
SUBJECT: U-PASS PROGRAM UPDATE

PURPOSE

This report, providing an update on the status of Victoria Regional Transit System (“VRTS”) post-secondary U-PASS programs, is provided to the Victoria Regional Transit Commission (the “Commission”) for **INFORMATION**.

BACKGROUND

The Commission and BC Transit are partnered with post-secondary institutions and student societies to provide U-PASS programs to students at the University of Victoria, Camosun College and Royal Roads University. Under these agreements, students are provided a significantly reduced semester-length fare based upon the principle of universal enrolment of all students attending courses at campuses within the VRTS. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, post-secondary institutions have taken measures to move courses to online delivery where possible in efforts to reduce the number of students on campus. Given the terms of the U-PASS agreements, the reduction of students attending on-campus courses will result in a reduction of U-PASS revenues received by the Commission.

DISCUSSION

With BC Transit having ceased fare collection in mid-March as a safety measure for operators and customers, there was a need for a temporary solution to administer the U-PASS programs for the summer semester given uncertainty as to when fare collection would resume. To ensure that those eligible students who had a need for transit over the summer were able to access it, the U-PASS programs were made available on an opt-in basis only for the summer term. Over that period, the University of Victoria Students’ Society distributed approximately 750 passes, with the Camosun College Student Society distributing an approximate 1,100. Royal Roads University did not participate in the summer opt-in program given the structure of their agreement not warranting it. Overall, the opt-in summer U-PASS will have resulted in an estimated \$130,000 in revenue received by the Commission.

Looking forward to the fall term, BC Transit and the U-PASS partners have met and established plans for the programs to be administered within the context of the majority of courses being delivered online. These plans largely follow the terms of the existing agreements, with memorandums of understanding (“MOU”) drafted to address any additional considerations. Those students who are taking courses that have an on-campus component will continue to be assessed the mandatory U-PASS fee, with those not taking on-campus courses being either automatically exempted from the program or given the option to opt-out of paying the fee depending on the specific agreement terms. As this scenario will result in some students not being assessed the fee but still needing transit access, opt-in provisions were included in MOUs to enable these eligible students to access the program. The planned changes to the administration of U-PASS programs will be in place for the fall term, with the intent of reviewing and revising as needed before agreeing to any necessary plans for subsequent semesters.

As a result of the changes to course delivery and program administration, it is expected that revenues from the U-PASS programs will be significantly lower for the fall term. With student course registration still open, U-PASS partners are currently unable to provide firm projections of student enrolment, particularly in regards to students attending on-campus courses. Based upon the changes to course delivery and initial enrolment figures, it is estimated the U-PASS revenues will be between 20-30% of historical figures. With these assumptions, the Commission may expect between \$550,000 and \$850,000 in U-PASS revenues for the fall term.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Victoria Regional Transit Commission receive this report for **INFORMATION**.

Respectfully,

Ryan Dennis
Manager, Sales and Revenue