



POSTPONED MOTIONS: ADMINISTRATIVE BACKGROUNDER

NUMBER: PM19-043

REQUESTED BY:	Councillor Sheena Hughes
ORIGIN OF REQUEST:	Committee of the Whole
DATE OF REQUEST:	November 19, 2018

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DEPARTMENT:	Public Works and Transit
DATE RESPONSE DUE:	November 23, 2018

MOTION:

That the City offer as a pilot and to gather information for the transit feasibility study, free local transit for youth that are in secondary (high school) or younger, and that the transit budget is amended by \$15,000.00 to accommodate this.

RESPONSE:

Administration's Understanding of Intent Motion:

The intent of this proposal is to offer free local transit to youth (high school) or younger. The program will serve to provide valuable data on the number of students that would divert from the current school bus network to transit buses if they were given this free option. Additionally, the program may bolster ridership and promote transit travel habits within this key age group that they will carry with them to adulthood.

Operational or Organizational Impacts if Motion is Approved:

Operational impacts to transit service resulting from free local travel for school age youth would be minimal. Local routes should be able to sufficiently accommodate the potential increase in ridership. Specific logistics such as age cutoff, method of confirmation is expected to be accommodated within existing staff levels and workloads.

Financial Implications of Motions:

The principle impact of this program would be in terms of transit fare revenue. All fare currently paid by this demographic would be forfeited. Less fare revenue would in turn reflect in the revenue-to-cost ratio and place a greater proportion of the transit operating budget on the taxpayer levy. It is anticipated that the fare revenue impact would be approximately \$15,000.00

Stakeholder Consultations:

Critical to the success of this program is the consultation and involvement of the various St. Albert School Boards. These Boards will be needed to assist us with monitoring ridership levels on school bus routes and identify numbers of students diverting away from school transportation. This in turn will show where St. Albert Transit has the highest potential to supplement school bus services within StAT's present operating parameters and perhaps serve to provide the School Boards with efficiencies that could save them and residents operating funds.

Background:

In response to a recommendation of the Transit Long Term Department Plan (of 2013), Administration has consulted with the Boards in the past to determine if there are opportunities for Transit to supplement or even replace certain student transport services using existing transit routes, schedules, and bus deployments. At present, the sheer numbers of students requiring transport at two very specific times of the day cannot be accommodated without the deployment of a significant number of additional and dedicated buses that our fleet size cannot accommodate. This proposal could serve to identify opportunities outside of actual creation of StAT student routes that can be performed within existing fleet deployments and operating budgets. Another potential added benefit of such a program – one that is aimed at the youth demographic - is the development of transit travel habits that will remain with the students as they progress into adulthood – ultimately boosting transit ridership in the long term.

Risks:

Administration wishes to identify the following risks that this proposal could present if approved:

- The program will negatively impact current fare revenue accumulations and place a greater proportion of the transit operating budget on the overall tax levy.
- The public may expect that the program remains in effect indefinitely, and not as a pilot program of finite duration. Reverting back to present status after the pilot period could result in significant opposition.
- If there is significant uptake by students to the new program, some routes could potentially see ridership demand that exceeds the capacity provided by existing transit service. This could lead to the need to deploy additional buses – commonly referred to as overload buses. And this in turn would require the purchase and operation of new buses with no off-setting revenue.
- Other ridership groups may demand similar treatment, including seniors and AISH recipients.