



P.O. Box 1749  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
B3J 3A5 Canada

**Item No. 15.1.4**  
**Halifax Regional Council**  
**June 10, 2025**

**TO:** Mayor Fillmore and Members of Halifax Regional Council  
**FROM:** Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer  
**DATE:** May 12, 2025  
**SUBJECT:** Student Transit Pass Pilot Program Status Update

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**ORIGIN**

June 18, 2024, meeting of Regional Council (Item 17.7):

MOVED by Councillor Mancini, seconded by Councillor Purdy

THAT Halifax Regional Council:

1. Adopt the recommendations as outlined in the private and confidential report dated June 6, 2024; and
2. Release the private and confidential report dated June 6, 2024 to the public once the conditions as outlined in the report have been met.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Initially launched in 2021 and expanded over time, in 2024/25 the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program offered free transit passes to more than 30,000 students across the municipality, including students from both Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE) and Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial (CSAP) schools as well as two Designated Special Education Private Schools (DSEPS)—Bridgeway Academy and Churchill Academy.

Two surveys, conducted in fall 2024 and winter 2025, highlighted the program's positive impacts on student independence, confidence, and increased transit usage, as reported by both students and parents.

All current partners have expressed interest in exploring the transition of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program into a permanent program. To ensure continuity and allow sufficient time to develop a long-term funding model, it is recommended that an agreement be executed with the Province of Nova Scotia to extend the program through the 2025/26 school year, maintaining the current funding arrangement of \$1.2 million from the Province and \$600,000 from the Municipality, for a total program cost of \$1.8M.

Additionally, it is recommended that the program be expanded to include homeschooled students, with the additional cost being absorbed by the municipality in the short term.

**RECOMMENDATIONS ON PAGE 2**

Due to rising enrolment and recent fare increases in September 2024, sustaining a permanent program will necessitate additional funding. It is anticipated that transitioning the Student Transit Pass Program to a permanent initiative will require phased, incremental increases in external funding over several years. A separate staff report outlining the proposed long-term funding model would be brought to Regional Council for consideration in preparation for the 2026/27 school year.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to:

1. negotiate and execute an agreement with the Province of Nova Scotia that extends the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program through the 2025/26 school year;
2. expand the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program to include homeschooled students, with the cost of this expansion to be borne by the Municipality, as set forth in the Financial Implications section of this report;
3. engage with private schools to assess their interest in participating in, and funding their participation in, the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program; and
4. prepare a report for Regional Council outlining a proposed long-term funding model for transitioning the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program to a permanent program, with such a model reflecting the cost and value of the program, and enabling adjustments for operational costs and inflation.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Student Transit Pass Pilot Program is a collaborative project that provides junior high and high school students in the Halifax Regional Municipality with free annual transit passes for use on all Halifax Transit services, including buses, ferries, and Access-A-Bus.

Phase 1 of the pilot program, approved by Regional Council in May 2021, was launched in fall 2021 at four high schools, providing transit passes to approximately 2,250 students. Phase 2 of the program, approved in November 2022, expanded eligibility to six junior high schools, increasing overall participation to approximately 4,300 students. In June, 2024, Regional Council approved the program's expansion for the 2024/25 school year, funded by a \$1.8 million investment—\$1.2 million from the Province of Nova Scotia and \$600,000 from the Municipality (see Attachment A: Declassified June 6, 2024 Staff Report – Halifax Transit Student Pass Pilot Program). This expansion led to the distribution of approximately 30,000 transit passes across 59 schools.

During the 2024/25 school year, Halifax Transit staff visited 21 junior high and 15 senior high schools to educate students on how to ride transit and the Transit Code—Halifax Transit's guide for passenger conduct and policies.

In early 2025, an Amending Agreement was ratified with the Province of Nova Scotia to formally include approximately 100 students attending two Designated Special Education Private Schools (DSEPS)—Bridgeway Academy and Churchill Academy. HRCE-registered students attending these schools had been inadvertently omitted from the original list provided by HRCE.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **1.0 Upcoming 2025/26 School Year**

All current partners have expressed interest in exploring the transition of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program into a permanent program. To ensure continuity and allow sufficient time to develop a long-term funding model, it is recommended that an agreement be executed with the Province of Nova Scotia to extend the program through the 2025/26 school year, maintaining the current funding arrangement of \$1.2

million from the Province and \$600,000 from the Municipality, for a total program cost of \$1.8M.

Current 2024/25 student passes would continue to be valid until September 2025, and new passes would be issued at the start of the new school year.

### **1.1 Program Evaluation**

Now in its fourth year, the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program continues to demonstrate strong performance and community support. The program has been widely recognized for its positive impact on student mobility, helping to increase access to transportation options for junior high and high school students.

Throughout the 2024/25 school year, several outreach and evaluation initiatives were undertaken to monitor the program's effectiveness and to engage with students. Two comprehensive surveys were conducted, one in fall 2024 and another in winter 2025, complemented by in-school engagement sessions aimed at improving confidence in using transit.

The fall 2024 survey was open to both students and parents/guardians, providing an opportunity to gather initial data on student travel behaviour, modes of transportation, and attitudes toward transit use. The goal was to establish a baseline understanding of how the program was influencing travel patterns and student independence.

Building upon the fall data, the winter 2025 survey introduced separate surveys for students and parents/guardians. The ability to compare the perspectives of students and parents/guardians offered valuable insights into both the tangible and perceived benefits of the program.

In total, the two survey cycles generated more than 8,100 responses, reflecting a broad and representative cross-section of users. This substantial volume of feedback has helped paint a detailed picture of the Student Transit Pass Program's successes, areas for refinement, and impact on students and families.

### **1.2 Survey Results**

The following table provides a summary of the key findings from both the fall 2024 and winter 2025 surveys, highlighting the measurable impacts of the program and identifying opportunities for future improvement and long-term planning. For the full results and analysis of both the fall and winter surveys, refer to *Attachment B: Student Transit Pass Pilot Program Survey Report*.

**Table 1: Survey Results 2024/2025 Summary**

<b>Student Travel Patterns</b>
<p><b>School-Related Travel Patterns</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In fall 2024, school-related transit use was reported to have increased from 11.8% (pre-pass) to 33.4%.</li><li>• In winter 2025, 52.4% of students reported using Halifax Transit as one of their primary methods to get to and from school. With respect to school-related travel, 65.3% of students reported using Halifax Transit at least once a week; this is supported by 66.4% of parents who reported their child's travel patterns.</li></ul>

- Qualitative parent feedback from winter 2025 supported student-reported trends, with many parents noting increased transit use, flexibility, and a greater sense of independence.

#### ***Non-School Related Travel Patterns***

- In fall 2024, 45.5% of students reported using Halifax Transit for non-school-related activities, such as part-time jobs, extracurricular programs, and social outings, up from 18.2% pre-pass. In winter 2025, 71.1% of students reported using Halifax Transit as one of their methods to get to non-school-related activities, confirming that students are using the pass beyond the classroom.
- In winter 2025, 75.8% of students reported using Halifax Transit at least once per week for non-school travel. Parents supported this as 77.1% indicated their child uses transit at least once per week.
- Open-ended parent feedback echoed these findings, citing frequent travel to sports practices, part-time work, volunteer activities, and social events.

#### ***Access to Transit***

- In fall 2024, 23% of students reported limited route coverage and low service frequency in their area as a barrier to using their transit pass. Additionally, 10.9% of students indicated that they rely on a car ride or taxi/Uber to reach a bus stop, reflecting challenges with first-mile/last-mile connectivity.
- In winter 2025, students echoed these concerns; 12.9% still relied on a car ride to reach transit stops and terminals, a potential consequence of colder temperatures.
- Parents and guardians reported that prior to the pass program, their child was discouraged from using transit due to one or more factors, including cost of transit fare (21.2%), safety concerns (20.8%), lack of available routes (13.7%), child has family and friends that drive them (11.8%), and the distance to the nearest bus stop (11.5%).

## **Student Independence, Confidence, and Safety**

### ***Independence***

- In fall 2024, 85.3% of junior high and 86.6% of high school students reported that having the transit pass made them feel more independent in their daily travel.
- This trend remained consistent in winter 2025, with 84.8% of junior high and 91.5% of high school students agreeing that independence has been reinforced with the pass.
- For parents, 81.6% of junior high and 88.9% of high school students agreed that the pass contributed to greater independence; open-text comments reinforced this view.
- These findings show the impact the program has on student independence and mobility, particularly among high school-aged youth.

### ***Confidence in Transit Navigation***

- In fall 2024, 59.1% of junior high and 60.2% of high school students reported feeling confident navigating Halifax Transit.
- In winter 2025, this number remained constant for junior high students and increased slightly to 64.4% for high school students, indicating that student confidence in using transit independently improved.
- From the parent perspective, 74.6% agreed or strongly agreed that their child could confidently navigate transit, while 13% remained neutral, and 12.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Open-text responses from both groups cited trip planning, understanding transfer points, and coping with service delays as barriers to independent navigation. Notably, 75% of students indicated they would find peer-led transit training helpful or were open to it, and 94% of parents expressed support for this approach.

### ***Perceptions of Safety and Comfort***

- In fall 2024, 59.1% of junior high and 60.2% of high school students reported feeling safe and comfortable using Halifax Transit.
- In the winter 2025 survey, 59.7% of junior high and 64.4% of high school students reported they felt safe and confident on transit
- From the winter 2025 parent survey, 20.8% of parents identified safety concerns as a reason they had previously discouraged their child from using Halifax Transit. Open-ended comments highlighted crowding, inappropriate behaviour, and safety at transit terminals as areas for improvement.

## **1.2 Enhanced Transit Training**

While in-school travel training led by transit staff helped increase students' familiarity with the transit system, survey results from the winter 2025 survey indicate that confidence in navigating transit independently remains an area in need of continued support.

In response to this challenge, Halifax Transit has proposed a new Student Transit Ambassador Program for the fall 2025, which would be implemented upon approval by Regional Council of the program extension for the 2025/26 school year. The intent of this peer-led model would be to engage students and transit champions to offer continued support to their peers, focusing on trip planning, transit safety, and route navigation.

## **1.3 Homeschooled and Private School Students**

As the Student Transit Pass Program continues to evolve, there has been growing public interest in extending eligibility to homeschooled and private school students. As of the 2024/25 academic year, there are approximately 250 homeschooled students and 1,560 students attending private schools within the Halifax region (see Table 2: Number of Homeschooled and Private School Students by Grade)

At this time, no external funding for student passes for students that are homeschooled or attending private schools has been secured.

Due to the relatively low number of homeschooled students, and modest impact to revenue (estimated at less than \$10,000 annually), these students could be included in the pilot program for the 2025/26 school year. In future years, there may be an opportunity to integrate the funding for homeschoolers in a permanent funding arrangement.

**Table 2: Number of Homeschooled and Private School Students by Grade**

	Number of Schools	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Total #	Approximate Cost of Program
Homeschooled Students	0	59	62	56	37	24	12	250	\$10,000
Private School Students	17	336	317	302	212	210	183	1560	\$85,000

There is no expectation of receiving external funding from other orders of government, now or in the future, for private school students. These students could be provided passes at the sole cost of the municipality, which can be included in the 2026/27 budget process for consideration, currently estimated at \$85,000. Alternatively, the municipality could seek agreements with individual schools that are willing to participate and fund the program. If this direction is provided, a separate report will be brought forward outlining any potential partnership for Regional Council’s consideration.

**1.3 From Pilot to Permanent—Proposed Transition Plan**

All current partners in this initiative have expressed interest in exploring the transition of the pilot to a permanent program.

With growing student enrolment and a transit fare increase implemented in September 2024, the expectation is that additional external funding will be required to transition the pilot program to an ongoing, permanent program. This may require phased, incremental increases in funding over several years. This gradual approach is proposed to help reach an agreed-upon funding threshold that reflects the true cost and value of the program, which can then be adjusted annually for inflation, ensuring the program’s long-term sustainability. A separate staff report detailing the proposed long-term funding model would be presented to Regional Council prior to the 2026/27 school year.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Annual funding implications for the program were previously estimated at \$1.8M. This was based on the potential reduction of fare revenue from students who benefit from the program and had paid fares prior to the program launch. Continuation of the pilot for the 2025/26 school year at this estimated cost, the same as the 2024/25 school year, was included in the Halifax Transit Operating budget and can be accommodated. This reflects \$1.2M in external funding, and the absorption of \$600,000 by the municipality, and includes the estimated offset to revenue, as well as program administration costs such as printing, and a temporary staff position to administer the pilot.

Inclusion of homeschooled students for the upcoming school year is estimated at a cost of \$10,000, which was not previously budgeted for, but can be accommodated within the existing 2025/26 Halifax Transit Operating budget.

**RISK CONSIDERATION**

There are no significant risks associated with the recommendations in this report. The risks considered rate low.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

In the 2024/25 school year, two surveys were conducted (fall 2024 and winter 2025) and in-school engagement to promote transit literacy and gather feedback was undertaken. The fall 2024 survey, open to students and parents, established a baseline of student travel habits and perceptions of independence. The winter 2025 survey included separate questionnaires for students and parents.

Together, the surveys collected over 8,100 responses, providing valuable insights into the program's impacts, strengths, and areas for improvement.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

The continuation and expansion of the Student Transit Pass Program is expected to increase transit usage, leading to reduced reliance on private vehicles. As students become more familiar with Halifax Transit, this shift will contribute to lower traffic congestion, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and a smaller overall environmental footprint.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

Regional Council could choose to:

1. Discontinue the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program for the 2025/26 school year.
2. Approve some but not all recommendations outlined in this report.
3. Approve all or some recommendations outlined in this report, with the addition of extending program eligibility to private school students, with costs absorbed by the municipality.

### **LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

*Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, R.S.N.S 2008, c. 39*

**69 (1)** The Municipality may provide a public transportation service by:

- (a) the purchase of vehicles or vessels and operation of the service.
- (b) providing financial assistance to a person who will undertake to provide the service; or
- (c) a combination of these methods.

**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.

**(2)** The Municipality may expend money provided for in an operating budget or capital budget for a purpose other than that set out in the operating budget or capital budget for that fiscal year if the expenditure does not affect the total of the amounts estimated for the operating budget and the capital budget.

#### ***Halifax Regional Municipality By-law Number U-100 Respecting User Charges:***

- 8D. (1) A person who meets the eligibility criteria requirements of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program as adopted by Council, by resolution, may be placed in the program.
- (2) Meeting the eligibility requirements does not guarantee a person will be placed in the

Student Transit Pass Pilot Program.

(3) Subject to subsection (1), a person placed in the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program shall be provided a Student Transit Pass.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A: Declassified June 6, 2024 Staff Report – Halifax Transit Student Pass Pilot Program

Attachment B: Student Transit Pass Pilot Program Survey Report

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Report Prepared by: Cheryl Chappel, Manager, Programs & Engagement, Halifax Transit, (902) 483-2023, &  
Bryan Maponga, Program Coordinator, Halifax Transit, (902) 943-3505

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**DECLASSIFIED**

FOIPOP Review: [REDACTED]

Approved to Release: [REDACTED]

Date: September 5, 2024

**Item No. 17.7**  
**Halifax Regional Council**  
**June 18, 2024**  
**In Camera (In Private)**

**TO:** Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

**SUBMITTED BY:** Original Signed

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Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** June 6, 2024

**SUBJECT:** **Halifax Transit Student Pass Pilot Program**

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**PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL**

**ORIGIN**

December 12, 2023, meeting of Regional Council (Item 15.4.3):

MOVED by Councillor Mancini, seconded by Councillor Blackburn

THAT Halifax Regional Council:

1. Approve the extension of Phase 2 of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program, which includes four high schools and six junior high schools, to the end of the current school year (June 2024);
2. Accept a contribution of \$185,000 from the Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE) towards the extension of Phase 2 of the program and authorize the CAO to negotiate and execute a contribution agreement.
3. Approve the scope of the full implementation of the Student Pass Pilot Program as further detailed in this report, with such implementation including 10 additional high schools and 27 junior high schools, pending funding approval; and
4. Direct the CAO to continue to pursue funding opportunities for the full expansion of the program, including Options F, G, and H in Table 1 of this report with such expansion being conditional on the Municipality receiving financial contributions from third parties, including other levels of government, which, at least reasonably offset the anticipated shortfall in HRM Transit Revenue associated with such expansion and authorize the CAO to negotiate and execute agreements or arrangements that may be necessary to receive such funding and fully expand the Student Transit Pass Program.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

**Recommendation on page 2**

**LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

*Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, R.S.N.S 2008, c. 39*

Subsection 19 (1) and (2)

Except as otherwise provided in this Section, Council meetings and meetings of committees appointed by the Council are open to the public.

