**Municipal Government Representatives for Poverty Reduction (MGR) CoP**

*November 29, 2017*

## Attendees

1. Rob Wiles, City of Calgary
2. Doug Borch, City of Calgary
3. Cheri Malo, City of Whitehorse
4. Lucenia Ortiz, City of Edmonton
5. Kate Mechan, Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition
6. Vanessa Parlette, City of Hamilton - Public Health Services
7. Trevor Haché, Healthy Transportation Coalition (Ottawa)
8. Jim McDonald, City of Saskatoon
9. Marieke Knight, City of Saskatoon
10. Dianna Souveny, City of Red Deer
11. Stephen Lynn, City of Windsor
12. Rachelle, City of Windsor
13. Cheryl Smith, City of London
14. Anne Makhoul, Caledon Institute
15. Natasha Pei, Tamarack Institute
16. Kirsti Battista, Tamarack Institute

**Regrets:** Jennifer Casorso (City of Kamloops), Joan Farkas (City of Calgary)

## Welcome and Check-Ins

* The City of Saskatoon has a low-income monthly pass at $66.40 (30% reduction); seniors pass $29; and annual seniors rate of $313.
* The City of Whitehorse does not have an affordable transit strategy yet, but is interested in what others are doing.
* The City of Hamilton has a ½ price low-income transit pass that sells out quickly every month, also looking at subsidies for youth.
* The City of London is rolling out a subsidized bus pass at $52 (30% discount) launching in January, they have a youth bus pass pilot regardless of income at $52/month, and children 12 and under ride free.
* Ottawa’s Healthy Transportation Collaborative works closely with the City of Ottawa, working on making the city a better place for people who walk, bike ride and take public transit, with a particular focus on improving things for people living on low-income. They are working on a 50% low-income transit pass ($58 per month), and this year are likely to pass single fare discounts for low-income riders ($1.75 per ride rather than $3.50). They also have discounted passes for seniors and ODSP recipients.
* The City of Windsor has had an affordable pass program since 2011, and it is fully operational. They are interested in hearing best practices, especially as they are now undergoing a fare structure review. They have a $9 family all day pass – can include 2 adults and up to 3 children or 1 adult and 4 children between 5-12. Children under 5 are free.
* Caledon Institute published a policy paper about Calgary’s Fair Fares several years ago, and is interested to see how the program has progressed.

## Affordable Transit: The Experience from Calgary's Fair Entry Low-Income Transit Pass, led by Rob Wiles

* Rob is an Issue Strategist, not with the Transit department, though they’re are a critical partner in the development of this initiative. Rob led the project management piece of the sliding scale initiative
* This presentation covers the Adult & Youth Low-Income Monthly Transit Pass. The City of Calgary also has a Youth Monthly Pass ($65 per month), Seniors Pass ($95 per year), Seniors Low Income Pass ($15 per year). These are separate, and not covered here.

Overview

* The initiative began with the low-income monthly pass in 2006. It’s been a long journey to get to this point.
* Fair Calgary Policy was important to this context, it laid the foundations for the sliding scale program – introduced policy to review City subsidy programs and make them accessible to all.
  + From this policy, formed an internal working group of stakeholders across City departments from different subsidy program representatives. They were critical to the discussions, decisions, and relationship-building.
* Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), 2013 (Enough for All)– When City Council adopted the PRS, it provided an enhanced *coordinated* approach for poverty work in Calgary; especially as one of the strategy’s goals was to increase access to programs and services.
* Fair Entry, single application was introduced in 2015 across 5 different subsidy programs; it laid the foundation for other work with respect to the assessment process for a sliding scale

Engagement

**The Internal Working Group**

* Transit
* Recreation (fee assistance)
* Property Tax (low-income home owner’s relief)
* Senior Services (home maintenance program)
* No-cost spay and neuter services for pets
  + Found success working together by focusing on small victories. The foundation of trust and relationship-building was built on agreements around:
    - Access parameters –must be a resident of Calgary to access the program, and
    - A common income guideline – to make the pass more accessible for low-income Calgarians.

**External Stakeholders**

* Fair Calgary Community Voices – Was very organized and perseverant on affordable transit. They are a coalition of people with lived experience and community organizations serving low-income residents. They have been instrumental in feedback on City programs, and outstanding advocates for their needs. They mobilize around opportunities to speak at City Council, and attend each and every meeting to make sure that Council knows how important it is.

Sliding Scale

* Fair Calgary Community Voices demonstrated to City Council that the original, 50% discount pass for low-income (under LICO) residents, was still out of reach for many individuals.
* Council commissioned directed Administration to examine solutions to affordability and access – including other programs, but with a particular focus on transit.
  + 1st report delivered was aspirational, and knew there would be funding challenges. Identified two primary goals:
    1. Deepen the discount for current recipients (then, 100% of LICO cut-off); and
    2. Extend the income eligibility threshold beyond 100% LICO

* Reaction from City Council was a desire to implement, but funding is a critical issue. Want to dialogue with other levels of government to bring in collaborative funding. Administration was asked to come back with a revised report and other options.
* The Province announced transit funding to Edmonton and Calgary in 2016. With the new funding, Administration revised the report recommending they could achieve ONE of the two goals - to deepen the discount OR expand eligibility.
  + The main recommendation was to deepen the discount because economic research found that people in deepest poverty experienced the biggest impact during an economic downturn (which they were in) and being able to expend dollars on subsidy vs administration of programs.
  + The sliding scale model received approval using provincial money.

