

March 2012

**BC TRANSIT  
TICKET ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**



**REPORT TO THE  
VICTORIA REGIONAL  
TRANSIT COMMISSION**

A report of the



COMMUNITY SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL  
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## Executive Summary

The BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program (BCTTAP) provides free tickets and more recently passes to eligible participants living on low-income across BC's Capital Region. Community Social Planning Council has been administering the program for the past 16 years, providing access to affordable transportation to agencies serving low-income clients. The BCTTAP is promoted as a best practice model in poverty reduction and prevention by national non-governmental organizations (the Caledon Institute, Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement) and has been adopted in several B.C. communities.

The leveraged value of the program in providing free tickets and passes for every purchased product has resulted in increased funding for transportation from a number of charitable, business, government and other agencies, with a resulting increase in the budget for that expense amongst the participating agencies. This increased investment in transit for people in need means that the program has almost certainly increased expenditure and ridership on transit in the region. While the Victoria Regional Transit Commission is subsidizing 50% of the tickets and passes allocated to the program, the remaining 50% earn revenue and ridership for the Commission. Such revenue, unlikely to have been otherwise realized, amounted to over \$150,000 in retail sales from April 2011 to March 2012. This represents a "win-win" for social and economic returns on investment in our Transit system.

After the Transit Commission meeting in May 2011, the Council limited the maximum number of tickets and passes available to each approved participating agency in an effort to manage and ensure an equitable and sustainable supply within the program. Even with these limits, the supply of passes was exhausted by December 2011. In June 2011, the Commission changed the policy governing transfers, shortening the time the transfer valid from 90-minutes to 60-minutes and revoking the return trip option for short round-trips that could be completed within the transfer period. Agencies report that this change of policy essentially doubles the supply needed of tickets to cover trips to essential services by their clients and an increased demand for passes as a result.

**Given financial constraints for the Commission, we are proposing to continue to manage supply of Tickets within the program for 2012/13 at the same level as 2011/12 at 135,000 tickets. We are however requesting an increase in passes to partially meet the increased demand due to the change in transfer/return policy on tickets. The increase requested is from 1200 to 1500 (25%).**

## Introduction

Victoria Regional Transit Commission has provided free bus tickets and more recently monthly bus passes to the Community Social Planning Council to distribute to people with urgent transportation needs. The program has been assisting low-income residents of the Capital Region for the past 16 years and has grown to meet the affordability issues facing many residents.

The program has been recognized as a key resource to meet the needs of community social service clients in the region. The leveraged value of the program in providing free tickets and passes for every purchased product for eligible clients and agencies has resulted in increased funding for transportation from variety of charitable funding sources, with a resulting increase in the budget for that expense amongst participating agencies. This increased investment in transit for people in need means that the program has almost certainly increased expenditure and ridership on transit in the region beyond its costs in subsidized tickets. This represents a "win-win" for social and economic returns on investment in our Transit system.

BCTTAP has been regarded as the best practice model making transit more affordable to people living on low-income by national non-government organizations such as Caledon Institute and Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement. The values of BC Transit addressed in Shaping Our Future regarding Sustainability, Innovation and Collaboration are well reflected through the application of this Program.

## Program Status

The Community Council requested an increase of 50% in tickets and 100% in passes in May 2011 to meet increased demand being experienced as a consequence of growth in need of member agencies dealing with the impacts of the 2008 recession. The need for access to affordable transit grew with the increase in unemployment, housing affordability and poverty exacerbating demand on social service agencies throughout the region.

The Commission authorized a 25% increase in the Transit Ticket Assistance Program in May 2011 to meet partially that request and then a further increase of 25% in September 2011, over the 2010/11 allocation. The total number of tickets and passes available on a "buy one get one free" basis in 2011/12 therefore increased from 90,000 tickets and 800 passes in 2010/11 to its current level of 135,000 tickets and 1,200 passes.

