



TRANSIT AND PARKING STRATEGY MEMORANDUM

TO: MAYOR, J. LEHMAN AND MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

FROM: B. FORSYTH, DIRECTOR OF TRANSIT AND PARKING

NOTED: R. JAMES-REID, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ACCESS BARRIE

RE: TRANSIT SERVICE UPDATE

DATE: NOVEMBER 22, 2021

The purpose of this Memorandum is to update members of Council on the status of Barrie Transit ridership and revenue recovery, as well as upcoming plans to return to pre-pandemic service levels.

Barrie Transit is currently operating at 85% of its service level, in comparison to pre-pandemic levels of service, and ridership has been trending at approximately 55% of pre-pandemic levels. Throughout the pandemic, Barrie Transit has been able to maintain its operating budget without relying on additional support from the tax rate by reducing service levels and through funding programs from upper levels of government.

Safe Restart Agreement (SRA)

Early in the pandemic, both the federal and provincial governments began supporting transit services through the SRA to keep their transit systems running and relieve financial pressures created by Covid-19. Eligibility under the program include both COVID-19 related financial pressures associated with the need to continue to operate with reduced revenue, as well as new expenditures resulting from COVID-19. Municipalities were also required to include savings associated with COVID-19 (i.e., reduced service levels, lower maintenance costs, etc.), with the province only providing funding for net municipal expenditures. The SRA funding is not meant to replace the budgeted subsidy that the municipality provides to transit operations.

Transit operations are currently operating under the 3rd phase of the SRA. This phase of the program ends on Dec 31, 2021. With provincial approval, any unspent phase 3 funding can be carried forward and support operating budgets in 2022. We have submitted a request to the province to carryover our unspent funding (estimated at \$1.1M) and are awaiting their response.

As part of the recent provincial economic statement, the provincial government has committed to provide transit agencies with \$345M in funding, and \$225M of this funding to be allocated to the Safe Restart Program to continue to support transit agencies as they continue to recover. At the time of writing this memo, details of this program have not been released. However, as always, staff are committed to leveraging all funding possible to provide the highest level of service to Barrie residents.

Notably, with the carryover of \$1.1M in Phase 3 SRA funding and the potential for additional SRA funds, this will allow the City to maintain higher service levels without impacting the City of Barrie tax rate. Any cost savings due to service reductions would result in the City leveraging less SRA funding and may not result in a tax rate savings.

Georgian College – Return to Class

Prior to the pandemic, Georgian College students accounted for approximately 40-45% of Barrie Transit total ridership. When Georgian College moved to remote learning in the spring of 2020, the U-Pass agreement was amended. The amendment included a deferral on assigning the U-Pass ancillary fee while students were learning remotely, and that the initial agreement would be extended for the same length of



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time as the deferral. The original U-PASS agreement was set to expire in August 2021, whereas it is now set to expire as of December 2023.

Georgian College has advised city staff that they will be returning to in-class learning in January of 2022, which based on pre-COVID level ridership, is one of the most significant triggers to returning to pre-Covid service levels. Over the past number of weeks, staff have been working to reinstate the U-Pass for the 2022 winter semester. Current projections, based on students who will be on campus, indicate that approximately 7,300 students will receive the U-Pass compared to about 8,300 based on pre-pandemic levels. Assuming Georgian College students have similar travel patterns, staff project that total Barrie transit ridership will be between 80-85% of pre-pandemic levels throughout 2022, pending any significant setbacks.

Also, it is important to note that based on provincial and SMDHU guidance, we are required to continue to support physical distancing on our service, when possible. The return of the ridership and accompanying revenue will come with potential crowding of buses, which is another reason why it is important to consider returning to pre-pandemic service levels to further support physical distancing.

Pre-pandemic Service Levels

As a result of both the continued SRA funding and the return to in-class learning at Georgian College, city staff are planning to ramp transit service back up to pre-COVID levels in early 2022. City staff are currently working with the transit service provider on the specific timing as the industry is experiencing a shortage of drivers and will want to ensure we have the available resources prior to reinstating the service.

The pandemic has affected municipal transit agencies in varying ways; however, one of the consistent major catalysts to ridership recovery is reinstating service levels to support the needs of the riders and the communities. Appendix A includes the planned service levels for January 2022, of our peer transit agencies, ranging from 75% to 100%, with most agencies at 90% and higher.

As staff plan and rollout the pre-COVID service levels, we will continue to be flexible in our approach as we continue adapt to the everchanging pandemic and will remain fiscally responsible through the management of the council approved budget.

APPENDIX A

Transit System/Municipality	% of Service (Planned Jan/22)
Burlington	100
Durham	100
Kingston	100
London	100
Niagara Falls	100
Peterborough	100
Thunder Bay	100
TTC	100
Windsor	100
Grand River Transit	95
Hamilton	95
Guelph	90
Mississauga	90
York Region	87
Brampton	85
Ottawa	80
Oakville	75