(2) The Council or any committee appointed by the Council may meet in closed session to discuss matters relating to

(e) contract negotiations;

(i) any subject, the discussion of which could, in the opinion of the Council or the committee, as the case may be, violate the confidentiality of information obtained from (i) the Government of Canada or the Government of the Province,

Subsection 69(1)

The Municipality may provide a public transportation service by:

(a) the purchase of vehicles or vessels and operation of the service.

(b) providing financial assistance to a person who will undertake to provide the service; or

(c) a combination of these methods.

Section 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.

*Halifax Regional Municipality By-law Number U-100 Respecting User Charges*

8D. (1) A person who meets the eligibility criteria requirements of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program as adopted by Council, by resolution, may be placed in the program.

(2) Meeting the eligibility requirements does not guarantee a person will be placed in the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program.

(3) Subject to subsection (1), a person placed in the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program shall be provided a Student Transit Pass.

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Regional Council:

(1) approve the expansion of the Student Transit Pass Pilot program to all HRCE and CSAP junior high and high school students within the municipality and authorize the CAO to negotiate and execute the required contribution agreements as described in this report; and,

(2) not release this report to the public until after a joint funding announcement, involving the Province, is made and such announcement is anticipated to occur prior to September 1, 2024.

**BACKGROUND**

A pilot pass program for four high schools was initially launched in September 2021 and has been extended from year to year and expanded to include six junior high schools. Currently, annual transit passes are available to approximately 4,300 students at no cost to the students.

In December 2023, the pilot was extended to June 2024, and direction was given to continue pursuing funding opportunities for the expansion of the program to all junior high and high schools within the transit service areas.

## **DISCUSSION**

In the November 23, 2023 staff report it was estimated that the cost to expand the program to all schools within the Halifax Transit service area would be approximately \$1.8M for one year. This is based on 2022/23 student enrolments and student survey data and was intended to reflect the anticipated loss of revenue from reduced ticket/pass/cash fares that would have otherwise been collected. This value is estimated, and actual revenue loss may be higher or lower. Actual revenue loss from the program would be challenging to determine, even post pilot, particularly as overall transit ridership and revenue is currently growing.

The Province of Nova Scotia, the Joint Regional Transportation Agency and HRCE have expressed interest in supporting the continuation and expansion of the pilot program. The current proposal under consideration is for one year of external funding in the amount of \$1.2M to expand the program to all HRCE schools (not just those within the Halifax Transit service area as was previously proposed). This funding includes \$500k from HRCE, which is a reallocation of funds from a different longstanding program with Halifax Transit, as well as \$700k from the Province of Nova Scotia. In this proposal, the municipality would be required to absorb the remaining \$600k in potential lost fare revenue.

Extending the pilot program would allow the program to continue for the existing students that are participating, which includes both HRCE and CSAP students. It would also include expansion to all students in HRCE junior high and high schools. It was previously estimated that approximately 23,000 students were located with the transit service areas; expansion to all schools would increase this number to an estimated 27,000 students. However, the inclusion of additional schools is not anticipated to increase the cost of the program in a tangible way, as it is expected that those students rarely pay fares for transit services. There are also potential benefits to increasing the reach of the pilot, which may encourage more students to experience public transit. However, as expansion beyond the transit service areas was not contemplated in the previous staff report, Council direction is required.

### Next Steps

Should direction be provided to expand the pilot program, the following outlines key components of implementation:

- *Contribution Agreement:* One or more contribution agreements will be negotiated and executed between the parties. A requirement of the agreements will be collaboration on the development and collection of metrics to evaluate the success of the expanded pilot.
- *Existing Participants:* In June 2024, new annual passes will be distributed at the 10 schools currently participating in the pilot, to allow students to receive a new pass to replace passes expiring this month. Communications will go out through the schools to students and parents about the extension. Due to the late notice in the school year, existing passes with a June 2024 expiration date may continue to be honoured throughout the summer, which will also be communicated to students and transit staff.
- *New Participants:* The parties will coordinate and plan for the expansion of the pilot to all newly participating schools in early September 2024. This will include both the distribution of passes and education on using public transit.
- *Public Funding Announcement:* A joint funding announcement for the expansion of the pilot to additional schools will be planned for mid to late summer, prior to the September launch. Until that time, it is requested that the information regarding the expansion to additional schools be kept confidential.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Funding implications are estimated, based on potential reduction of fare revenue. The \$1.2M in external funding to cover the one-year program is anticipated to be fully received in 2024/25 but will be applied over two fiscal years. The anticipated cost to the municipality is approximately \$600k, also spread over two fiscal years. This can be accommodated in the 2024/25 Halifax Transit operating budget and projected into the 2025/26 Halifax Transit revenue budget if required.

### **RISK CONSIDERATION**

No risk considerations were identified specific to this report.

Risks related to the pilot program expansion were evaluated and noted in the November 23, 2023 staff report, and included service delivery risks, security risks, and financial and economic risks.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Community engagement was not undertaken for this report.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

Continuation and/or expansion of this program is expected to increase transit usage in both the short and long term, as youth gain comfort using Halifax Transit, which has positive environmental implications.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

Regional Council could choose not to approve the recommendation. This may result in the pilot project being discontinued effective June 30, 2024.

Regional Council could choose to make an alternative recommendation regarding funding arrangements or implementation. This may result in delays, the need for further negotiations with funding partners, or an additional staff report.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1 – Staff Report Dated November 23, 2023

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If the report is released to the public, a copy can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

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P.O. Box 1749  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
B3J 3A5 Canada

**Item No. 15.4.3**  
**Halifax Regional Council**  
**December 12, 2023**

**TO:** Mayor Savage Members of Halifax Regional Council

**SUBMITTED BY:** Original Signed  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Councillor Pam Lovelace, Chair, Transportation Standing Committee

**DATE:** November 23, 2023

**SUBJECT:** **Student Transit Pass Program**

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**ORIGIN**

November 23, 2023 meeting of Transportation Standing Committee, Item 13.1.3.

**LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

Legislative Authority is outlined in the attached staff report dated November 4, 2023.

Administrative Order One, *Respecting the Procedures of the Council*, schedule 7 Transportation Standing Committee Terms of Reference, section 2 states:

2. The Regional Transportation issues of the Council include:
  - (a) regional transportation policy, infrastructure objective and priorities and oversight of the Transportation outcome areas and functional plans;
  - (b) transportation demand management strategies, polices and traffic calming and mitigation and safety;
  - (c) Halifax Transit strategic plans and directions;
  - (d) active transportation initiatives and infrastructure;
  - ....

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the Transportation Standing Committee recommend that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Approve the extension of Phase 2 of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program, which includes four high schools and six junior high schools, to the end of the current school year (June 2024);

**RECOMMENDATION CONTINUES ON PAGE 2**

2. Accept a contribution of \$185,000 from the Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE) towards the extension of Phase 2 of the program, and authorize the CAO to negotiate and execute a contribution agreement;
3. Approve the scope of the full implementation of the Student Pass Pilot Program as further detailed in the staff report dated November 4, 2023, with such implementation including 10 additional high schools and 27 junior high schools, pending funding approval; and
4. Direct the CAO to continue to pursue funding opportunities for the full expansion of the program, including Options F, G, and H in Table 1 of the staff report with such expansion being conditional on the Municipality receiving financial contributions from third parties, including other levels of government, which, at least reasonably offset the anticipated shortfall in HRM Transit Revenue associated with such expansion and authorize the CAO to negotiate and execute agreements or arrangements that may be necessary to receive such funding and fully expand the Student Transit Pass Program.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Transportation Standing Committee received a staff recommendation report dated November 4, 2023 to consider Phase 2 of a Student Transit Pass Program.

For further information refer to the attached staff report dated November 4, 2023.

### **DISCUSSION**

Transportation Standing Committee considered the staff report dated November 4, 2023 and approved the recommendation to Halifax Regional Council as outlined in this report.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Financial implications are outlined in the attached staff report dated November 4, 2023.

### **RISK CONSIDERATION**

Risk consideration is outlined in the attached staff report dated November 4, 2023.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Meetings of the Transportation Standing Committee are open to public attendance and members of the public are invited to address the Standing Committee for up to five (5) minutes during the Public Participation portion of the meeting. Meetings are live webcast on Halifax.ca. The agenda, reports, video, and minutes of the Standing Committee are posted on Halifax.ca.

For further information on Community Engagement refer to the attached staff report dated November 4, 2023.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

Environmental implications are outlined in the staff report dated November 4, 2023.

**ALTERNATIVES**

Alternatives are outlined in the attached staff report dated November 4, 2023.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1 – Staff recommendation report dated November 4, 2023.

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Elizabeth Macdonald, Legislative Assistant, Municipal Clerk's Office 902.497.7548

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P.O. Box 1749  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
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**Item No. 13.1.3**  
**Transportation Standing Committee**  
**November 23, 2023**

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Transportation Standing Committee

**SUBMITTED BY:** Original Signed  
Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** November 4, 2023

**SUBJECT:** Student Transit Pass Program

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**ORIGIN**

November 22, 2022 Regional Council (Item No.15.1.3):

MOVED by Councillor Hendsbee, seconded by Councillor Mancini

THAT Halifax Regional Council:

1. Approve the implementation of Phase 2 of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program as outlined in the staff report dated November 8, 2022; and
2. Accept a contribution agreement of \$200,000 from Halifax Regional Centre for Education towards the pilot program and authorize the Chief Administrative Officer to negotiate and execute a contribution agreement.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

**LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

*Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*, R.S.N.S 2008, c. 39, subsection 69(1), and section 102, as follows:

Subsection 69(1)

The Municipality may provide a public transportation service by:

- (a) the purchase of vehicles or vessels and operation of the service.
- (b) providing financial assistance to a person who will undertake to provide the service; or
- (c) a combination of these methods.

Section 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.

*Halifax Regional Municipality By-law Number U-100 Respecting User Charges*, section 8D:

- 8D. (1) A person who meets the eligibility criteria requirements of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program as adopted by Council, by resolution, may be placed in the program.
- (2) Meeting the eligibility requirements does not guarantee a person will be placed in the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program.
- (3) Subject to subsection (1), a person placed in the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program shall be provided a Student Transit Pass.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Transportation Standing Committee recommend that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Approve the extension of Phase 2 of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program, which includes four high schools and six junior high schools, to the end of the current school year (June 2024);
2. Accept a contribution of \$185,000 from the Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE) towards the extension of Phase 2 of the program, and authorize the CAO to negotiate and execute a contribution agreement;
3. Approve the scope of the full implementation of the Student Pass Pilot Program as further detailed in this report, with such implementation including 10 additional high schools and 27 junior high schools, pending funding approval; and
4. Direct the CAO to continue to pursue funding opportunities for the full expansion of the program, including Options F, G, and H in Table 1 of this report with such expansion being conditional on the Municipality receiving financial contributions from third parties, including other levels of government, which, at least reasonably offset the anticipated shortfall in HRM Transit Revenue associated with such expansion and authorize the CAO to negotiate and execute agreements or arrangements that may be necessary to receive such funding and fully expand the Student Transit Pass Program.

### **BACKGROUND**

In consultation with the Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE) and Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial (CSAP), four high schools were chosen to participate in Phase 1 of the Halifax Transit Student Transit Pass Pilot program, as approved by Regional Council on February 25, 2021. The four schools were chosen for several reasons, including their proximity to existing transit routes, concentrated student populations, and the ability for existing transit service to serve the schools without exceeding bus capacity numbers, resulting in bus overloading.). Phase 1 was successfully launched in the fall of 2021, which included the distribution of physical passes to approximately 2,250 students and onsite travel training at participating schools.

Phase 2 of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program was approved by Regional Council on November 22, 2022. Under this program, six junior high schools were added to the pilot program, resulting in approximately 4,300 students from two HRCE high schools, two CSAP high schools, and six junior high schools receiving annual transit passes in fall 2022.

The total estimated cost of implementing Phase 2 of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program was \$310,000. A contribution agreement was negotiated with HRCE for \$200,000, with the remaining \$110,000 being absorbed as a loss to Halifax Transit revenue.

The existing passes distributed as part of Phase 2 expire on December 31, 2023.

## **DISCUSSION**

Kingston, Ontario, began a student pass program in 2012 that has received national recognition, and transit agencies across the country are looking to replicate their success. The programs are understood to be highly valuable in terms of economic, societal, and environmental benefits. Although these benefits are largely anecdotal at this point, with stories emerging both locally and nationally about student employment opportunities, social equity, etc., these benefits have not yet been quantified.

Halifax Transit considers the pilot project to date to be a success. Anecdotally, positive feedback has been received from many students and parents. HRCE has reported that Phase 2 of the pilot program has been received favourably, with no negative feedback from participating students and families. Inquiries received through 311 and Councillor offices have been primarily related to the future of the program. The impact of the pilot on transit ridership is challenging to analyze due to the number of potential external factors. As well, near Dartmouth High School, the presence of the Bridge Terminal with high daily passenger activities make it challenging to isolate any relevant student-based trends. However, it appears that in the neighbourhood around Woodlawn High School, a review of boardings at the 14 bus stops show passenger activity increased more than 50% over the baseline.

Based on the positive reception and potential long-term positive impact on the community, HRCE, CSAP, and Halifax Transit are all supportive of continuing the program; however, a funding source is currently not apparent. In the medium/long term, there is potential for reduced reliance on school busing to allow HRCE to redistribute funds to support the transit program. However, part of the value of the program is in providing youth with multiple mobility options, and for public transit use to supplement school bus services, so the ideal situation would see the program funded independently.

In the interim, HRCE is supportive of extending the pilot for the remainder of the academic school year for the students who already have passes, to prevent disruption and challenges for the families that have come to rely on the student passes. The estimated cost of this extension for the six-month period is \$185,000, which HRCE is willing to contribute.

### **Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial (CSAP)**

As CSAP students live in a much wider catchment area than HRCE schools, it is anticipated that relatively few can use Halifax Transit for school trips, and many may not have any access to transit service near their homes. As such, the financial impact of extending the pilot in CSAP schools is minimal. Currently, both CSAP high schools, namely École secondaire du Sommet and École secondaire Mosaïque, participate in the program and will continue to extend the passes to its students, but cannot offer any funding at this time due to the limited access of transit in the wider CSAP catchment area.

### **HRCE Program Expansion**

There are an additional 10 high schools and 27 junior high schools in the municipality in which at least a portion of students have regular access to conventional transit service. In some cases, public transit would not reasonably be an option for school trips for the students but could support travel to shopping, employment, or recreational activities. These schools are listed in Attachment A. The original intent of the pilot was to eventually expand program eligibility to include these students. This would require funding, either in the form of external partnerships with educational agencies, other orders of government, or through the annual municipal budget process, which has not been secured to date.

Costing for a variety of options has been prepared to reflect the current anticipated annual revenue loss by

Halifax Transit for providing passes for program expansion. The costing has been calculated with the intent that the program be cost-neutral – that Halifax Transit will not experience a revenue shortfall due to students who currently purchase tickets, passes, or pay cash to use transit, no longer needing to do so. It is not intended to reflect anticipated usage or to be based on a discounted “cost per trip” value, as other programs (DCS, UPass) are.