However, Commission staff approved an overage of 16,400 tickets and 324 passes in 2010/11 due to the increased demand, which were deducted from the available tickets and passes in 2011/12 giving a total of 118,600 available tickets and 876 passes.

All of the current year's tickets and passes have been allocated in 2011/12. The Council limited the maximum number of tickets and passes available to each approved participating agency in May 2011 to ensure an equitable and sustainable supply within the program. Even with these limits, the supply of passes was exhausted by December 2011.

## What agencies are saying

At the annual program meeting of participating agencies, (February 8, 2012) the following points were made:

- Demand continues to exceed supply for people in need to use transit to attend essential services (medical appointments, counseling, training, employment, education, getting to food banks). This is a consequence of increased unemployment and poverty amongst clients since the recession, relocation of some government offices generating increased need for travel, cut backs by provincial ministries and VIHA in supplying transit tickets to their clients, and increases in participating agencies dealing with population growth in some communities (e.g. West Shore.)
- The change to transfer policy (reduction in transfer time as well as revoking the return trip option) in June 2011 has caused a major increase in demand for tickets and passes to cover the same number of trips.
- The limits to the maximum number of tickets and passes that the Council imposed to manage the program has caused hardship to many agencies' clients, quite often the allocation is used up within hours of being available and then clients can get no assistance with travel to their appointments.
- Agencies also report a curtailment of participation by clients in programs that are essential to their well-being because of the restrictions on access to transit.

The ticket usage statistics are presented in Table 1. Health, medical and counseling related needs are the topmost reason for the usage of tickets in 2011-12.

*Most of our clients are accessing social services, welfare and employment services in Victoria. They travel to Victoria as offices have been relocated from Langford and Colwood. We run out of tickets before end of month so we are unable to provide these valuable tickets to our clients.*

**-Sooke Residents in Need Society**

*When we were located downtown, people could walk to many of the other community services. Being further away from the services has been difficult for our clients, especially the ones with mobility issues.*

**-Victoria Cool Aid Society, Shelter Worker**

*Every single work day I am turning away at least four clients for bus tickets. So, in a one month period, I believe I turn away between 80 to 100 requests for bus tickets. People used to be able to get the bus to the pharmacy to pick up meds and return on one ticket, now they need 2 tickets. Most of the time we can only provide one ticket per client so they must walk one way.*

**-Victoria Cool Aid Society, Client Service Worker.**

*At the Transition House, the bus passes are a lifeline for our women. The ability to order bus passes are of great help to the women living in our supportive housing complex. Many times, we have women who come to us with a great deal of initial financial stress. Women leave their abusive ex-partner with almost nothing. Being able to offer women and children a way to get around the city during this time of emotional and financial upheaval is extremely important. The recent rationing of bus passes has impacted our program in that we have not been able to offer bus passes to women who are starting out in our housing program.*

**-Cridge Transition House**

*We know that bus passes are not a luxury, but are imperative to our girls who often live in unhealthy and violent home environments, and are commonly in high risk situations.*

**-Artemis Place**

## Ticket Usage Statistics

Description	Table 1					
	2011-2012	2010-2011	2009-2010	2008-2009	2007-2008	2006-2007
Health/medical/ Counselling	37%	39%	32 %	37 %	45%	35%
Employment related	17%	28%	32 %	25 %	20%	24%
Basic Needs	9%	9%	11 %	15 %	12%	9%
Financial Assistance Worker	5%	5%	7 %	8 %	8%	8%
Children/family	6%	4%	5 %	4 %	4%	6%
Court	3%	2%	2 %	2 %	2%	2%
Other	24%	14%	11 %	10 %	9%	15%

Source: Participating Agencies' Ticket Tracking Data

## Fraud prevention and control

Fraud prevention and control is one feature of the program that the Council contributes to, acting on reports of fraud by following up with the participating agency to increase controls. In general, there are very few reports of fraud (two in 2011/12) and prompt action is taken when Transit staff contact the Council with such reports.

