



TRANSIT AND PARKING STRATEGY MEMORANDUM

TO: MAYOR A. NUTTALL AND MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

FROM: B. FORSYTH, DIRECTOR OF TRANSIT AND PARKING

**NOTED: R. JAMES-REID, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ACCESS BARRIE
M. PROWSE, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

RE: BARRIE TRANSIT – FREE SENIORS SERVICE

DATE: March 29, 2023

The purpose of the Memorandum is to provide members of Council some history as it relates to free transit for seniors. Specifically, as Senior month approaches (June), staff have received some questions as to whether Barrie Transit offers free service to seniors throughout the month of June.

In the spring of 2019, Council adopted a 12-year fare strategy for Barrie Transit, where a framework was approved with regular fare increases. The fare changes within that framework would be presented to Council for consideration during the annual business planning process. As part of that report, staff received direction from Council to consider either providing free transit to seniors for the month of June, in recognition of senior's month or look at offering seniors free transit one day per week throughout the year. Following this direction, staff conducted a survey and consulted the Seniors Advisory Committee on the various options.

Based on the survey results and consultation with the Seniors Advisory Committee, the free day a week was determined to be the preferred option. Here are some of the main benefits to providing the free day of the week:

- Provides the greatest value to the senior's community by providing 52 days of free transit every year compared to 30 in June only
- A day every week of the year to use transit at no cost to run errands, attend medical appointments, visit family/friends, etc. and better supports low-income seniors
- Provides an alternative travel option during winter or bad weather days
- Helps combat isolation by providing a free travel option all year long

Here is some of the rationale that highlights Thursday as the preferred day of the week:

- Thursday was the most popular day for travel by seniors based on a review from our farebox ridership reports.
- Seniors discount for some key senior's retail locations is often on Thursdays
- Through discussions at the seniors advisory committee, it was noted that some doctor offices are closed for the afternoons on Wednesdays

The free day per week has been in place for about 3 years now and has been positively received by the senior's community. Throughout 2022, approximately 30,000 free trips were provided to seniors on Thursdays. Staff would recommend that free service for seniors is maintained on Thursdays, but should Council wish to add an additional day, staff would consult the Senior and Accessibility Advisory Committee to include their feedback on the day.

Based on current ridership trends, it is estimated that providing transit free to Seniors for the month of June would reduce revenue by approximately \$40K, whereas an additional free day per week would reduce revenue by approximately \$50K for a calendar year. If Council directed staff to proceed with one of these options, they could do so by funding it from the Ontario Gas Tax Reserve as an in-year adjustment for 2023, and staff would include the impact in the operating budget for 2024 business plan moving forward.