At a non-discounted rate, the cost to purchase monthly passes for all eligible students for a year would be approximately \$15,580,000. Based on a discounted rate available to HRCE in a longstanding agreement, this would be reduced to \$12,982,800. The direct value of the program to students is estimated at approximately \$5,000,000 annually. However, when costed to offset the loss of existing revenue only, as well as operating costs (ie printing of passes/staffing to administer) the full program is estimated to require approximately \$1,800,000 in funding annually at the onset.

Costs were determined based on 2022/23 enrollment numbers provided by HRCE, survey data collected from the pilot schools regarding transit usage prior to the pilot, the level of transit service in proximity to each school, as well as community usage of transit service in each school catchment area. Grades 7-12 were included (as applicable), as the majority of students turn 13 during their Grade 7 year and are no longer eligible to ride Halifax Transit for free. Although still an estimate, this information represents an informed approximation of the total revenue currently being collected from the students annually.

Table 1 below provides the estimated costs for both the existing students and the expansion of the program. The full list of schools under consideration, with detailed student numbers, is included in Attachment A.

*Table 1- Costing*

Option	Eligible Schools	Estimated Number of Students	Estimated Revenue Loss
A	2 CSAP schools, Grades 9 -12	745	\$29,000
B	2 CSAP schools, Grades 7-12	935	\$32,800
C	Current HRCE Program (2 High Schools + 6 Junior High Schools)	3,295	\$371,700
D	Current 2 HRCE High Schools	1,688	\$254,500
E	Current 6 HRCE Junior High Schools	1,607	\$117,200
F	All HRCE High Schools	11,642	\$1,212,700
G	All HRCE Junior High Schools	9,996	\$511,500
H	All CSAP and HRCE students Grades 7-12	22,573	\$1,757,000

Additional estimated operating costs associated with printing/distribution and internal staffing related to the program, bring the total annual cost for full implementation to \$1.8M.

**Considerations**

**Operational Concerns:** As outlined in previous reports, there remain concerns related to operational constraints, specifically the overloading of trips at school end times in some locations. Although this was not observed at the pilot schools, it remains a risk, particularly at schools where large volumes of students are already resulting in overloads, including Halifax West High School.

In addition, since the time of the original approval to proceed with a pilot, additional resources and mitigation measures have been required to address youth-related safety incidents at transit terminals and on transit vehicles. It is not known what impact the widespread distribution of transit passes, and ease of accessing the system, will have on the number and severity of youth-related safety incidents.

**Implementation Timeline:** The timeline for distribution of passes to students would vary based on the volume of schools involved and requires coordination with the school system. Activities include the

production and distribution of passes, surveying students, and providing educational sessions in the school to ensure students have the information they need to successfully use public transit. To extend passes for the existing participants, surveys and education are not as critical, and therefore it is expected that it can be completed in less than a month, before the passes expire on December 31, 2023.

Should funding be secured to expand the program to all schools (Option H), it is expected that this would require between several months and a year, depending on timing as it relates to exam schedules, summer break, etc., and the order in which schools were enrolled would be based on logistical considerations.

Due to the nature of the legislative and budgetary processes at the Municipality, the Province and HRCE, including administration requirements regarding the provision of funds between levels of government, the roll-out of passes at additional schools could be delayed significantly, meaning interim periods where students do not have access to the Student Transit Pass Program. To address this potential delay in receiving any funding, HRM staff will work with staff from the Province and HRCE to examine means by which funding can be provided to the Municipality in an efficient manner while also addressing the Municipality's need for certainty of the provision of funding.

**If external cost sharing agreements cannot be secured, expansion of the program could be considered as part of the 2025/26 municipal business planning process.**

**By-Law U-100 User Fees By-law:** The current by-law allows Council to approve participation in this pilot program with an approved motion and would not need to be amended to support the current recommendation. However, should the program become permanent, By-law U-100 will need to be updated to reflect the final program parameters.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The student pass program is expected to reduce transit fare revenue collected by traditional means. In Phase 2, this was offset by funding from HRCE.

For the extension of Phase 2 to June 2024, the estimated cost for HRCE schools is \$185,000, which HRCE is willing to contribute. For CSAP schools, the estimated cost is approximately \$15,000, which is a nominal amount in relation to the Halifax Transit revenue budget and can be absorbed.

At this time, it is estimated that the Halifax Transit revenue budget can potentially absorb up to approximately \$300,000 of additional lost revenue without requiring a separate funding source. Any additional costs would require an external funding partnership, or a municipal budget source would need to be identified.

## **RISK CONSIDERATION**

A risk assessment was completed. When evaluated, the risks were considered low. To reach this conclusion, consideration was given to the following risks:

**Service Delivery Risks:** There is a risk of increased overloads on buses, impacting service to both students and other passengers. This risk overall rates low as it was not observed during the pilot phase and not anticipated to occur by extending the pilot to June 2024 at the existing schools. However, there is one school location not participating in the pilot at this time where overloads already occur and are likely to happen more frequently if passes are distributed. It may be possible in the future to mitigate this risk by adding additional service.

**Security Risks:** There is a risk of increased safety related incidents, or vandalism associated with the program. This risk rates low for extending the existing students, as they already have access to transit

services. To mitigate this risk, information sessions provided at the schools will include information on expected behaviours while accessing the transit system.

*Financial and Economic Risks:* There is a financial risk to the municipality if student passes are distributed in advance of receipt of funds from a funding partner. This risk rates low as the potential funding partners are government organizations. This risk can be mitigated by requiring appropriate documentation prior to proceeding.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Student surveys prepared by Halifax Transit were completed at the beginning of both Phase 1 of the pilot program. HRCE-led family surveys were also distributed and completed that provide additional insight into the usage of the program. Positive comments and feedback have been received throughout the pilot, including emails/phone calls from residents who wish to see the program continue, and who are inquiring about availability in other schools.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

Continuation and/or expansion of this program is expected to increase transit usage in both the short and long term, as youth gain comfort using Halifax Transit, which has positive environmental implications.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

That the Transportation Standing Committee

1. Choose not to approve the continuation of the program by defeating the recommendation.
2. Recommend that Halifax Regional Council direct Halifax Transit to include Option (A - H) as part of the 2024/25 Budget and Business planning process for consideration by the Budget Committee.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A – List of Eligible HRCE Schools

Attachment B – Staff Report Dated November 8, 2022 – Student Transit Pass Pilot Program

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Patricia Hughes, MCIP, LPP, Director, Planning and Customer Engagement, Halifax Transit 902.490.6287

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## Attachment A – List of Eligible HRCE Schools

High School	Number of Students	Estimated Revenue Loss
Auburn High	844	\$ 73,800
Bay View High	973	\$ 51,700
Charles P Allen High	1,710	\$ 72,100
Citadel High	1,454	\$ 213,500
Cole Harbour District High	325	\$ 28,400
Dartmouth High	868	\$ 152,000
Halifax West High	1,540	\$ 204,500
Island View High	548	\$ 66,000
JL IIsley High	975	\$ 99,000
Millwood High	828	\$ 71,200
Sackville High	757	\$ 78,000
Woodlawn High	820	\$ 102,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,642</b>	<b>\$ 1,212,700</b>

Junior High School	High School Family	Number of Students	Estimated Revenue Loss
AJ Smeltzer Jr High	Sackville High	170	\$ 8,800
Astral Drive Jr High	Auburn High	485	\$ 21,200
Bicentennial School	Dartmouth High	232	\$ 20,300
Brookside Jr High	Halifax West High	250	\$ 16,600
Calendonia Jr High	Woodlawn High	293	\$ 18,300
Clayton Park Jr High	Halifax West High	458	\$ 30,400
Cunard Jr High	JL IIsley High	123	\$ 6,200
Dartmouth South Academy	Dartmouth High	221	\$ 19,300
Elizabeth Sutherland School	JL IIsley High	181	\$ 9,200
Ellenvale Jr High	Woodlawn High	445	\$ 27,800
Eastern Passage Education Centre	Island View High	326	\$ 19,600
Eric Graves Memorial Jr High	Woodlawn High	197	\$ 12,300
Fairview Jr High	Halifax West High	525	\$ 34,900
Five Bridges Jr High	Bay View High	606	\$ 16,100
Graham Creighton Jr High	Auburn High	290	\$ 12,700
Gorsebrook Jr High	Citadel High	346	\$ 25,400
Herring Cove Jr High	JL IIsley High	146	\$ 7,400
Halifax Central Jr High	Citadel High	128	\$ 9,400
Highland Park Jr High	Citadel High	155	\$ 11,400
John Martin Jr High	Dartmouth High	219	\$ 19,200
Leslie Thomas Jr High	Sackville High	209	\$ 10,800
Madeline Symonds Middle School	Charles P Allen High	728	\$ 15,400
Oxford School	Citadel High	311	\$ 22,800
Park West School	Halifax West High	271	\$ 18,000
Ridgecliffe Middle School	Bay View High	456	\$ 12,100
Rockingstone Heights School	JL IIsley High	122	\$ 6,200
Rocky Lake Jr High	Charles P Allen High	977	\$ 20,600
Ross Road School	Cole Harbour District High	138	\$ 6,000
Sackville Height Jr High	Millwood High	448	\$ 19,300
Sir Robert Borden Jr High	Cole Harbour District High	197	\$ 8,600
St. Agnes Jr High	Citadel High	343	\$ 25,200
<b>Total</b>		<b>9,996</b>	<b>\$ 511,500</b>



P.O. Box 1749  
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**Item No. 15.1.3**  
**Halifax Regional Council**  
**November 22, 2022**

**TO:** Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

**SUBMITTED BY:**

Original Signed by 

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** November 8, 2022

**SUBJECT:** **Student Transit Pass Pilot Program - Phases 2 & 3**

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### **ORIGIN**

On May 18, 2021, Halifax Regional Council approved a motion for Item 11.1.1:

MOVED by Councillor Mason, seconded by Councillor Mancini

That Halifax Regional Council:

1. Approve the phased in Student Transit Pass Pilot Program as described in the staff report dated February 1, 2021, with Pilot Phase 1 expanded to include all students at each of the four identified schools in grades 9 through 12; and
2. Adopt By-law U-108, the purpose of which is to amend By-law U-100, the User Charges By-law, to enable the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program, as set out in Attachment C to the staff report dated February 1, 2021.

### **MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

### **LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

*Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*, R.S.N.S 2008, c. 39, subsection 69(1), and section 102, as follows:

Subsection 69(1)

The Municipality may provide a public transportation service by:

- (a) the purchase of vehicles or vessels and operation of the service.
- (b) providing financial assistance to a person who will undertake to provide the service; or
- (c) a combination of these methods.

Section 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

**RECOMMENDATION ON PAGE 2**

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Approve the implementation of Phase 2 of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program as outlined in this report; and
2. Accept a contribution of \$200,000 from Halifax Regional Centre for Education towards the pilot program and authorize the CAO to negotiate and execute a contribution agreement.

**BACKGROUND**

**Halifax Transit Student Transit Pass Phase 1 Implementation**

In consultation with Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE) and Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial (CSAP), four high schools were chosen to participate in the Halifax Transit Student Transit Pass Pilot program, as approved by Regional Council on February 25, 2021. The four schools were chosen for several reasons, including their proximity to existing transit routes, concentrated student populations, and the ability for existing transit service to serve the schools without exceeding bus capacity numbers.

The program was successfully launched in the fall of 2021. This report details the results of the 2021/22 pilot program and recommendations for Phases 2 and 3 of the program.

**DISCUSSION**

**Distribution and Uptake of Student Transit Passes**

One year transit passes were provided and distributed to students in all grades at each of the participating schools, as outlined in table 1.

*Table 1 – Pilot Project Participants*

<b>Schools</b>	<b>Passes provided</b>	<b>Passes distributed</b>
Dartmouth High School	1,010	1,010
Woodlawn High School (formerly Prince Andrew High)	830	830
École secondaire du Sommet	340	240
École secondaire Mosaïque	400	172
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,580</b>	<b>2,252</b>

The HRCE schools distributed all passes to eligible students. CSAP student participation was lower, as students were given the option to participate.

As part of the program launch, Halifax Transit staff facilitated interactive *How to Ride Transit* events for students at each school in the pilot program. These events provided information on the use of transit maps, Riders' Guides, schedules, and smartphone applications, as well as basic transit safety, and passenger conduct guidelines. Each school provided staff time during school hours for the presentations and all events were well attended.

**Halifax Transit Student Survey**

As part of the pilot program measurement plan, students were asked during the onsite school events in fall 2021 to complete and return a survey to assess their familiarity and use of transit services. Of the more

than 2,500 surveys distributed, 529 (approximately 20%) were completed and Halifax Transit was able to extrapolate the following key insights:

- Most students were familiar with Halifax Transit services;
- When asked how they travel to school, 30.9% of respondents stated they use Halifax Transit, 30.9% take a school bus, and 38.8% get a drive from a parent;
- 25.4% of respondents use transit daily, 28.2% use transit weekly, 35% use transit monthly;
- Of those who use Halifax Transit, 51.3% of respondents use transit to get to school, and 48.7% of respondents use transit for entertainment, such as restaurants, movies, and events;
- When asked if they feel comfortable and safe riding alone on Halifax Transit, 75.3% of respondents responded “Yes”;

### **HRCE Family Survey**

In June, 2022, HRCE conducted a survey with families to evaluate the program. The following provides key highlights from the survey:

- Of the 161 responses received, 66% of students attend Dartmouth High and 34% of students attend Woodlawn High;
- In total, 64% of respondents take Halifax Transit to school, 30% take a school bus, and 6% stated not applicable;
- By contrast, 49% of Woodlawn High students who responded take Halifax Transit, versus 70% of Dartmouth High students;
- Of the students who prefer the school bus as their method of transportation, their reasoning for not taking Halifax Transit was evenly split between the bus not running often enough (8%), the route taking too long (7%), or a long walk to the bus stop or terminal (6%). Although there were a variety of responses provided in the “other” category (17%), most of these responses included that the school bus stop is closer to their home and more direct to school;
- Of the students who ride a school bus, about one-quarter (23% a.m., 24% p.m.) take the bus five days a week, to and from school. Between both Woodlawn and Dartmouth High, students reported taking the school bus on average 3.76 mornings and 3.72 afternoons per week;
- Of the students who take Halifax Transit, about one-third (31% a.m., 35% p.m.) take the bus five days a week, to and from school. Between both Woodlawn and Dartmouth High, students reported taking Halifax Transit on average 3.56 mornings and 3.58 afternoons per week. Additionally, students reported taking Halifax Transit for midday trips on average 2.95 days a week, an option not available to school bus riders. 87% of survey respondents felt that the Halifax Transit Student Pass has helped with flexibility for travel to and from school.

Overall, Phase 1 of the program was deemed successful based on the feedback received from participating students, families, and schools. Moreover, 311 has received numerous inquiries from families about the status of the program and its potential expansion to all schools.

Prior to the launch of Phase 1, Halifax Transit anticipated some operational concerns, such as passenger overloads and service requirements but none were experienced.

### **Pilot Program Extension**

Phase 1 of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program was initially anticipated to be complete on June 30, 2022. At that time, HRCE remained interested in the program; however, they required additional time to evaluate the program. Halifax Transit agreed to extend the program to November 30, 2022, which allowed

time for HRCE to conduct their review and analysis, and to continue discussions and negotiations for the implementation of Phase 2 of the program. This has been further extended to December 31, 2022, to allow for sufficient time to receive Regional Council direction on the next phase.

### **Phase 2 Implementation**

It is proposed that Phase 2 of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program operate from January 1, 2023 to fall 2023, a period of approximately nine months. Results from Phase 2 of the pilot program and a recommended approach for a next steps will be shared with Regional Council via a staff recommendation report in the fall of 2023. Transit passes provided during this phase will be set to expire in December 2023, to allow transitional time following the pilot.

### **HRCE Schools**

The initial proposed plan for Phase 2 was to launch the program at three to five additional HRCE high schools, with the goal of eventually expanding to all high schools and junior high schools.