*Participants usually must meet with a Family Worker to request a ticket, we have a receipt signed by the participant for each ticket given—the receipt tracks the type of use.*  
-Blanshard Community Centre

Each agency has their methods of distribution which include tight controls. As the transit products are purchased by the individual agencies, they are extremely motivated to prevent fraud.

## Low-Income Transit Assistance Programs

Most of the low-income transit programs across Canada are getting subsidized rates funded either by the province or by the City. Some of the examples of low-income transit programs available across Canada are as follows:

- Vancouver – Reduced Transit Pass for people on fixed income (Disability Allowance) – less than half of a regular priced pass (reg. \$99, reduced to \$45)
- Calgary -Low-income Transit Pass Program offers a monthly pass to people living on a low-income at a fixed rate of \$40.00 (less than half the regular price of \$90)
- Hamilton – Affordable Transit Pass Program helps City of Hamilton residents who are living on a low-income purchase an adult month bus pass for half the price
- Kingston –Affordable transit pass for everyone living on a low-income – Discount established using the Low-income Cut-Off by Statistics Canada (reg. \$65, reduced to \$44)
- Ottawa –Reduced Transit Pass for people on fixed income (Ontario Disability Support Program or ODSP) – less than half the cost of a regular priced pass (reg. \$84.00, reduced to \$30.40)

Donate a ride is an example similar to BCTTAP which is a City of Edmonton initiated charity. Donate a ride funds are used to purchase transit tickets and distributed to local social service agencies to meet the urgent transportation needs of their clients.

## Recommendations

While the Commission is subsidizing 50% of the tickets and passes allocated to the program, the remaining 50% earn revenue and ridership for the Commission which would probably not otherwise be earned (i.e. the participating agencies would not be able to purchase tickets and passes without the availability of the subsidy to leverage funding for transportation costs). This amounts to over \$150,000 in retail sales from April 2011 to March 2012.

**Given financial constraints for the Commission, we are proposing to continue to manage supply of Tickets within the program for 2012/13 at the same level as 2011/12 at 135,000 tickets. We are however requesting an increase in passes to partially meet the increased demand for them due to the change in transfer/return policy on tickets. The increase requested is from 1200 to 1500 (25%).**

## Appendix 1

### BC Transit Ticket Assistance Program Participating Organizations List 2011-2012

Action Committee of People with Disabilities	Nil/Tu,O Child and Family Services
AIDS Vancouver Island	Our Place
Artemis Place	PEERS
Beacon Community Services	Ready to Rent
Blanshard Community Centre	Saanich Neighbourhood Place
Boys & Girls Club	Single Parent Resource Centre
Bridges for Women Society	Sooke Family Resource Society
Burnside Gorge Community Centre	Sooke Residents in Need Society
Citizen's Counselling Centre	St. Vincent de Paul - Social Concern office
Cool Aid-Shelters and Health Centre	St. Vincent de Paul - St Josephs Conference
Cridge Transition House	Surrounded by Cedar
Epilepsy and Parkinson Centre	Threshold Housing Society
Esquimalt Neighbourhood House	Together Against Poverty Society
Fairfield-Gonzales Community Association	Victoria Disability Resource Centre
Fernwood NRG - Best Babies	Victoria Native Friendship Centre
Hulitan Family and Community Services	Victoria Women's Sexual Assault Centre
Inter-Cultural Association	Victoria Women's Transition House
Island Metis Family & Community Services Society	Victoria Youth Empowerment Society
James Bay Community Project Youth Clinic	Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS)
John Howard Society	Vancouver Island Public Interest Research Group (VIPIRG)
La Société Francophone de Victoria	Volunteer Victoria
Laren Society/Bill Mudge House	YM-YWCA of Greater Victoria
Mary Manning Centre	Young Parents Support Network
Mustard Seed Street Church	