

**VICTORIA REGIONAL TRANSIT COMMISSION
CHAIR & MEMBERS**

March 13, 2023

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PREPARED FOR: Victoria Regional Transit Commission
PURPOSE

This report reviews the results of the Refugee Pass Program and is provided to the Victoria Regional Transit Commission (the “Commission”) for understanding of the program. In addition, this report will seek to obtain APPROVAL from the Commission on funding the Refugee Pass Program on an ongoing basis without additional approvals, adjusting from the current annual funding model.

BACKGROUND

At the December 8, 2015, meeting, the Commission approved a motion to support the transition of refugees into the Greater Victoria Area by providing temporary free transit for a one-year period. In the February 22, 2022, meeting the Commission brought forward a request to staff to explore and bring forth an option to approve the program into the annual budget.

To qualify for the program an approval letter is required from the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) of Canada and the approval letter must be provided to the Inter-Cultural Association prior to obtaining entry into the program. The program is administered by BC Transit and the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA).

DISCUSSION

In 2016, the Federal Government announced a decision to accept 84% more humanitarian refugees than 2015 due to the global Syrian refugee crisis. The influx of refugees overwhelmed many local settlement service groups. The Commission approved a motion to support local settlement service groups and the influx of incoming refugees with the creation of a temporary free transit program. The program extended all refugees arriving in the Capital Region between December 2015 and December 2016 one year of free transit passes and was renewed for subsequent one-year terms annually from 2016 – 2022 by the Commission.

Since the program's inception, it has been successfully administered by BC Transit and the ICA. A pre-determined quantity of monthly passes is delivered to the ICA monthly for final distribution to the incoming refugees. All tasks within these processes have been captured within routine and normal processes for both parties and have not been an administrative burden to either organization. Since 2018, BC Transit has distributed 8,520 adult monthly passes and 4,640 youth/senior monthly passes to 13,160 monthly passes with a combined total retail value of \$938,000.

The program’s annual funding amount has remained relatively consistent since its inception with the average funding being \$185,617 annually and a maximum amount provided being \$196,200, which occurred in 2020 and 2022. As such it is recommended that the annual budgeted amount for the program be set at \$196,200 for 2023 with an annual increase to the budgeted amount of 2%. The intent of the program is to support all qualified Refugees so should

the passes provided for any annual year trend towards exceeding the budgeted amount a report will be provided to the Commission to seek approval for additional funding.

Table 1: Annualized Monthly Pass Quantities and Value of the Refugee Program

Year	Adult Passes	Discount Passes	Total Passes	Total Value
2018	1,680	960	2,640	\$186,000
2019	1,590	880	2,470	\$174,750
2020	1,800	960	2,760	\$196,200
2021	1,650	880	2,530	\$184,850
2022	1,800	960	2,760	\$196,200
Total	8,520	4,640	13,160	\$938,000

*Retail value of all monthly passes distributed to Intercultural Association

Given the on-going need for the program and the low associated administrative burden, it is recommended that the program be funded on an ongoing basis to allow for the proper Refugee Settlement Provider Organization to continue to support new refugees arriving into the community and not have to revisit the Commission annually for approval. Updated reports will be provided annually, and in cases where additional support may be required for those who do not qualify as Refugee Status, BC Transit will present to the Commission on a case-by-case basis for review.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the annual allocation for the Refugee Pass Program be APPROVED on an ongoing basis.

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