Following further consultation and negotiations with HRCE, due to the tendency for both high school and junior high school students to travel on the same school buses/routes together, it appears that for the next phase of the program, it may be more beneficial to evaluate the impact of the program by adding the six junior high schools that feed into the two participating high schools. They are:

#### **Dartmouth High family of schools:**

- Bicentennial School
- Dartmouth South Academy
- John Martin Junior High

#### **Woodlawn High family of schools:**

- Caledonia Junior High
- Ellenvale Junior High
- Eric Graves Memorial Junior High

It is anticipated that the junior high schools will have varying rates of transit usage for both school trips and non-school trips, depending on their locations and proximity to Halifax Transit routes. Extending the program and adding junior high schools allows HRCE additional time to evaluate the program and explore long term student transportation strategies and budgets. HRCE will provide a financial contribution as outlined below in this report to contribute to the costs of the program. Based on the uptake and success of Phase 2 of this program, HRCE may consider discontinuing some school bus routes to assist with funding a permanent program if the shift from school buses to transit service is substantial enough to move forward.

### **CSAP Schools**

It is recommended that Phase 2 of the pilot program also include the two participating CSAP High schools: École secondaire du Sommet and École secondaire Mosaïque. While CSAP, to date, has not expressed interest in financially supporting the program, extending the program at these schools would allow time for Halifax Transit to assess student ridership patterns and to evaluate if students use transit for other purposes such as extracurricular activities, jobs, or recreation. As CSAP students live in a much wider catchment area than HRCE schools, it is anticipated that relatively few are able to use Halifax Transit for school trips, and many may not have any access to transit service near their homes. As such, CSAP is less likely to contribute to the program, in part because there are limited opportunities for them to find cost savings in

school busing, however the financial impact of extending the pilot in these schools is minimal.

### **Estimated Revenue Impacts**

The total estimated cost of implementing Phase 2 of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program at HRCE high schools, HRCE junior high schools, and CSAP high schools identified in this report is \$310,000.

The following provides a breakdown of these costs by school board.

### ***HRCE High Schools and Junior High Schools***

Based on the survey responses, information about transit service levels/usage in various communities, and enrollment numbers at each school, estimated program costs have been determined. These costs reflect the revenue lost by not collecting fares from the students.

The cost of the pilot program per student at Dartmouth and Woodlawn High Schools is estimated to be in the range of \$120-\$236 annually, or a median of approximately \$175 per student. Using this as the base rate, for a nine-month pilot, depending on enrollment numbers, offering the pilot in the two high schools could result in a revenue loss of approximately \$200,000. If the permanent program was extended to the additional 10 high schools serviced by Halifax Transit, the total revenue loss is estimated to be approximately \$1.2M per year.

The addition of the six junior high feeder schools will add significant value in informing the next phase of the project. A portion of junior high students already have access to transit service at no cost as they are 12 years of age or under. Students typically turn 13 years old in either grade 7 or grade 8. As such, the potential revenue loss from offering the program is significantly lower than at high schools. In addition, although there is no data available about trip patterns/purposes at this time, it is anticipated that junior high students are likely to spend less on transit per student than high school students as they are less likely to have part time jobs, etc. As such, the extension of the program to the junior high schools is expected to have a cost of approximately \$88,000 for the nine-month period.

The estimated cost for implementing Phase 2 of the program at HRCE high schools and junior high schools is \$288,000 for the nine-month period. A total financial contribution of \$200,000 has been proposed and agreed upon in principle by HRCE to support the next phase of the pilot program. This contribution reflects the cost of the high school portion of the program only. While the student passes will be valid for a twelve-month period from January 1 - December 31, 2023, the financial contribution from HRCE reflects the anticipated nine-month pilot phase. This will allow students to continue to use their passes, and ensures sufficient time for Halifax Transit to negotiate a fee agreement for Phase 3 of the program with HRCE, prepare a staff recommendation report for Regional Council, and develop by-law amendments that will be required to transition the pilot to a permanent program in January 2024.

It is recommended that the cost of implementation at the six junior high feeder schools be covered by Halifax Transit. This investment will help to build momentum for the program, and allow HRCE to assess results and potential cost savings with school buses at junior high schools. It also supports Halifax Transit's goal of fostering early adoption of transit amongst youth.

Upon approval by Regional Council of the implementation plan outlined in this report, a contribution agreement between HRCE and the municipality will be completed.

### ***CSAP Schools***

Considering ridership for the sake of commuting to school is low in the communities served by the two participating CSAP schools, there is minimal financial impact, and it is recommended that Halifax Transit fund the continuation of the program at École secondaire du Sommet and École secondaire Mosaïque to allow for continued discussions regarding the program with CSAP. The total cost for implementing Phase 2 of the program at these two schools is estimated at approximately \$22,000.

### **Program Administration**

Similar to Phase 1 of the program, the annual transit passes will be printed and branded as an annual Student Pass. Distribution of passes to students will be managed by individual school administrations. Each student will be provided with a QR code directing them to the Student Transit Pass program information. For those who prefer, paper copies will be made available.

*How to Ride Transit* educational events will continue to be facilitated at participating high schools and junior high schools by transit staff in collaboration with each school. During these events, student surveys will be distributed to monitor and evaluate the program

### **Phase 3 Implementation – Permanent Program**

The results of the Phase 2 implementation will be provided to Regional Council to consider formalizing a permanent program with HRCE and CSAP to provide passes to all high schools and junior high schools serviced by Halifax Transit. The implementation of Phase 2 of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program is in accordance with sections 3(i) and 8D of By-Law U-100 - Respecting User Charges; however, amendments to the by-law would be required should the program become permanent.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The total estimated cost of operating Phase 2 of the pilot program is \$310,000. Estimates for this cost are difficult to determine as these assumptions of potential revenue loss are gathered from survey respondents and not historical financial data.

These costs will be partially offset by HRCE contributing approximately \$200,000 towards the Phase 2 pilot for two HRCE high schools for the duration of this phase. This leads to a net maximum expected revenue loss of \$110,000 for the Phase 2 pilot program and has been accounted for in current year revenue projections under cost centre R631 - 5201. This is estimated to be the maximum expected revenue loss from this program but could vary depending on the timing of the Phase 3 implementation.

### **RISK CONSIDERATION**

There are no significant risks associated with the implementation of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program. Phase 1 of the program was implemented successfully, and the program has been positively received. Risks are rated low.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Halifax Transit engaged with HRCE and CSAP in the development of this report.

In addition, high school students who participated in Phase 1 *How to Ride Transit* events were surveyed to inform recommendations outlined in this report.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

This program will increase transit ridership for school trips, but it is also anticipated that those participating in the program will use transit for other trips, including recreation and extracurricular activities. This means that in the long term, these youth and young adults are more likely to build sustainable transportation patterns.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

That Halifax Regional Council:

1. Modify Phase 2 of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program to be limited to the four current participating high schools, and not expand to include the junior high feeder schools.
2. Defeat the staff motion recommending moving forward with the Phase 2 implementation plan outlined in this report and terminate the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program.
3. Defer the matter for a supplementary report dealing with expanding Phase 2 of the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program to other schools serviced by Halifax Transit.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A – Expanded 2021-2022 Student Transit Pass Pilot Program Report

Attachment B - 2021 Student Survey Results EN FR

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Lisette Cormier, Program Coordinator, Transit Planning & Customer Engagement,  
902.490.4160

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P.O. Box 1749  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
B3J 3A5 Canada

**Item No. 8.1**  
**Transportation Standing Committee**  
**Special Meeting**  
**March 25, 2021**

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Transportation Standing Committee

***-Original Signed-***

**SUBMITTED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Dave Reage, MCIP, LPP, Executive Director, Halifax Transit

***-Original Signed-***

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** **March 9, 2021**

**SUBJECT:** **Expanded 2021-2022 Student Transit Pass Pilot Program**

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**SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT**

**ORIGIN**

At the February 25, 2021 meeting of Transportation Standing Committee, the following motion was put and passed:

That the Transportation Standing Committee defer item 12.1.1 - 2021/22 Student Transit Pass Pilot Program to the March 25, 2021 meeting of the Transportation Standing Committee and request a supplementary report dealing with extending the student pass pilot program to all students from the four identified schools.

**LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, 2008, c. 39

Subsection 69(1)

The Municipality may provide a public transportation service by:

- (a) the purchase of vehicles or vessels and operation of the service;
- (b) providing financial assistance to a person who will undertake to provide the service; or
- (c) a combination of these methods.

Section 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.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Transportation Standing Committee recommend that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Approve the phased in Student Transit Pass Pilot Program as described in this report dated February 1, 2021, with Pilot Phase 1 expanded to include all students at each of the four identified schools in grades 9 through 12;
2. Adopt By-law U-108, the purpose of which is to amend By-law U-100, the User Charges By-law, to enable the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program, as set out in Attachment C to this report.

## **BACKGROUND**

At the February 25, 2021 meeting of Transportation Standing Committee, the Committee reviewed and discussed the staff recommendation to implement a limited Transit Pass Pilot for one grade at each of four schools. These schools were:

- Dartmouth High School
- Prince Andrew High School
- École Mosaïque
- École du Sommet

The original staff recommendation included a three phased approach:

- Pilot Phase 1: A pilot program limited to one grade at four select schools which are currently well served by Halifax Transit service. The Pilot Phase 1 period will provide an opportunity to adapt the program as required due to any unforeseen impacts, and ensure adequate time is provided to negotiate an appropriate funding agreement with both HRCE and CSAP ahead of Pilot Phase 2. This phase will be offered at no cost to HRCE and CSAP.
- Pilot Phase 2: An expanded pilot program would see the program incrementally extended and offered to the remaining grades within the four pilot schools, and the program launched in three to six additional high schools that are well served by transit. Details of the Pilot Phase 2 will be dependent on the findings of survey and data collected in Phase 1 and will require a formal funding agreement between the school organizations and the municipality.
- Full Program Roll Out: The objective is to create a permanent program offered to all middle and high schools that are served by Halifax Transit.

This phased-in approach was recommended to help Halifax Transit to understand the cost of the program, as well as the impact that many additional riders at school dismissal times may have on capacity.

At the February 25, 2021 meeting of Transportation Standing Committee, staff were directed to return with a staff report showing a Phase 1 Pilot revised to include all grades at each of the four pilot schools. This report discusses the benefits and risks associated with a revised, expanded Phase 1 Pilot.

## **DISCUSSION**

Expanded participation will include approximately 2400 students, an increase of 350% over the original planned uptake of approximately 530 students for Pilot Phase 1. Students are distributed as per Table 1 below.

School	Number of Students by Grade				Total
	9	10	11	12	
Dartmouth High	118	259	291	311	979
Prince Andrew High	0	225	225	295	745
École Mosaïque	88	71	56	86	301
École du Sommet	103	82	84	93	362

The benefit of the expanded Pilot Phase 1 is that more students benefit from the program in the first phase. It is anticipated that this will be well received by both HRCE and CSAP, and that it will likely reduce the complication and administrative burden of this phase of the pilot. The additional student participants will also provide further information to inform the development of a funding agreement in Pilot Phase 2.

This revised approach is not without risk. There is a significant risk that the additional passenger load could cause overcrowding on some routes at sometimes of the day. It is anticipated that this is a lower risk at the CSAP schools due to the overall lower enrollment, and the larger school catchment areas.

There is likely to be a considerable impact to revenues, as described in the financial implications section of this report.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are approximately 2,400 students who would be included in the pilot program. It is anticipated that the revenue loss associated with Pilot Phase 1 of this program is between \$72,000 and \$108,000 annually. The potential loss varies depending on how frequently the students are currently paying for transit, and the length of the pilot (anticipated to be between 6 and 18 months). Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of Pilot Phase 1 on ridership and revenue is anticipated to be lower than it would be in a more typical year. However, it is not expected that this would be a long-term revenue loss beyond the Pilot Phase 1; once Pilot Phase 2 is rolled out and funding agreements are in place with HRCE and CSAP, it is expected that Halifax Transit will recoup any lost revenue, and potentially even increase future revenues by building sustainable transportation habits in Halifax youth.

## **RISK CONSIDERATION**

It is likely that some trips will be overloaded by a significant increase in ridership as a result of this program. This risk has been mitigated to some degree by the careful selection of pilot schools for this program, but it is still likely that there will be trips regularly that overload. At this time, Halifax Transit has no additional resources to reallocate to provide additional trips in the case that there are regular overloads.

It is also a risk that staff will not reach a funding agreement with HRCE and CSAP. If this is the case, then the pilot will not continue beyond Pilot Phase 1.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

No engagement has been undertaken in the preparation of this supplementary report.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

This program will likely increase transit ridership for school trips, but it is also possible that those participating in the program will be more inclined to use transit for other trips. Students may choose public transit because it accommodates their schedule or extracurricular activities, and otherwise helps to build their independence by facilitating other trips. This means that in the longer term, these youth and young adults are more likely to build sustainable transportation patterns.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

The Committee may recommend that Regional Council approve the original scope of the Phase 1 Pilot, including only Grade 9 or Grade 10 students at all four pilot schools.

The Committee may defeat the staff motion recommending the Student Transit Pass Program as described in this report and not adopt By-law U-108. The consequence of this is the status quo would be maintained.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A: 2021 22 Student Transit Pass Pilot Program Rec Report 210225tsc1211

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Erin Blay, MCIP, LPP Supervisor, Service Design & Projects, 902.490.4942

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P.O. Box 1749  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
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**Item No. 12.1.1**  
**Transportation Standing Committee**  
**February 25, 2021**

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Transportation Standing Committee

**SUBMITTED BY:** - Original Signed -

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Dave Reage, MCIP, LPP, Executive Director, Halifax Transit

- Original Signed -

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Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** February 1, 2021

**SUBJECT:** 2021 / 22 Student Transit Pass Pilot Program

**ORIGIN**

At the August 13, 2019 meeting of Halifax Regional Council, the following motion was put and passed:

Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to begin planning a Student Transit Pass Pilot Program by meeting with the Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE) and Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial (CSAP) officials to discuss potential partnership opportunities, program details, timelines, logistics, marketing and costs.

**LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, 2008, c. 39

Subsection 69(1).

The Municipality may provide a public transportation service by:

- (a) the purchase of vehicles or vessels and operation of the service;
- (b) providing financial assistance to a person who will undertake to provide the service; or
- (c) a combination of these methods.

Section 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.

**RECOMMENDATIONS ON PAGE 2**

From the Transportation Standing Committee Terms of Reference:

The Transportation Standing Committee shall:

- a) review and oversee policy direction and long term funding approach to promote and encourage Transit alternatives as outlined in the Regional Plan;
- b) review and oversee specific strategic planning directions related to Transit Services coming from the Regional Plan such as the five year strategic plan, Accessibility Plan and the Ferry Plan; and
- c) promote and enable positive communication between communities, ridership, and the Council and Transit services to enable and support the Regional Transit service to the communities of the municipality.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Transportation Standing Committee recommend that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Approve the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program as described in this report; and
2. Adopt By-law U-108, the purpose of which is to amend By-law U-100, the User Charges By-law, to enable the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program, as set out in Attachment C to this report.

### **BACKGROUND**

In 2012, Kingston City Council approved a pilot project that provided grade 9 students with fully subsidized transit passes. Today, all high school students in Kingston receive free transit passes, along with an on-board orientation session to teach students how to ride the bus. In the program's pilot year, students accounted for 28,000 rides, and that number has grown to over 600,000 rides annually (10 per cent of Kingston Transit's total ridership). Since the launch of the Transit High School Bus Pass Program, Kingston's transit ridership has increased by 73%. The Kingston Transit High School Bus Pass Program contributes to overall ridership growth, provides a meaningful alternative mode of transportation for youth, and influences behavioral change.<sup>1</sup>

In 2020, Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE) purchased approximately 1100 monthly transit passes at a specialized rate and distributed them to students to improve options for travel to school. Passes were distributed as per Table 1 below.

