.

Submitted by,

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