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Item No. 15.1.1
Halifax Regional Council
April 8, 2025

TO: Mayor Fillmore and Members of Halifax Regional Council

FROM: Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: February 21, 2025

SUBJECT: Transit Support For People Experiencing Homelessness

ORIGIN

Staff initiated report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The number of people experiencing homelessness has been growing rapidly over the past several years. In order to support people experiencing homelessness to find and maintain housing the ability to move efficiently throughout the municipality is critical. Transit access allows people to consider returning to employment, obtain food and other essential items, access health care, connect with family and friends, and move from homelessness to permanent housing.

The municipality has demonstrated a strong commitment to ensure people are able to exit homelessness. While some who are experiencing homelessness are able to access transit passes there are many who can't. One opportunity for the municipality to contribute to the ending of the housing and homelessness crisis is the provision of transit passes to those who do not qualify for them through some other means.

The report recommends increasing the number of transit fare products provided to the Housing and Homeless Division of HRM to support people through their journey from homelessness to housing.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Approve an increase to the maximum monthly value of transit fare products available to the Executive Director of Halifax Transit for housing and homelessness initiatives by the equivalent value of one hundred (100) Adult Monthly Passes.

BACKGROUND

HRM is in a midst of a housing and homelessness crisis. In 2018 there were 18 people sleeping rough in HRM and by 2024 that number grew to over 200. As of February 5, 2025, there are 1,165 people actively

homeless in HRM.¹ Within the past two years the Province of Nova Scotia has added over 300 shelter beds and over 700 temporary housing units. Due to the rapid growth of persons experiencing homelessness the need for support to allow people to access various services has increased.

The number of fare products Halifax Transit can provide to support people experiencing homelessness is controlled through By-law U-100. On May 25, 2023, Halifax Regional Council set the number of fare products available for initiatives related to housing and homelessness to the equivalent of 140 Adult Monthly Passes. These passes are used to provide both bus tickets and monthly bus passes to people sleeping rough, in shelters, or in temporary and supported housing projects. When this program started HRM was providing 40 monthly passes to people experiencing homelessness and that quickly grew to 50 monthly passes and 500 individual bus tickets.

The By-law allows for Regional Council to increase the maximum equivalent monthly value by resolution.

DISCUSSION

Access to transportation is essential for everyone. The Transportation Association of Canada notes that access to transportation is important for the achievement of public health goals.² The Canadian Public Health Association notes that transit is essential for social equity and for low-income individuals allows the access to services in their community and ensures they can focus their limited funds on other essentials such as food³.

In discussions with people experiencing homelessness in HRM, they identify many benefits to having access to Halifax Transit.

- Opportunity to access food support programs, visit grocery stores, or restaurants
- Ability to look and accept employment
- Ability to participate in training and education opportunities
- Ability to access government and community support programs
- Allows them to consider sheltering and temporary housing opportunities further away from services
- Look for permanent housing
- Acquire suitable clothing and footwear
- Participate in social activities essential to mental health
- Connect with family members

Transit assistance is available from multiple sources. For example, full time students receive monthly bus passes, as do persons who qualify for the Employment Support and Income Assistance program. The Affordable Access Transit Pass Program provides a 50% discount for Adult Transit Passes for those eligible and accepted into the program. Some people experiencing homelessness however do not qualify for income assistance and even for the person who will qualify it can take time to access the program.

Providing access to transit is a critical way in which HRM supports people experiencing homelessness. Through this HRM and Halifax Transit increase options for people, support them in be able to fully participate in society, to achieve independence, and reduces the number of people forced to sleep rough in municipal parks and event spaces.

Currently, through Schedule 1 of By-law U-100, Halifax Transit provides a mix of monthly bus passes and tickets, equivalent to 140 Adult Monthly Passes. Since this was set by Council in 2023, the Province has launched communal shelters, 140 pallet shelters, and multiple housing projects including the Cove with 55 units, the tiny homes community providing housing solutions for up to 70 people, and facilities like the Rose

¹ [AHANS | HRM Homelessness Statistics](#)

² [Integrating Health and Transportation in Canada | Transportation Association of Canada \(TAC\)](#)

³ [Public Transit Factsheet | Canadian Public Health Association](#)

which is structured to support families. In order to support these additional projects and help people achieve independence and access permanent supportive housing there is a dramatic increase in the need for people to access transit. An increase in equivalent value of 100 Adult Monthly Passes would bring the program total to an equivalent value of two-hundred forty (240) Adult Monthly Passes per month and would meet the current needs.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The additional maximum cost to deliver additional transit fare products up to the equivalent value of 100 additional Adult monthly passes is \$8,250 per month, or \$99,000 per annum. Adult monthly passes would be available to support the Housing and Homelessness Division each month. This increase in support would only result in a loss of revenue to Halifax Transit if the participants would otherwise be purchasing transit fare products, which is expected to be rare.

RISK CONSIDERATION

As the Housing and Homelessness team has a strategy and process to ensure that passes are only provided to people who do not have another option to access transit and that passes are not resold by the individuals receiving them, the risks associated with the recommendation in this report is low.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Housing and Homeless Team has discussed the needs for transit access with multiple shelter and temporary housing service providers. Staff have also discussed the need for and benefit of transit access with persons experiencing homelessness.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No environmental implications were identified.

ALTERNATIVES

That Halifax Regional Council:

1. Increase or decrease the equivalent value of transit fare products available to support persons experiencing homelessness.
2. Refuse the recommendation to increase transit support to persons experiencing homelessness.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, SNS 2008, c 39:

- 7A** The purposes of the Municipality are to
- (a) provide good government;
 - (b) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; and
 - (c) develop and maintain safe and viable communities.

- 79A** (1) Subject to subsections (2) to (4), the Municipality may only spend money for municipal purposes if
- (a) the expenditure is included in the Municipality's operating budget or capital budget or is otherwise authorized by the Municipality;
 - (b) the expenditure is in respect of an emergency under the *Emergency Management Act*; or
 - (c) the expenditure is legally required to be paid.
- 102** Subject to the approval of the Board for those services that are subject to the Public Utilities Act, the Council may, by by-law, prescribe charges for the provision of services for persons who use or benefit from the service, on a basis to be set out in the by-law.

By-Law U-100 – the User Charges By-law, Schedule 1

Housing and Homelessness

8E. (1) The Executive Director of Halifax Transit may provide fare products on a monthly basis for initiatives such Executive Director determines are related to housing or homelessness to a maximum monthly value equal to the user charge for one-hundred forty (140) Adult Monthly Passes.

(2) Council may, by resolution, increase or reduce the maximum monthly value under subsection (1). [emphasis added]

(3) The passes or tickets shall not be provided to a for profit business or industry.

(4) A request for a Transit Pass or tickets does not guarantee a person will receive them.

(5) The Executive Director of Halifax Transit may, with the consent of the CAO, delegate, in whole or in part, the issuance of the Transit passes and tickets to one or more employees of the Municipality.

ATTACHMENTS

None

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