*Table 1: Monthly Transit Pass Distribution by School (HRCE, 2020)*

<b>HRCE School</b>	<b>Number of passes</b>
Halifax West High School	327
Oxford School	35
Bedford and Forsyth Education Centres	70
Elizabeth Sutherland School	3
Citadel High School	667

The relationship between Halifax Transit and HRCE has been longstanding, but the pass purchases have always required a significant amount of administration due to the use of paper passes. In the 2020/21 school year, in order to facilitate the pass distribution process and eliminate the need for monthly

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<sup>1</sup> Case Study: The Kingston Story, page 5

reconciliation, Halifax Transit and HRCE implemented an annual pass model similar to the annual SmartTrip EPass, whereby students receive a sticker on their student ID card which makes them eligible for free access to transit services. Similar to the EPass, students show the card to the transit Operator when boarding the bus/ferry in lieu of paying fare or showing a monthly pass.

At present, Halifax Transit does not have a partnership with Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial (CSAP).

## **DISCUSSION**

At the August 13, 2019 meeting of Halifax Regional Council, and with further support from the *Integrated Mobility Plan* (specifically, *Action 57: Encourage young people to use transit and active transportation*), Halifax Transit were directed to engage with HRCE and CSAP to develop a program that would provide free transit service to certain students initially with the goal being to offer the program to a wider student population.

### **Understanding the Impact of the Program**

Considering the potential impact of a program like that seen in the City of Kingston (i.e. increases in ridership, decrease in revenues), it is recommended that the program be introduced as a pilot, allowing for students in one grade at four schools to participate.

In consultation with the school organizations, it was decided that grade 9 or grade 10 students would be a good candidate population for the purposes of the pilot, as this age is becoming more independent, and is generally not yet able to apply for a driver's license.

The candidate schools were chosen for their proximity to existing transit routes and concentrated student population, as well as for the ability of existing transit service levels to serve the students without exceeding capacity. More discussion on candidate schools can be found below.

It is proposed that implementation program occur in three phases, as described below, with ongoing monitoring, particularly during the pilot phases:

- Pilot Phase 1: A pilot program limited to one grade at four select schools which are currently well served by Halifax Transit service. It is anticipated that this pilot would last between six and 18 months, and pending the approval of Regional Council, would begin as soon as feasible (targeting March or April 2021). The uncertainty related to the length of Pilot Phase 1 is due to several factors, but primarily, the difficulty in collecting representative ridership data during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, an extended Pilot Phase 1 period will also provide an opportunity to adapt the program as required due to any unforeseen impacts, and ensure adequate time is provided to negotiate an appropriate funding agreement with both HRCE and CSAP ahead of Pilot Phase 2. This phase will be offered at no cost to HRCE and CSAP.
- Pilot Phase 2: An expanded pilot program would see the program incrementally extended and offered to the remaining grades within the four pilot schools, and the program launched in three to six additional high schools that are well served by transit.

Details of the Pilot Phase 2 will be dependent on the findings of survey and data collected in Phase 1. It is also anticipated that it will require a formal funding agreement between the school organizations and the municipality. The intent is to return to Regional Council summarizing findings of the Phase 1 pilot, and recommendations for proceeding with Phase 2, including a funding agreement, within twelve months.

- Full Program Roll Out: The objective is to create a permanent program offered to all middle and high schools that are served by Halifax Transit.

This phased-in approach is recommended as it will help Halifax Transit to understand the cost of the program, as well as the impact that many additional riders at school dismissal times may have on capacity. As noted above, no fees will be levied against the HRCE or CSAP for the duration of the Pilot Phase 1, but should this relationship be extended into the Pilot Phase 2, HRM staff will negotiate an agreement with each of HRCE and CSAP, which would include these organizations paying a fee to HRM for the program. The fee would be in accordance with the transit fare to be set forth in *Bylaw U-100 - Respecting User Charges*, once Regional Council has approved proposed amendments. This agreement can be partly informed by survey information collected from students about prior transit use and anticipated usage. The fees paid by HRCE and CSAP would be used to offset revenue losses from students who no longer purchase passes at full price and may potentially be required to ensure resources (extra vehicles/trips) are available at school bell times to accommodate the students without resulting in overloads.

In discussion with HRCE, it was revealed that it would be their preference to move directly into Pilot Phase 2 for the ease of administration and maximum benefit to their students. However, there is significant risk in initiating the program with that many participants all at once, specifically with regards to overloading capacity and cost. With so many unknowns, and no funding agreement in place, staff believe that Pilot Phase 1 would mitigate this risk and make the program more successful.

### **Identification of HRCE Candidate Pilot Schools**

In partnership with HRCE, Halifax Transit has undertaken analysis to determine several candidate schools for the Pilot Phase 1 program described above.

The following provides a summary of the five schools considered for the Pilot Phase 1 program:

#### **Prince Andrew High School**

Prince Andrew High School is located on Woodlawn Road in close proximity to Main Street and Mount Edward Road. This means students participating in the pilot program will be within easy walking distance of Routes 10, 54, 62, and 72. A high level geographic analysis indicates that there are clusters of Prince Andrew students living in neighbourhoods on or near to routes 62 and 54.

#### **Dartmouth High School**

Dartmouth High School, located on Victoria Road, is very well served by transit, as it is within a very short walk to the Bridge Terminal, which is served by many routes from Dartmouth, Cole Harbour, Sackville, Eastern Passage/Woodside, and Halifax. Geographic analysis indicates that there are clusters of Dartmouth High students along Pleasant Street, in the Montebello and Caledonia neighbourhoods, and throughout central Dartmouth. All these neighbourhoods are well served by transit routes which converge at Bridge Terminal.

#### **Citadel High School**

Citadel High is located on Trollope Street in downtown Halifax. Due to its central location, students at Citadel High are within easy walking distance of the highest level of transit service in the city on Robie Street, Summer Street, Spring Garden Road, and South Park Street. Geographic analysis indicates clusters of Citadel High students are distributed throughout peninsular Halifax, and Armdale, among other locations. Staff note that it is possible that the significant number of students could cause overloads on routes such as the Routes 7 and 22. While Citadel High represents a strong candidate for later stage of the pilot, due to the potential for trip overloads, at this time, including this school in the pilot is not recommended.

#### **Halifax West High School**

Halifax West High School is located on Thomas Raddall Drive in Clayton Park. This school is approximately 750m from Lacewood Terminal but is only served directly by the Routes 30A and 30B, and Express Route 137. As the Route 30A and 30B are currently experiencing overloads, this school's inclusion in the program should likely only be considered with the roll out of additional service to serve the demand anticipated by

program. With this in mind, it is recommended that the inclusion of Halifax West High School be considered once a funding agreement is in place in Phase 2 of the pilot.

### **JL Ilsley High School**

JL Ilsley High School is located on Sylvia Avenue in Spryfield. It is within walking distance of Herring Cove Road (served by Corridor Route 9), and the Governors Brook subdivision (served by the Route 25). Analysis indicates that many students of this school live around the Herring Cove Road and would likely be regular users of the Route 9. Unfortunately, as the Route 9 currently experiences overloads with some regularity, it is very likely that a pilot program at this school would result in overloads and dissatisfaction among students, parents, and existing transit passengers. It is recommended that JL Ilsley be considered for inclusion in Phase 2 of the pilot, following data collection and analysis of service levels.

For the reasons noted above, staff recommend that grade 10 students at Prince Andrew High School and grade 9 students Dartmouth High School are included as part of the Pilot Phase 1 program.

### **Identification of CSAP Candidate Pilot Schools**

CSAP has identified two candidate schools for inclusion in the Pilot Phase 1 program described above.

#### **École du Sommet**

École du Sommet is located on Larry Uteck Boulevard, and is served by Routes 90 and 91.

#### **École Mosaïque**

École Mosaïque is located on John Savage Avenue in Burnside. This school is serviced directly by the Route 64 Burnside.

For the reasons noted above, staff recommend that grade 9 students from both CSAP schools be included in the Pilot Phase 1 as staff expects few overload occurrences.

### **Pilot Program Overview and Roll Out**

The student pass pilot program would allow participating students to travel on all conventional transit, ferry, and Access-A-Bus services<sup>2</sup>, free of charge, at any time. Travel on the premium Regional Express services would require additional fare, similar to other fare products.

Similar to the University Pass program or the EPass program, eligible students, if approved, for the Pilot Phase 1 program would receive a transit sticker, placed on their student photo ID by the school administration. Then, when boarding Halifax Transit, students would show their student card to the transit Operator. The rules and regulations of the pass would be reviewed during an in-class Halifax Transit orientation sessions, which would also include information on trip planning and passenger conduct.

Halifax Transit would work to initiate the pilot as soon as possible, targeting March/April 2021, as there is currently more capacity onboard buses for the students than normal, which will mitigate potential overload issues.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the scope of the program and timeline are subject to change at the request of HRCE, CSAP or Halifax Transit due to operational concerns.

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<sup>2</sup> Must be registered Halifax Transit AAB clients and meet eligibility requirements

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are approximately 530 students who would be included in the pilot program. It is anticipated that the revenue loss associated with Pilot Phase 1 of this program is between \$16,000 and \$24,000 annually. The potential loss varies depending on how frequently the students are currently paying for transit, and the length of the pilot (anticipated to be between 6 and 18 months). Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of Pilot Phase 1 on ridership and revenue is anticipated to be lower than it would be in a more typical year. However, it is not expected that this would be a long-term revenue loss beyond the Pilot Phase 1; once Pilot Phase 2 is rolled out and funding agreements are in place with HRCE and CSAP, it is expected that Halifax Transit will recoup any lost revenue, and potentially even increase future revenues by building sustainable transportation habits in Halifax youth.

## **RISK CONSIDERATION**

There are no significant risks associated with the recommendations of this report. The risks considered rate low.

It is possible that some trips will be overloaded by a significant increase in ridership as a result of this program. This risk has been mitigated by the careful selection of pilot schools for this program.

It is also a risk that staff will not reach a funding agreement with HRCE and CSAP. If this is the case, then the pilot will not continue beyond Pilot Phase 1.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

At the direction of Halifax Regional Council, Halifax Transit engaged with HRCE and CSAP in the development of the recommendations of this report.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

This program will likely increase transit ridership for school trips, but it is also likely that those participating in the program will be more likely to use transit for other trips. Students may choose public transit because it accommodates their schedule or extra curricular activities, and otherwise helps to build their independence by facilitating other trips. This means that in the longer term, these youth and young adults are more likely to build sustainable transportation patterns.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

1. The Committee defeat the staff motion recommending the Student Transit Pass Program as described in this report and not adopt By-law U-108 as set out in Attachment C to this report. The consequence of this is the status quo would be maintained.
2. The Committee defer the matter for a supplementary report dealing with extending the student pass pilot program to all students from the four identified schools.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A - Kingston Model Guidebook (FCM, 2019)  
Attachment B – Showing Proposed Changes to U-100  
Attachment C – Amending By-law – U-108

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Lisette Cormier, Program Coordinator, 902.579.4851

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Student Transit Pass Pilot Program

# Attachment B: Survey Results

Fall 2024 and Winter 2025

Halifax Transit: Planning & Customer Engagement  
5-29-2025

## Contents

Halifax Transit Use.....	1
Student Travel Patterns .....	2
Non-School Travel Patterns .....	3
Access to Transit.....	4
Transit Use Frequency .....	5
Barriers to Transit.....	6
Student Independence, Confidence, and Safety .....	7
Support for Peer-Led Transit Training .....	9
Open-Text Feedback: Student Transit Pass Program .....	9
Fall 2024 – Student Feedback .....	12
Winter 2025 – Student Feedback .....	13
Winter 2025 – Parent Feedback .....	14

# Student Transit Pass Pilot Program: Survey Results

The following report includes a summary of the key findings from both the fall 2024 and winter 2025 surveys for the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program.

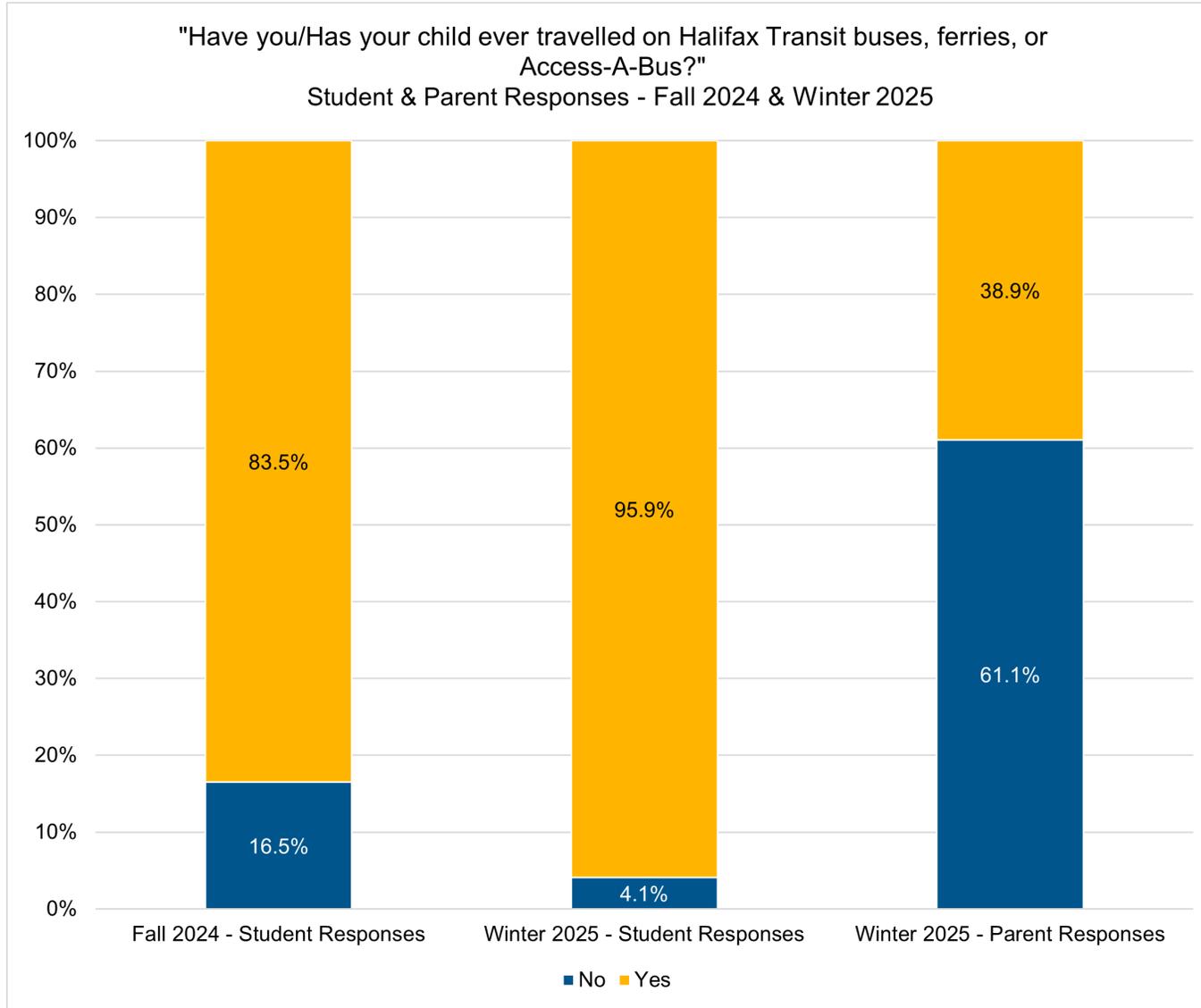
The fall 2024 survey was open to both students and parents/guardians, providing an opportunity to gather initial data on student travel behaviour, modes of transportation, and attitudes toward transit use. The goal was to establish a baseline understanding of how the program was influencing travel patterns and student independence.

Building upon the fall data, the winter 2025 survey introduced separate surveys for students and parents/guardians.