Defining the Pass

* People earning less than 50% LICO get a 95% subsidy
* People earning 50-85% LICO get a 65% subsidy
* People earning 85-100% LICO get a 50% subsidy
* No one pays more than they would have under the previous program (i.e. 50% subsidy)
* The original sliding scale proposal was an 85% as the maximum benefit, but the community countered that the fee was still too high for people in the deepest poverty. Council passed a 95% subsidy.

Data – Uptake & Outcomes

* Tremendous uptake since April: 200,000 passes sold at the $44 rate in 2016.
* Revised estimates predict 300,000 passes sold next year.
* Data shows the tremendous need in the community.
* Selling more passes,
  + Over 50% buying the $5 pass just around 40% are buying the $35 pass.
* In the $50.50 range (Band C) – seeing decrease in number being sold to this group, and in absolute numbers are selling fewer passes. 5,000 fewer passes were sold in this category in last 6 months versus same period in 2016.
* Growth in new monthly passes (16,000 people have never purchased a monthly pass previously) – now they are trying to understand, are they converters of other products (other cash, tickets, etc.) or new customers?
* Households are buying more passes, potentially because they could not afford one per family member previously.
* Seeing continual growth month over month, still seeking to understand the data
* Surveyed low-income customers on their experience with the pass. Highlights include:
  + Overwhelming gratitude and thanks
  + Stories about being able to access the community more easily – appointments, family and friends, and savings
    - + 80% spent savings on basic necessities (food, shelter)
    - + 50% paid debts
    - + 60% (in the highest subsidy category) said they couldn’t afford a bus pass previously

Challenges

* Given the **uptake**, it’s offsetting revenues, need to ask council for additional funding. Though overall pass sales have increased, revenue has decreased. 50% of the Transit overall operating budget must be from revenue and this program contributes to the challenge reaching that goal in a time of decreased ridership.
* Higher application volume and **longer lines** at wickets. There are 5 locations to buy low income pass, and are looking for creative solutions to the administrative burden. Are looking into multi-month passes (ex. Buy 3 months at a time).
* **Inappropriate use** – Number of suspensions due to inappropriate use accusations has increased, though this was also the case with the previous pass, and is still less than 1% of all users.

Next Steps

* Council will debate the funding gap.
* Report as part of the next 4-year budget cycle
* Get a better picture of revenue impact
* Understand the customer better
* Deliberate and mitigate what happens if provincial dollars are discontinued (other funding sources?) – it’s a 3-year funding pilot.

## Q&A and Discussion

* What are the suspensions for?
  + The data doesn’t provide this detail, but potentially the rider is caught using someone else’s pass, so the pass holder is suspended.
* Does the 20% drop in ridership influence Council support for the pass?
  + Yes, they primarily want to understand how to encourage people to continue being transit customers, but some Councilors have issue with jurisdiction and others feel the city must do all they can to support residents.
* Have you considered looking at reductions in price, based on age versus income? In Kingston, they're studying getting rid of age-based discounts and putting the savings toward income-based discounts. And in Ottawa, only 40% of senior discounted bus pass holders use the pass.
  + Calgary has two seniors passes – one for low-income seniors ($15 per year for 100% below LICO) and a regular senior pass based strictly on age ($95 per year). There has been lots of debate, but so far City Council has not indicated interest in re-visiting these passes, and they were specifically told it was not part of the scope of this project
* LICO v LIM+ 15%. If working a minimum wage job ($11.25/hr in Ontario), you wouldn't qualify for LICO. Has Calgary considered making the cut off more generous?
  + They wanted to extend the subsidy to 130% LICO because of this criticism, that a number of individuals fall *just* over the threshold and could even be worse off. Due to budget, they kept LICO to deepen benefits for the short-term and maintain the program, and hope to expand past 100% LICO in the future.
* Why did ridership decline by 20%?
  + An economic downturn in the city. There was a loss of jobs in downtown core, which led to a lack of people coming downtown, and they are seeing a decrease in transit ridership.
* A newspaper article said Calgary already blew through the $4.5M funding from the province. Any truth?
  + It’s the current methodology they use to calculate the funding gap. For every pass sold for $5, there is $45 lost. Still trying to gain a picture of the revenue impact and to understand the customer (are they new customers completely, or converted from other cash, pass, or ticket-based products?)
* Is Calgary taking advantage of the Federal Government investment in ending homelessness?
  + No, but they have tried to engage the Federal Government through the poverty reduction strategy.
* What tools have you used to measure progress and evaluate progress?
  + They started with the survey evaluating the program from customer perspective/impact for customers
  + Next, they hope to do a Social Return on Investment evaluation

## Closing Announcements

### Upcoming Learning Opportunities with Tamarack Institute

**Webinar] A New Vision for Income Security  
Thursday, November 30th from 12:00 - 1:00 pm EST**

Laura Cattari, a member of the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services’ Income Security Reform working group, will help us explore the guiding principles, concepts, and objectives behind the fundamental shift in Ontario's approach to income security addressed in the newly released report, Income Security: A Roadmap for Change. Laura will address the policy changes that will help us move past social assistance as we understand it today, and toward addressing new labour market realities, the needs of vulnerable populations, and relations with Indigenous people. [**Register Now**](https://events.tamarackcommunity.ca/new-vision-income-security)**.**

**Next call date: Monday, January 8th from 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm EST**