



Office of the Commissioner  
Transportation Services Department

## MEMORANDUM

To: Members of Committee of the Whole

From: Paul Jankowski  
Commissioner of Transportation Services

Date: May 30, 2019

Re: Update on the Transit Assistance Program Pilot

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This memo provides an update on the results of the York Region Transit Assistance Program (TAP) one-year after implementation. TAP is a partnership between Community and Health Services (CHS) and York Region Transit (YRT), with Access York providing citizen intake services and maintenance of all personal information. The purpose of the program is to improve access to YRT services for York Region citizens living on a low-income.

On [November 16, 2017](#), YRT presented Council with an overview of the Ridership Growth Study. The study identified, as a short-term initiative with the potential of growing transit ridership, the implementation of a discounted pass program for citizens living on a low-income.

For the purpose of this program, low-income was identified using Statistics Canada Low-Income Measure, before tax, plus 15 per cent to align with other CHS programs. The additional 15 per cent enables low-income earners just above the threshold to participate in the pilot without being penalized for higher income due to minimum wage increases or increased work hours. The implementation of the TAP program did not affect transportation subsidies provided to citizens on or applying for Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program or the Transit Ticket Program.

There are approximately 111,000 citizens in York Region living on a low income with 7,800 to 11,000 citizens requiring assistance to pay for daily and/or occasional transit use. In addition to income eligibility, TAP participants must be between the ages of 18 and 64, and not receiving other forms of transit subsidies provided by the Region. Citizens outside of this age range already receive a discount of 22 to 58 per cent off of the YRT adult fare. For participant ease, the TAP monthly passes can be loaded onto PRESTO cards either online or at a transit fare retail location. In the first year, 67 per cent of the participants loaded their TAP pass online.

## **The Transit Assistance Program was implemented in January 2018 as a one-year pilot and resulted in an estimated 7,200 additional trips taken on YRT**

A pre-pilot survey of citizens applying for TAP suggested that seven per cent were not current YRT users. At the end of the December 2018, there were 402 participants enrolled in the program and an estimated 7,200 new trips taken on YRT in 2018. An additional survey was conducted in October 2018, six months after the initial launch of the program, and results included:

- 96 per cent of respondents indicated TAP made a positive difference in their lives by offering the freedom to travel without concern about the number/duration of trips; having extra money left over for other expenses and reducing the financial burden related to transit
- 63 per cent of respondents indicated TAP made a difference for family members to travel without concern about the number/duration of trips and an overall family financial benefit
- 79 per cent of respondents reported taking more trips on YRT
- 45 per cent of respondents reported using YRT during different hours
- 47 per cent of respondents reported using YRT on different days of the week

Survey respondents also indicated the upfront cost of a TAP monthly pass is considered a barrier for some participants. Others suggested a discounted single-ride fare option would make access to transit easier.

## **The TAP pilot has been extended until December 2019**

During this second year of the TAP pilot, staff is exploring the possibility of implementing a discounted single-fare. The effect of this option on the overall budget will be identified and how to provide it using PRESTO and the YRT Pay app.

Based on the available funds of \$398,000, currently shared between CHS and YRT, there are approximately 450 PRESTO cards available through TAP on a first-come, first-served basis. Continuation of the program beyond 2019 is subject to the availability of Regional funding and measured success based on participation rate and increased number of transit trips.

CHS is currently reviewing its other transportation subsidy programs such as the Transit Discount and Transit Ticket Programs. The review is intended to identify opportunities to integrate these programs and efficiencies in administration, process and improving citizen access to affordable transit.

## **Staff is working with the United Way Greater Toronto on the 2020 Donate-a-Ride Campaign**

Future funding of the Transit Assistance Program is being explored with different community partners. Staff is currently working with the United Way Greater Toronto to develop a 2020 Donate-a-Ride Campaign to support the growth of TAP. This opportunity was identified in the YRT Ridership Growth Study and has been successfully implemented by other Canadian transit agencies.

The initiative would be an external-facing campaign raising donations to fund TAP from private individuals and businesses. The United Way would receive the donations then redirect them to the Region to oversee the program for eligible residents.

In 2020, staff will provide Council with the results of the second year of the TAP pilot and the United Way Donate-a-Ride Campaign.

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Paul Jankowski  
Commissioner of Transportation Services

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Chief Administrative Officer

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