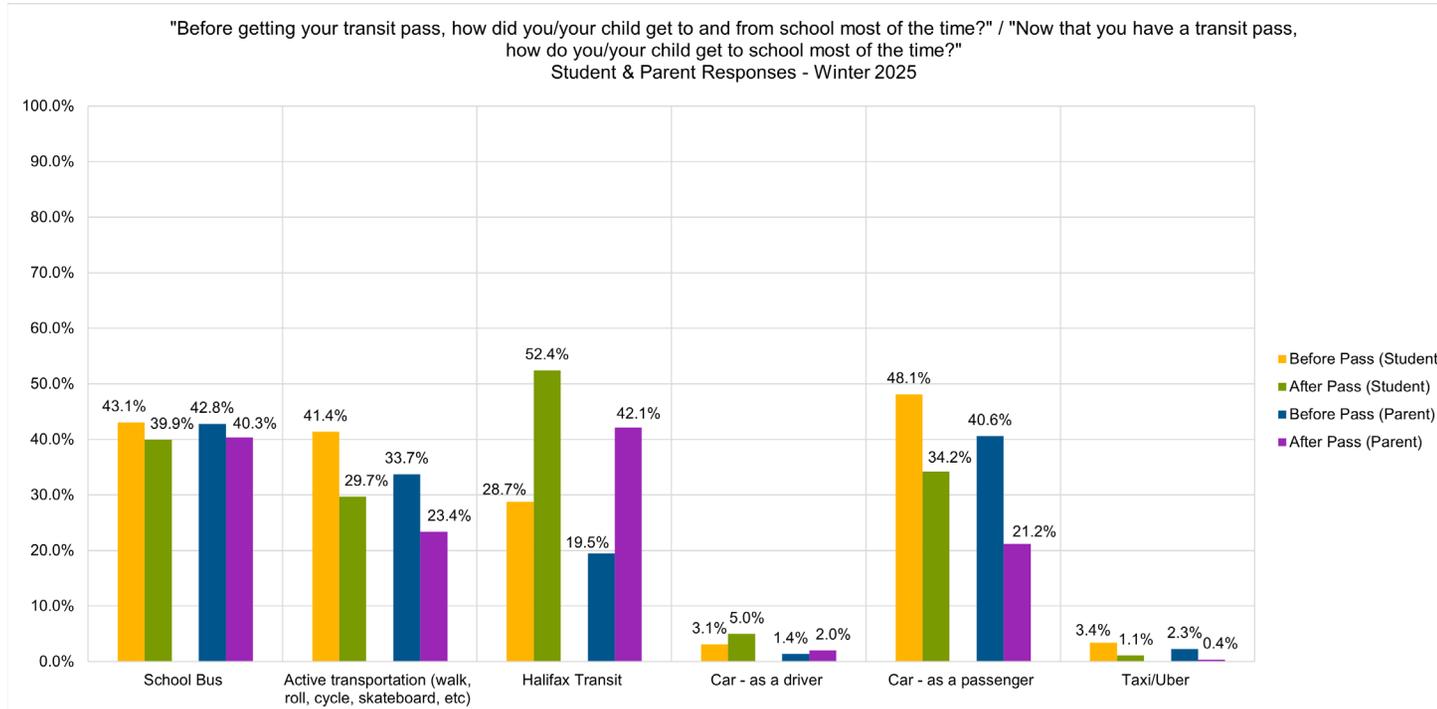
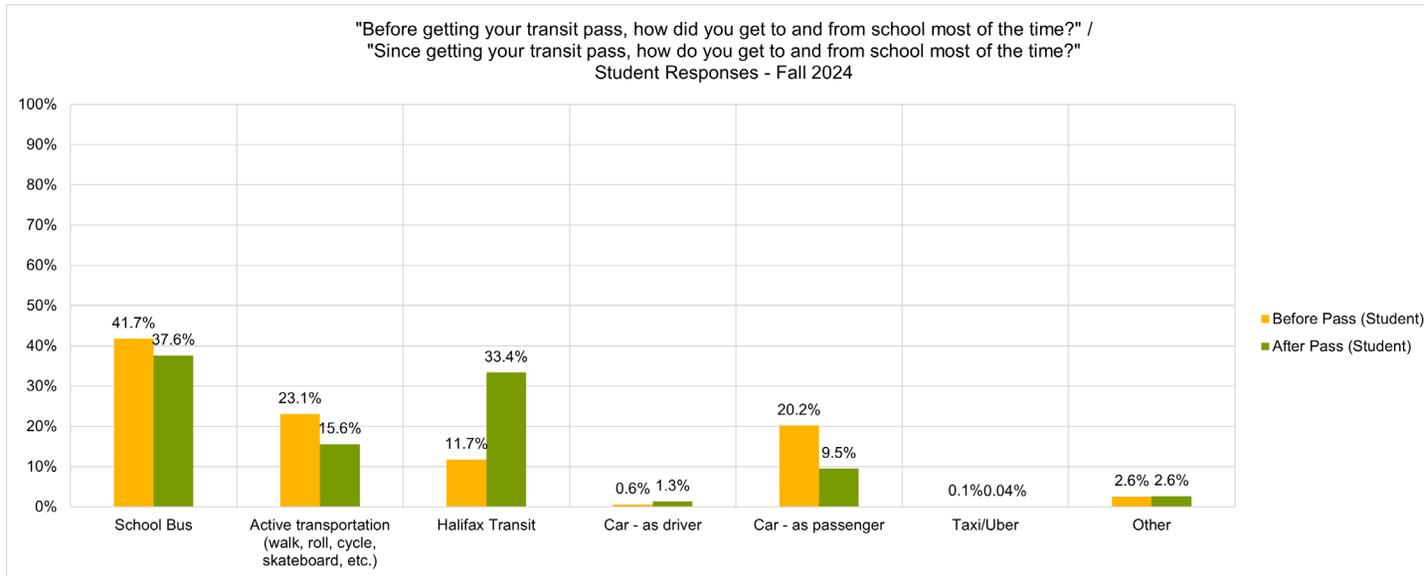
In total, the two survey cycles generated more than 8,100 responses, reflecting a broad and representative cross-section of users.

	Grade	Fall 2024	Winter 2025 (student responses)	Winter 2025 (parent responses)
Junior High School	7	347	205	57
	8	395	235	589
	9	437	319	709
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1179</b>	<b>759</b>	<b>1876</b>
High School	10	447	357	792
	11	509	432	693
	12	343	296	411
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1299</b>	<b>1085</b>	<b>1896</b>
<b>Did not provide grade</b>		<b>25</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>2503</b>	<b>1880</b>	<b>3772</b>

## Halifax Transit Use



# Student Travel Patterns

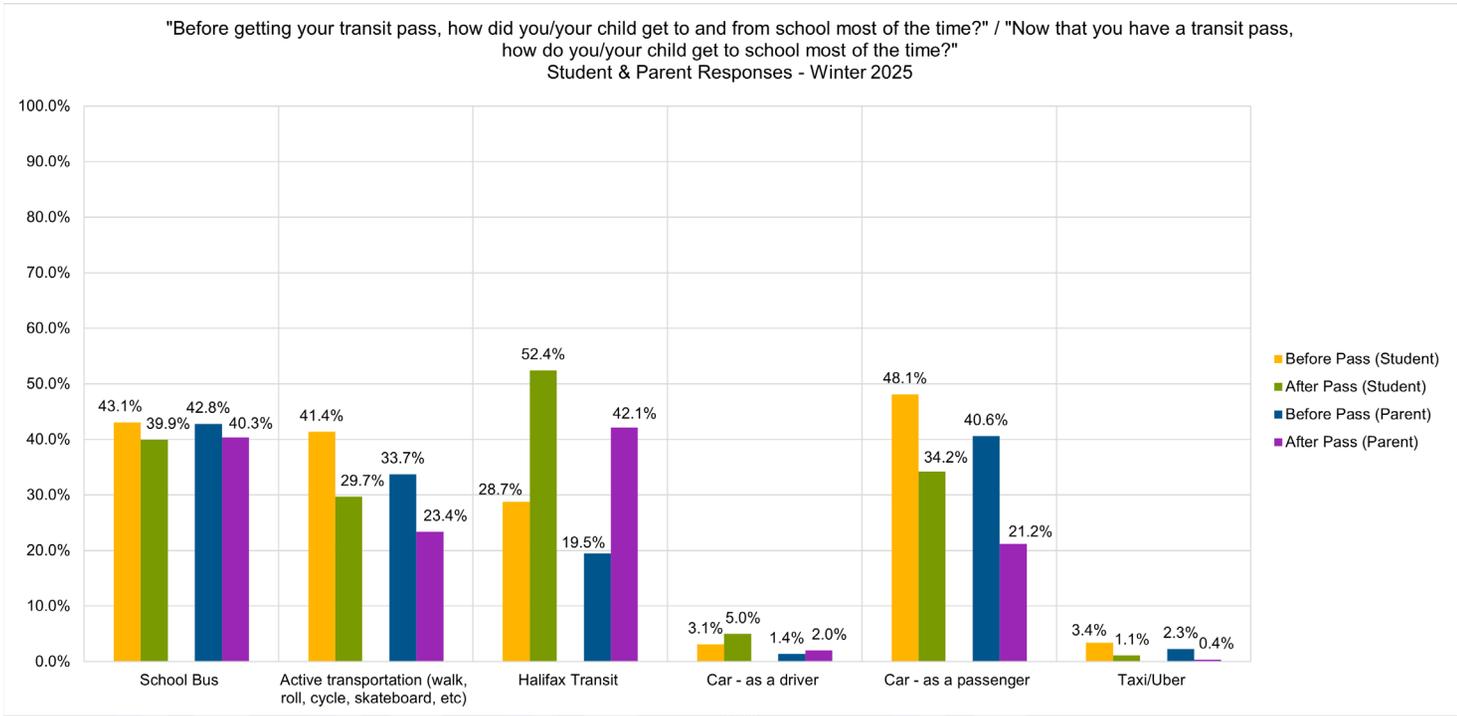
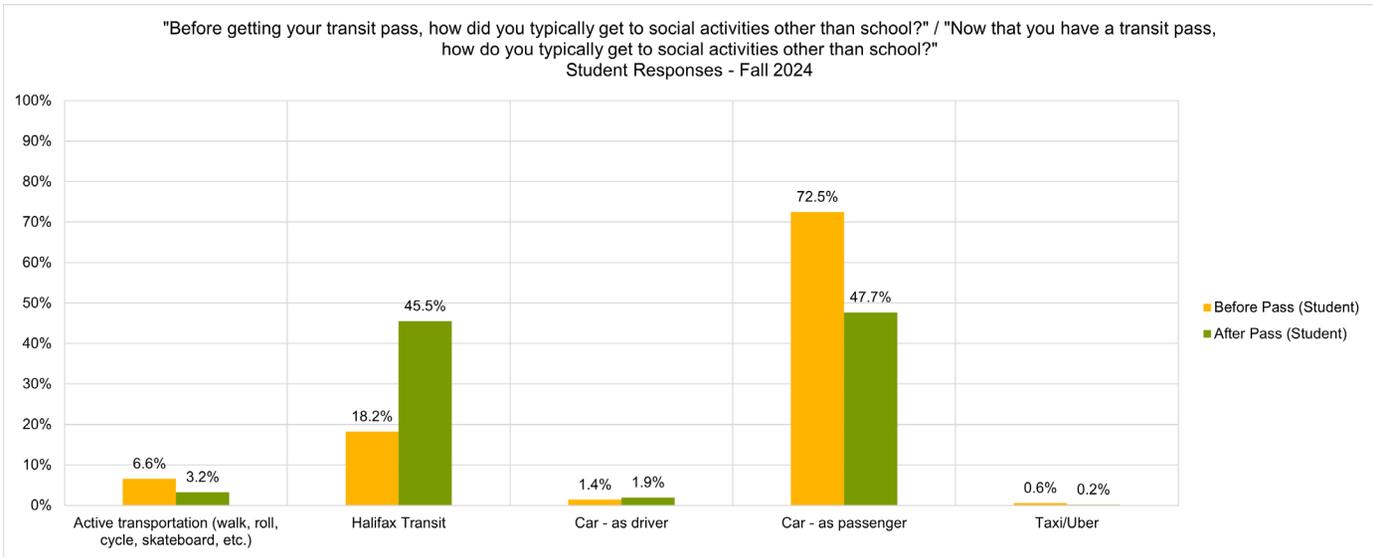


In fall 2024, school-related transit use was reported to have increased from 11.7% (pre-pass) to 33.4%.

In winter 2025, 52.4% of students reported using Halifax Transit as one of their methods to get to and from school.

Parent feedback from the winter 2025 survey supported student-reported trends, with many parents noting increased transit use, flexibility, and a greater sense of independence.

## Non-School Travel Patterns

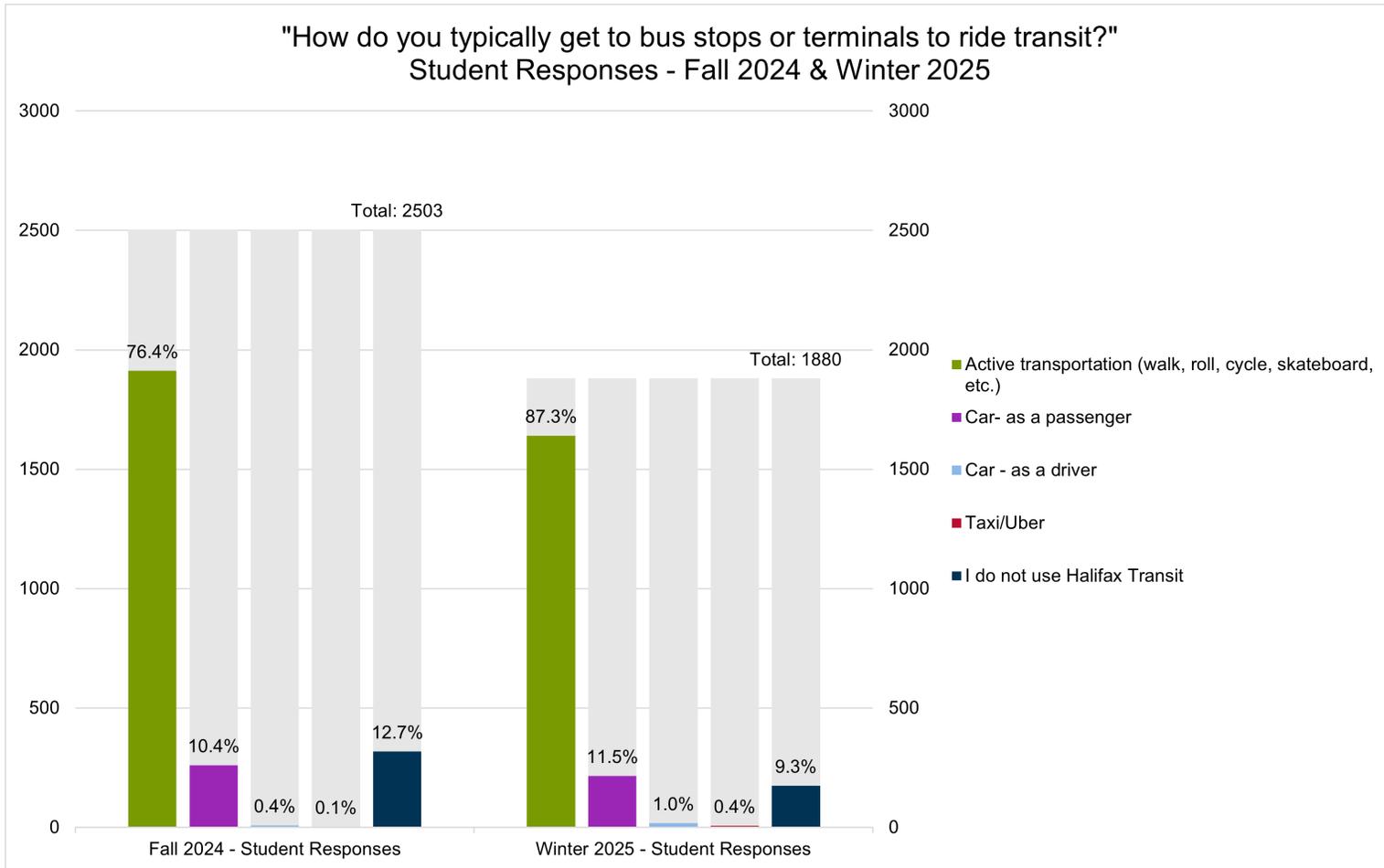


In fall 2024, 45.5% of students reported using Halifax Transit for non-school-related activities, such as part-time jobs, extracurricular programs, and social outings, up from 18.2% pre-pass.

