



March 31st, 2023

Re: Guelph Transit Fare Strategy

On behalf of the Board of the Transit Action Alliance of Guelph (TAAG), please find some support and suggestions to improve the Guelph Transit Fare Strategy to keep fares fair for everyone. Additional correspondence will be shared with City Council and Guelph Transit in the coming days and weeks.

Like most North American cities, Guelph relies on the fare box to fund a significant portion of its transit operations. However, there are many cities around the world looking to battle climate change by lowering fares, adding fare-free options, and, in some instances, going completely fare-free.

We will continue to advocate to the Provincial and Federal Governments for permanent operational funding to help lower fares and take the burden of funding off just the local government.

Monthly Fare Capping

TAAG is in support of fare capping. This simple concept in public transit fare payments eliminates the inadvertent social inequity caused by having riders pay upfront for unlimited monthly rides.

At its simplest, fare capping rewards all riders for travelling by automatically providing 'period passes' based on how much they ride or spend over periods of time (i.e., Weekly/Monthly) without needing to purchase them upfront.

Our concern is the rate of increase for the Adult monthly cap by 19% and the Youth/Senior cap by 12.5%, both above comparator averages. During this affordability crisis, finding an extra \$15.20 per month is going to be difficult.

Our Recommendation:

Spread the adult fare increase over 3 years (\$5.00, \$5.00, and \$5.20) to make this fare increase fairer and more affordable for users to budget for accordingly.

For senior and youth passes, we recommend keeping this fare at its current rate, which is slightly higher than the comparator average, for 1 year.

Transfers

With an expanding city, travelling across Guelph by bus takes longer. Some riders are having to pay double the fare as transfers are only valid for 1 hour from the time you board the bus (i.e., you board at 5:55 p.m. and the transfer expires at 6:55 p.m.).

As per the report, many neighbouring transit systems have moved to a 90-minute or 2-hour transfer window. This allows riders to hop on and hop off to do things like support local businesses and restaurants.

While the answer in the report about transfer time is very technical, it lacks information on the economics, accessibility, and other positives of increasing the transfer time period. (Another reason why the Economic Development department needs to be paired back with Transportation and Transit.) It also ignores the historical reason why Guelph Transit originally created the 1-hour transfer, which was to drive economic growth and access to downtown businesses, doctors, restaurants, etc. The report also does not dive deep enough into why other transit systems have 90-minute or 2-hour transfers (beyond the technical reasons listed).

Our recommendation:

Increase the transfer time to 90 minutes as a pilot project for one year and have staff report back to council on the benefits and drawbacks of an increased transfer on the local economy, etc.

Fare Free for Children

We are in full support of the Free Transit Rides for Children under 12. We were hopeful that this report would include some movement towards investigating a High School Student Transit Pass, a Field Trip Transit Pass Program, and lowering or eliminating Senior fares.

Our recommendation

We encourage Council to instruct staff to look into these areas over the next year.

Self-service terminals

We are in full support of these terminals; however, not locating them at Guelph Central Station, where the majority of riders are, is a huge oversight. Having them located at Guelph City Hall is redundant (ServiceGuelph can easily sell fares) and inaccessible after hours. Locating machines at both recreation centres will again not be accessible for most users as their locations and hours are limited.

Recommendation

Locate a self-service machine at Guelph Central Station, as originally proposed, and explore locating machines at major hubs (i.e., the University of Guelph, Stone Road Mall).

Conclusion

No one is being fooled into thinking that a fare increase is not actually needed. With fares frozen for 7 years and increasing operational and expansion costs, fares will need to be increased at an affordable and predictable rate. However, with some of these recommendations, it feels as though users are being punished because the city mismanaged not having affordable fare increases over the last 7 years.

For example, the 19% increase to adult monthly users is too abrupt and quick. It will hurt the already stretched pocketbooks of users during this affordability crisis. It will also hurt local businesses and restaurants and hurt our ridership growth prospects as historically any increase in fares has hurt ridership growth.

In the coming days and weeks, we will be connecting with our members and partners to gather additional information and stories on how some of these proposed changes and fare increases will hurt our local economy, hurt our residents during an affordability crisis, and make transit less accessible for people. Depending on that correspondence and other information, we may add or adjust our recommendations. We will share that correspondence prior to the City Council meeting later this month.

Thank you.

On behalf of the Board,

Steven Petric
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