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Presented by: Corrine Ball, Handibus Coordinator, Public Works & Transit

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9.1

Free All Aboard Program

Presented by: Corrine Ball, Handibus Coordinator, Public Works & Transit

RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 1) That the Trial Period for CM-20-010 “Free All-Aboard Program” (free local access to St. Albert Transit’s Handibus service for all residents who qualify for the “All Aboard” Program) be extended to the end of 2021 and be funded by the Stabilization Fund for up to \$30,870.
- 2) That the trial period for the parallel program CM-20-006 “Free Transit for Seniors” also be extended in the same fashion as CM-20-010 above, and be funded by the Stabilization Fund for up to \$29,000.
- 3) Upon conclusion of the proposed trial period extension to December 2021, that the programs continue to be supported as on-going programs beginning in the 2022 budget in the amount of \$59,870.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide an update to Council on the trial period for free access to local Handibus service for residents who qualify for St. Albert Transit’s All-Aboard Program (lower cost fares for low-income residents), and to forward a recommendation on the continued use of the program beyond the trial period.

ALIGNMENT TO PRIORITIES IN COUNCIL’S STRATEGIC PLAN

N/A

ALIGNMENT TO LEVELS OF SERVICE DELIVERY

N/A

ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL DIRECTION OR MANDATORY STATUTORY PROVISION

On May 19, 2020 Council passed the following motion CM-20-010:

“Upon reinstatement of fee for service of Transit that the free All Aboard Program for low-income residents be extended to local Handibus service for a trial period of one year. At the end of the one-year period, the trial should be assessed based on items such as cost to the municipality, ridership numbers, etc. Furthermore, that up to \$30,870 be funded from the Stabilization fund to support this initiative.”

On February 18, 2020 Council passed a similar motion (CM-20-006) that directed Administration to permit free local access to conventional transit and Handibus for residents 65 years of age and older who qualify for the All-Aboard program. The motion read as follows:

“That St. Albert citizens 65 years and older that qualify for the All Aboard Program, be provided free local transit, including on the Handibus, for a trial period of one year. At the end of the one-year period the trial should be assessed based on items such as cost to the municipality, ridership numbers, etc. Furthermore, the estimated cost of \$29,000 be funded from the Stabilization fund.”

Furthermore, on February 16, 2021, Council unanimously approved the recommendation in AR-20-430 to extend the trial period of CM-20-006 (Free local Handibus for All-Aboard Seniors) to July 1, 2021 because the initial launch was delayed due to COVID-19 protocols, and transit fares were suspended altogether from March 24, 2020 to July 1, 2020. As noted in AR-20-430, the extension of the trial period to July 1, 2021 aligned with the conclusion of the trial period for CM-20-010 (free local Handibus for all All-Aboard clients), also slated for July 1, 2021.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

These two pilot programs are currently in progress. Many of the target residents - seniors enrolled in All-Aboard - are applicable to both.

As Council is expected to revisit CM-20-006 separately through Agenda Report AR-20-430 (Trial Period - Free Local Transit for Seniors) on June 8, 2021, Administration is bringing both recommendations together to align the two programs as one.

To date, the All Aboard Program for Handibus Service has reflected the following data:

- 53 low-income residents are registered for the pilot program (28 of the 53 registered are seniors)
- 1,709 trips have been taken by registered residents of the pilot program from

July, 2020 to March, 2021, with a total cost of \$4,677.05 (3 Quarters).

These programs provided opportunities for financially-challenged residents to access transportation options for shopping, employment, recreation, or other community engagements without financial burden.

It is necessary to recognize the data above is not reflective of a typical period of Handibus operation. Overall trip numbers dropped substantially due to the pandemic. However, Administration is confident that local ridership on Handibus will return to pre-pandemic levels in 2022. Therefore, Administration recommends maintaining the initial projected funds required to support both Council Motions to the end of 2021. These costs are as follows:

CM-20-006: Free Local Transit for All-Aboard Seniors	\$29,000.00
CM-20-010: Free Local Handibus for all All-Aboard clients	<u>\$30,870.00</u>
Total Funds	\$59,870.00

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS OR ENGAGEMENT

N/A

IMPLICATIONS OF RECOMMENDATION(S)

Financial: If Council is supportive of continuing these programs, the 2022 base budget will reflect the new service level and maintain the funding on an on-going basis. The remainder of 2021 will be funded in the amount of \$59,870 through Stabilization Fund which has an uncommitted balance as at March 31, 2021 of \$7.3 million.

Legal / Risk: None at this time

Program or Service: None at this time

Organizational: Organizationally, the program has been established and staff have structured their workloads to continue administering it on an on-going basis. This current pilot program can continue as a permanent program with no significant impact on resources.

ALTERNATIVES AND IMPLICATIONS CONSIDERED

If Council does not wish to support the recommendation, the following alternatives could be considered:

Alternative 1. Extend the "Free All Aboard Program" (CM-20-010) pilot for another year, to July 1, 2022, to allow for additional data to be collected. At the end of this date, the program will be assessed based on items such as cost the municipality, ridership, etc. A decision to extend CM-20-010 should also include an extension to CM-20-006 "Free Transit For Seniors" because many of the target residents - seniors enrolled in All-Aboard - are applicable to both.

The extension of both pilot programs would cost a total of up to \$59,870 to be funded from the Stabilization fund to support both program extensions.

Alternative 2. Conclude CM-20-010 “Free All Aboard Program” pilot on December 31, 2021 and retain CM-20-006 “Free Transit for Seniors”. A decision regarding extension or cancellation of CM-20-006 “Free Transit for Seniors” can be made on June 8, 2021 when that specific report is presented to Council.

A decision to conclude CM-20-010 (\$30,870) while retaining CM-20-006 (\$29,000) would eliminate the ability of All-Aboard clients under 65 to access local service for free while retaining the privilege for those over 65.

Report Date: May 17, 2021
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