In winter 2025, 71.1% of students reported using Halifax Transit as one of their methods to get to non-school-related activities.

Open-ended parent feedback echoed these findings, citing frequent travel to sports practices, part-time work, volunteer activities, and social events.

## Access to Transit

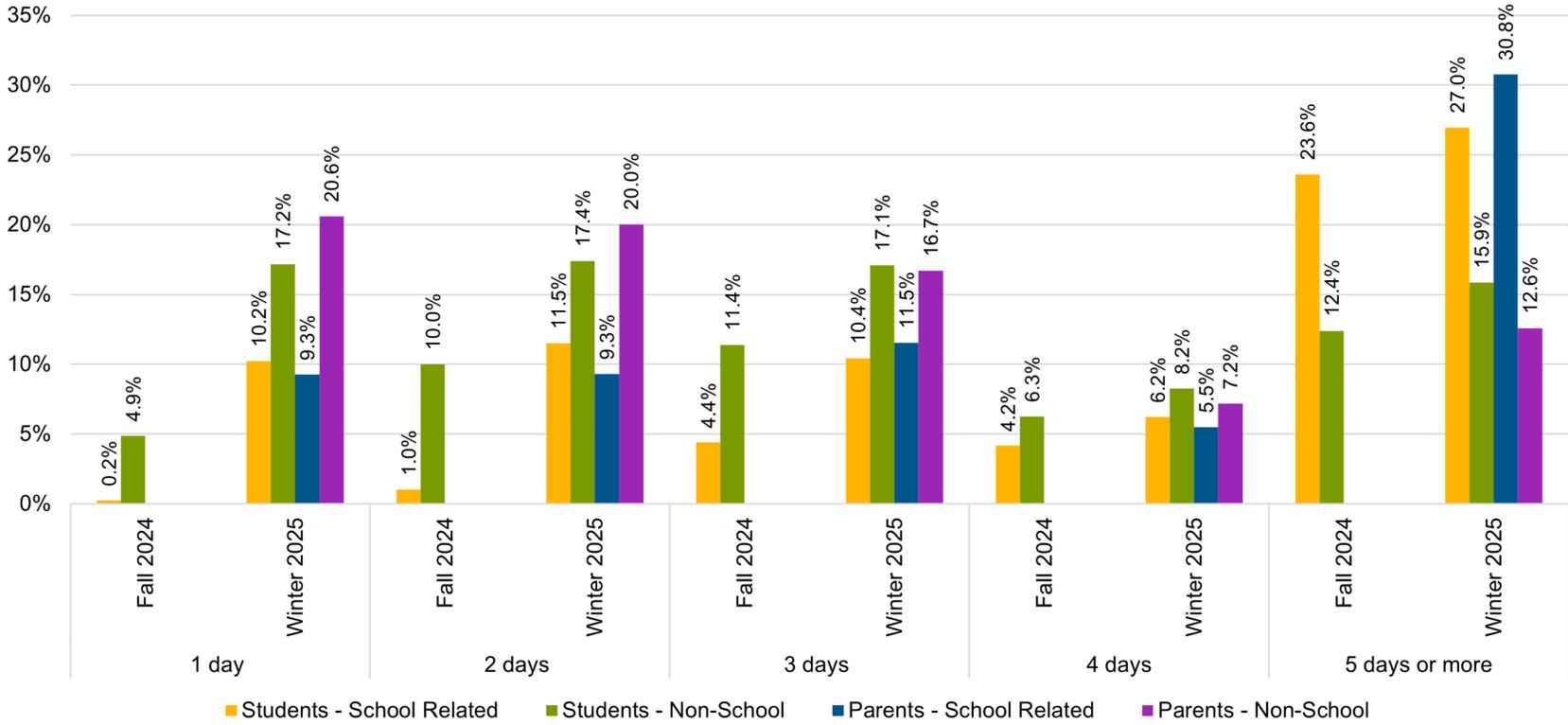


In fall 2024, 76.4% of students used active transportation to reach transit stops or terminals; 10.9% relied on a car or taxi/Uber, reflecting challenges with first-mile/last-mile connectivity.

In winter 2025, 87.3% reported active transportation as one of the methods to reach transit stops or terminals; 12.9% relied on a car or taxi/Uber as one of their methods to get to non-school-related activities.

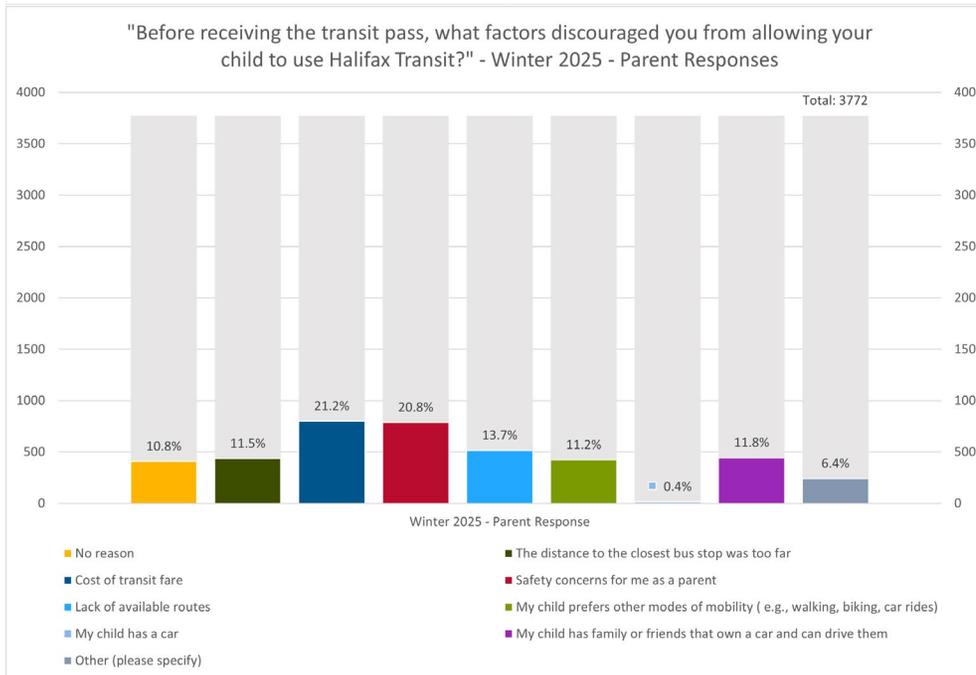
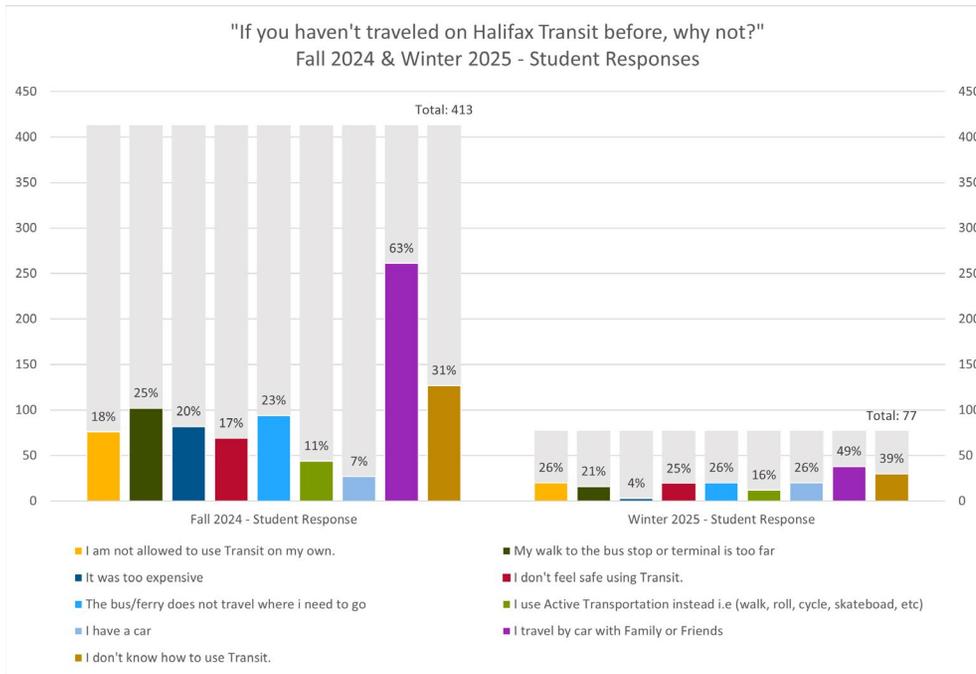
# Transit Use Frequency

"How many days per week do you/your child use the transit pass for school-related activities? / How many days per week do you/your child use the transit pass for social activities other than school?"



In fall 2024 and winter 2025, the majority of students travelling to school on transit used transit for five or more days per week. For non-school-related activities, the number of days per week that students use transit was evenly distributed throughout the week, with the exception of a smaller proportion of students using transit four days per week.

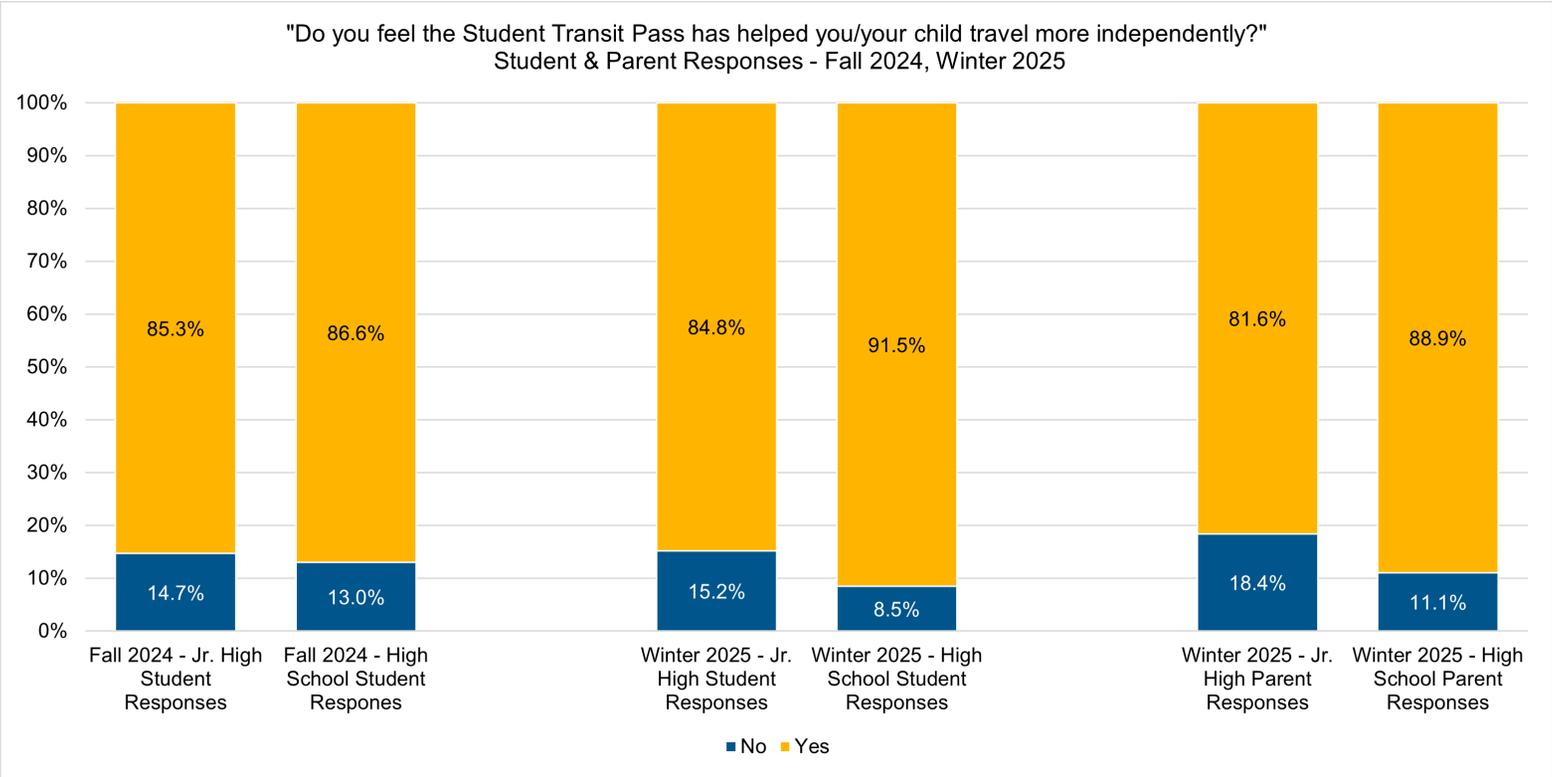
## Barriers to Transit



In fall 2024, the majority of students who reported not having travelled on Halifax Transit cited travelling with family and friends as the reason, followed by not knowing how to use transit, and distance to the nearest bus stop.

In winter 2025, the majority of reasons cited included travelling with family and friends and not knowing how to use transit. Following that, there was a three-way split between not being allowed to use transit, transit being too expensive, and already owning their own car.

# Student Independence, Confidence, and Safety



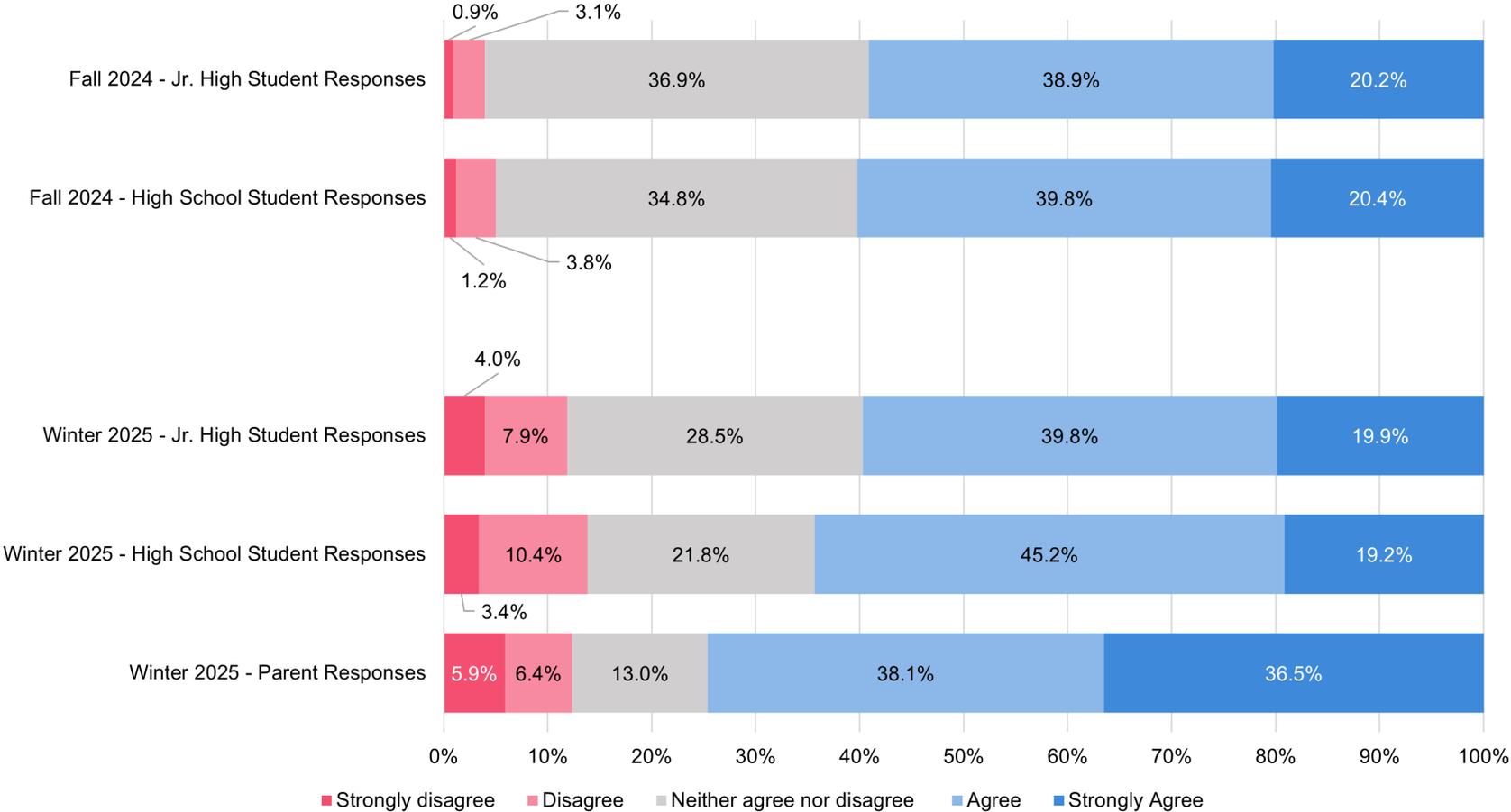
In fall 2024, 85.3% of junior high school and 86.6% of high school students reported that having the transit pass made them feel more independent in their daily travel.

