



Susan Brice  
Chair, Victoria Regional Transit Commission  
520 Gorge Road East  
Victoria, BC  
V8W 9T5

February 6, 2020

Dear Chair Brice,

On behalf of Victoria City Council, I am writing to request that the Victoria Regional Transit Commission reconsider, at its February 25, 2020 meeting, the initiation of a pilot program beginning in 2020 to provide fare-free public transit to people 18 years and younger in the Capital Region.

In April 2019, Victoria City Council endorsed “a major expansion of public transit ridership in the Capital Region, focused on the phasing out of user fees and a substantial improvement in service levels and fleet electrification,” beginning with elimination of “user fees for people 18 years of age and younger.”

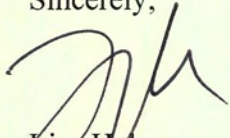
In August 2019, the Victoria Regional Transit Commission voted 4-4 on a proposed pilot program to provide fare-free public transit to youth in the Capital Region. Lacking a majority of votes, the pilot program was not initiated by the Regional Transit Commission at that time. In December 2019, the City of Victoria initiated a Youth Bus Pass Program on its own initiative, removing user fee barriers for public transit ridership funded through a combination of general revenues and parking revenues.

The City of Victoria Youth Bus Pass program has been a big success, with more than 2,100 local youth accessing the program, resulting in substantial savings to families, at an approximate monthly cost to the city of \$81,000.

Introduction of the City of Victoria program has also created a regional inequity in access to mobility for youth: while City of Victoria residents aged 18 years and younger now having access to fare-free public transit, youth who reside outside the city limits lack this access. This inequity exists within specific school communities, where catchment boundaries extend across municipal borders, and the inequity also exists within neighbourhoods straddling the borders of Victoria, Esquimalt, Saanich and Oak Bay.

Therefore, on behalf of Victoria City Council, we recommended the Victoria Regional Transit Commission reconsider the introduction of a pilot program to provide fare-free public transit for people 18 years and younger throughout the area served by the Commission.

Sincerely,



Lisa Helps  
Victoria Mayor

**For:** VRTC Meeting February 25<sup>th</sup> 2020  
**From:** Mayor Helps and Councillor Dubow

### **Introduction**

At its January 30<sup>th</sup> 2020 Council Meeting, Victoria City Council passed the following motion.

That Council:

1. Endorses the initiation of a pilot program to provide fare-free public transit for youth across the Capital Region, to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and promote transit ridership and sustainable mobility from an early age.
2. Requests that the Victoria Regional Transit Commission reconsider at its February 25, 2020 meeting the initiation of a pilot program beginning in 2020 to provide fare-free public transit to people 18 years and younger in the Capital Region.

### **Background**

At the August 13<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting the following motion was defeated on a 4-4 tie:

“Direct staff to pursue funding partners and develop a business case, to include a pilot project to provide fare-free transit for youth in the 2021/22 budget year.”

Since the motion was defeated in August there have been four developments that warrant reconsideration of the matter.

First, in December the City of Victoria initiated a pilot project distributing free transit passes to youth who are resident of Victoria. Since the program began there has been steady uptake:

December 2130

January 2433

February 2250 (to date, we hand them out all month)

March 2248 (to date, we hand them out all month)

Second, in response to its declaration of a Climate Emergency earlier in 2019, Saanich (which had two dissenting votes on the original motion) has sharpened its focus on climate change and is taking a leadership role to substantially accelerate climate action. Creating life-long transit riders by providing accessible fare-free transit to youth is one way to create car-free and car-lite lifestyles, tackling carbon pollution from transportation which makes up 50% of our regional emissions.

Third, we've learned of other local governments across British Columbia that have implemented fare-free transit for youth. Whistler began a pilot project in January 2020 to

offer fare-free transit to youth 18 and under. The the City of Salmon Arm and the Shuswap Regional Transit System offer free transit to youth under the age of 18 during:

- Christmas break
- July 1 - September 1
- Pro-D days during the school year
- Spring break

They do this to promote the bus as a safe and available means of transportation.

Fourth and finally, introduction of the City of Victoria program has created a regional inequity in access to mobility for youth. While City of Victoria residents aged 18 years and younger now having access to fare-free public transit, youth who reside outside the city limits lack this access. This inequity exists within specific school communities, where catchment boundaries extend across municipal borders, and the inequity also exists within neighbourhoods straddling the borders of Victoria, Esquimalt, Saanich and Oak Bay. Youth across the region have spoken up about this inequity and will be attending the Transit Commission meeting on February 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Recommendation:**

That the Transit Commission directs staff to pursue funding partners and develop a business case for fare-free transit for youth, to include a pilot project to provide fare-free transit for youth in the 2021/22 budget year.