In winter 2025, these percentages remained relatively consistent for both students and parents.

For parents, 85.3% agreed that the pass contributed to greater independence.

## Student Independence, Confidence, and Safety

**"I feel comfortable, confident and safe when using Halifax Transit" / Do you feel your child can confidently navigate Halifax Transit routes and services?" - Fall 2024/Winter 2025 - Student & Parent Responses**



In fall 2024, 59.1% of junior high school and 60.2% of high school students strongly agreed or agreed with feeling confident while navigating Halifax Transit.

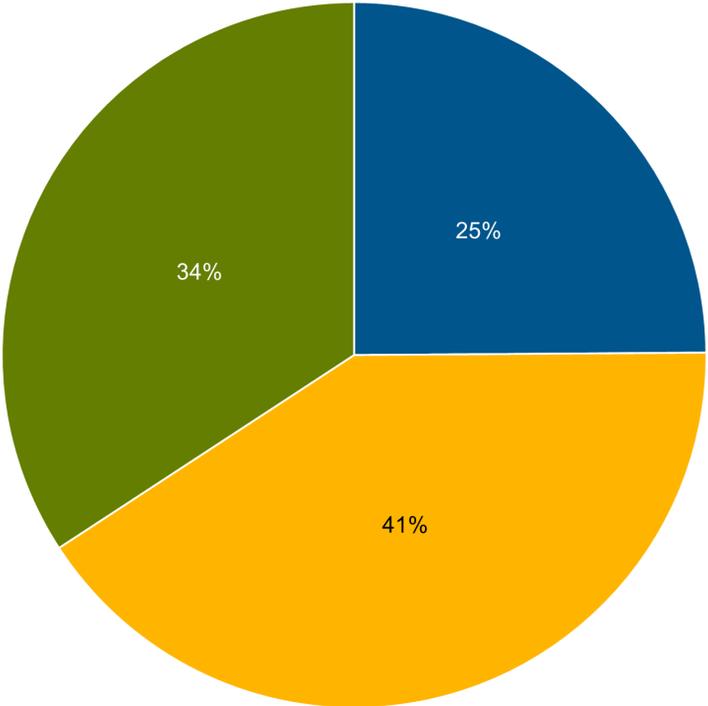
In winter 2025, this remained constant for junior high students with a slight increase to 64.4% for high school students.

From the parents' perspective, 74.6% agreed or strongly agreed that their child could confidently navigate transit.

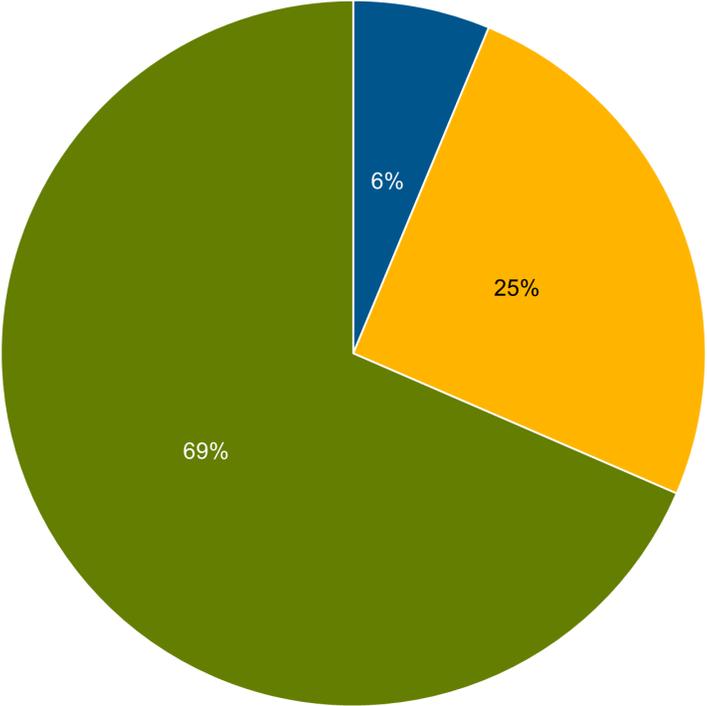
# Support for Peer-Led Transit Training

"Would you support schools providing peer-led transit guidance for students to help them navigate transit confidently?" - Winter 2025

Student Responses



Parent Responses



■ Not important   ■ Somewhat important   ■ Very important

Survey results from Winter 2025 highlight strong support for peer-led education as a way to build confidence and transit literacy. Among students, 75% reported that they would find peer-led transit training helpful. Parents confirmed this support, with 94% agreeing that a peer-based model would help their child feel safer and more confident using Halifax Transit.

## Open-Text Feedback: Student Transit Pass Pilot Program

To complement the quantitative findings from the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program surveys, a qualitative analysis was conducted using responses to open-ended questions from the fall 2024 and winter 2025 surveys. These written responses provided students and families with an opportunity to share their experiences and perceptions of the program in their own words.

Seven overarching themes were developed based on common patterns observed in the feedback. Responses that were vague, off-topic, or neutral were excluded from the analysis. As a result, the theme percentages reflect the proportion of responses that clearly aligned with specific insights, rather than a full 100% distribution.

### These themes include:

1. Independence, Gratitude & Personal Freedom
2. Affordability & Family Relief
3. Transit Literacy & Habit Formation
4. Operational Issues & Reliability
5. Accessibility & Transit Coverage
6. Pass Access and Admin Confusion
7. Desire for Summer Access

**Table 1:** This table shows the share of survey comments that clearly matched one main theme, compared to those that were too vague, off-topic, or general to categorize.

Dataset	% of Responses Matched to a Theme	% Neutral / Unclassifiable
Fall 2024 Student <i>n= 2465</i>	~45%	~55%
Winter 2025 Student <i>n= 746</i>	23.2%	76.8%
Winter 2025 Parent <i>n= 1884</i>	63.2%	36.8%

*Note: n = sample size/number of open text responses.*

**Table 2:** This table shows the share of survey comments that clearly matched one main theme, compared to those that were too vague, off-topic, or general to categorize.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Fall 2024 Student</b>	<b>Winter 2025 Student</b>	<b>Winter 2025 Parent</b>
Independence, Gratitude & General Praise	30.5%	16.5%	42.8%
Affordability & Family Relief	4.5%	6.5%	7.2%
Transit Literacy & Habit Formation	1.6%	1.9%	6.1%
Operational Issues & Reliability	3.2%	4.0%	3.5%
Access and Transit Coverage	1.8%	1.0%	1.9%
Pass Access & Distribution	1.0%	1.9%	0.9%
Desire for Summer Access	0.9%	1.3%	1.0%

## Fall 2024 – Student Feedback

Sample Size = 2,465

Theme	Description	Representative Quotes
Independence, Gratitude & Personal Freedom	Students described feeling empowered to get to school, activities, or work on their own and expressed appreciation for the program, often calling it “excellent” or “life-changing.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It gave me the freedom to get home without asking for a ride.”</li> <li>• “Now I can go to my friend’s house without waiting for my parents.”</li> <li>• “I feel more independent because I can travel alone.”</li> <li>• “I don’t have to rely on my mom or dad anymore.”</li> <li>• “Being able to take the bus on my own is great.”</li> <li>• I can go places on my own</li> <li>• “I love it. Please keep it.”</li> <li>• “Great idea—hope it stays.”</li> </ul>
Affordability & Family Relief	Appreciation for reduced household costs related to transit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “My family saves money because of this.”</li> <li>• “We don’t have to worry about tickets anymore.”</li> <li>• “It helps a lot with costs.”</li> <li>• “Transit is expensive and this helps.”</li> <li>• “This was a huge help financially.”</li> </ul>
Accessibility and Transit Coverage	Concerns about students in areas without transit service. Comments about the lack of transit service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We are one of the communities that received the transit pass and have ZERO access to transit within 12 km. It’s a nice idea, but without transit in our area, it was wasteful.”</li> <li>• “It’s a 20-minute drive just to reach a bus.”</li> <li>• “I can’t use it because no route goes to my neighbourhood.”</li> <li>• “No access out here.”</li> <li>• “No point in the pass if there’s no service.”</li> </ul>
Operational Issues & Safety	Long waiting times, late buses, or mismatched school schedules. A general discomfort with overcrowded, loud bus experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The bus is always late.”</li> <li>• “I have to wait 30 minutes for the next bus.”</li> <li>• “The schedule doesn’t work with school times.”</li> <li>• “Timing is off—I miss class sometimes.”</li> <li>• “They don’t come often enough.”</li> </ul>
Desire for Summer Use	Emerging interest in year-round access to support employment or mobility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Make it valid in July and August, please.”</li> <li>• “I’d use it for summer camp.”</li> <li>• “Would be great if it worked year-round.”</li> <li>• “I want to use it for my summer job.”</li> <li>• “Please let us keep it for the summer.”</li> </ul>

Pass Access & Distribution	A few noted missing passes or administrative confusion about pass distribution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I didn’t get my pass.”</li> <li>• “No one explained how to get the pass.”</li> <li>• “They should have a better way of giving them out.”</li> <li>• “It should be in the app.”</li> <li>• “Not everyone got one.”</li> </ul>
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**Winter 2025 – Student Feedback**  
**Sample Size = 746 open-text responses**

Theme	Description	Representative Quotes
Independence, Gratitude & Personal Freedom	Students described taking the initiative to get to destinations like the gym, friends, or school on the bus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Now I can get to the gym by myself.”</li> <li>• “It’s given me a lot more freedom.”</li> <li>• “I use it to go anywhere I want without asking for a ride.”</li> <li>• “Makes me feel more grown-up.”</li> <li>• “I don’t need to bother my parents anymore.”</li> <li>• “Thank you. This helps a lot.”</li> <li>• “I love this program.”</li> <li>• “It’s amazing. Don’t cancel it.”</li> <li>• “Best idea ever.”</li> <li>• “So helpful. Keep it going.”</li> <li>• "I think it's a great and important program."</li> <li>• "Thank you for giving us free bus passes."</li> <li>• "It's a great way to encourage public transit, also it's better for kids who don't want to pay all the time, not all of us are fortunate."</li> <li>• "The pass has benefited me and SOO many other students insanely. In the beginning, I had assumed that it would be a very bad idea, considering the fact that so many students would be using the transit, and it would be too chaotic, but it turns out, it isn't actually so bad, and I genuinely find that the Halifax transit and student pass program is great."</li> </ul>
Affordability & Family Relief	Continued acknowledgment of how the pass reduces family costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “My family saves money because of this.”</li> <li>• “We don’t have to worry about tickets anymore.”</li> <li>• “It helps a lot with costs.”</li> <li>• “Transit is expensive and this helps.”</li> <li>• “This was a huge help financially.”</li> </ul>

Accessibility and Transit Coverage	Continued frustration about unusable passes in areas without service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “There’s no bus stop near me.”</li> <li>• “It’s a 20-minute drive just to reach a bus.”</li> <li>• “I can’t use it because no route goes to my neighbourhood.”</li> <li>• “No access out here.”</li> <li>• “No point in the pass if there’s no service.”</li> </ul>
Operational Issues & Reliability	Continued complaints about frequent lateness or long wait times.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “My bus is always late.”</li> <li>• “I wait forever after school.”</li> <li>• “Had to change my routine because the bus never shows up on time.”</li> <li>• “Timing doesn’t work with school.”</li> <li>• “Buses are not reliable.”</li> </ul>
Desire for Summer Use	An increased emphasis for passes to work beyond the school year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Let it work in the summer too.”</li> <li>• “I need it for July and August.”</li> <li>• “Would help with summer work.”</li> <li>• “Want to use it during holidays.”</li> <li>• “Don’t end it after school.”</li> </ul>
Pass Access & Distribution	Concern about physical passes being issued universally despite limited transit in some areas. Further, multiple suggestions for the pass to be on “Halifax Transit App/Be Digital”.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I never got a pass.”</li> <li>• “Didn’t know how to get mine.”</li> <li>• “Should be digital.”</li> <li>• “Make it easier to access.”</li> <li>• “It was confusing to get it.”</li> </ul>

**Winter 2025 – Parent Feedback**  
**Sample Size = 1,884**

Theme	Description	Representative Quotes
Independence & Personal Freedom	Parents notice their children becoming more confident and capable of navigating the city independently, with a high level of general support for the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It’s been amazing to see my child get to and from school on their own.”</li> <li>• “My daughter now travels by herself.”</li> <li>• “It’s helped my child become more independent.”</li> <li>• “No more relying on rides from us.”</li> <li>• “He learned to navigate the city.”</li> <li>• “She takes the bus to school and work on her own.”</li> </ul>

Affordability & Family Relief	Strong acknowledgment of financial benefits, especially amid inflation.	“It’s one less thing to budget for. Every bit counts these days.”
Accessibility & Transit Coverage	Parents in suburban/rural zones expressed that the pass had no value due to poor coverage.	“We live in Fall River—there’s no bus. The pass was never used.”
Operational Issues & Reliability	Comments about misaligned routes, wait times, and inconsistencies in service.	“My daughter waits outside for 40 minutes. The route doesn’t match the bell.”
Pass Access & Distribution	Parents questioned blanket distribution, especially where transit doesn’t reach.	“Please don’t waste money on passes for places with no transit.”
Transit Literacy & Habit Formation	A few praised how the program built transit confidence in youth. Encouraged the city to switch to digital for access.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “My son now knows how to get to his job without asking for a ride.”</li> <li>• “Kids and teens are very resourceful... they navigate the transit system using their phones.”</li> <li>• “We didn’t use the transit pass... at 12 years old, I’m not comfortable allowing my child to ride alone.”</li> <li>• “Has improved confidence. Can now get to other activities safely.”</li> <li>• “It enables students to navigate the transit system at a younger age... leading to continued use.”</li> <li>• “It gave my child confidence to leave school and use the bus.”</li> </ul>
Desire for Summer Use	Suggested year-round access to accommodate summer activities and work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Summer jobs and camps would be easier if the pass worked year-round.”</li> <li>• “We need this in summer too.”</li> <li>• “Would help with camps and work.”</li> <li>• “Let them keep it year-round.”</li> <li>• “Summer coverage would be perfect.”</li> <li>• “Make it for 12 months.”</li> </ul>