

CITY OF HAMILTON

COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
Social Development & Early Childhood Services Division

Report to: Mayor and Members Committee of the Whole	Submitted by: Joe-Anne Priel General Manager, Community Services Department
Date: November 23, 2007	Prepared by: Carmen Rachelle Bian, Ext.2187 Barbara Powell, Ext 3538 Jane Soldera, Ext 2399

SUBJECT: Affordable Transit Pass Program - Pilot Project (ECS07038) (City Wide)

RECOMMENDATION:

- (a) That a maximum of \$500,000 be approved from the Social Services Initiatives Reserve Acct # 112214 to be used for a 12 month pilot project for the Affordable Transit Pass Program beginning April 1, 2008 until March 31, 2009.
- (b) That the target group for the Affordable Transit Pass Program pilot project be low-income (working poor).
- (c) That the subsidy level of the Affordable Transit Pass Program monthly pass to be 50% of the adult monthly pass rate as approved by Council.
- (d) That, if additional administrative support is required during the 12-month pilot project, the Community Services Department (Special Supports Section) and/or the Public Works Department (Transit Division) be authorized to increase their staff complements by one full-time contract position, each for a total of up to \$105,000, accommodated from the \$500,000 one-time funding for the Affordable Transit Pass Program.

Joe-Anne Priel
General Manager,
Community Services Department

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

As part of the 2007 City of Hamilton budget deliberation, the Transit Division of the Public Works Department received approval for a number of transit fare increases. Although the Transit Division put forward a compelling argument for the transit fare increases, a concern was raised by some Councillors and the community as to the potential impact of transit fare increases on low-income citizens.

To mitigate the potential impacts of the 2007 and potential future transit fare increases, Council could consider implementing an Affordable Transit Pass Program to provide a reduced transit pass fare for low-income citizens. Prior to implementing a broad scale program, Council could approve funding for a 12-month pilot of the Affordable Transit Pass Program. The purpose of the pilot project would be to determine program uptake, potential longer term program costs, and impact to the target group chosen for the pilot.

BACKGROUND:

A. Previous Council Decisions:

The City of Hamilton introduced a subsidized transit program for persons with disabilities in 1983, which was eliminated as part of the 1992 budget process. The Group A program provided reduced fare tickets and passes to persons receiving permanent disability pensions. The original intent of the program was to provide assistance to persons with disabilities who might have limited incomes. A review of the program revealed; however, that the criteria for registering for the program allowed all persons receiving a disability pension to access the program regardless of their level of disability and income. At the time the program was discontinued, there were 2,462 persons registered.

The issue of transportation for low-income citizens has been discussed and addressed by Council most recently in 2002. At that time, staff from the Social and Public Health Services Department was requested to report to the Council on the possibility of providing a subsidized transit program for persons in receipt of ODSP that would mirror the seniors program at that time. The report was received by Council and deferred to the Affordability and Accessibility Issues Task Force on December 3 2002. Unfortunately, the Affordability and Accessibility Issues Task Force was not re-established after the next municipal election so no further work on the issue of low-income transit was completed.

A recent report tabled at the Social Services Committee on June 27, 2006, requested that the City of Hamilton forward correspondence to the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) in support of an increase in social assistance rates to include the cost of transportation. Recognizing the financial barrier that current social assistance rates present to those on Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) with respect to access to transportation, the Social Services Committee and Council endorsed the recommendation and correspondence was sent to

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the MCSS on September 20, 2006. Although the Province has minimally increased social assistance rates, the issue of transportation costs for social assistance recipients has not been specifically addressed.

B. Persons Currently Receiving Assistance with Transit & Transit Usage:

Table 1 below summarizes in greater detail data obtained for 2006 by target group, level of subsidy, total spent and funding source by department:

Table 1: 2006 Transit Subsidies Available by Department & Funding Source:

Target Group	# in 2006	Rate	Level of Subsidy to user	Total \$ in 2006	Dept	Funding Source	
Seniors	Average of 4,544 registrants monthly	• Annual Seniors Pass -- \$205	• \$48.00 per month on pass	• \$1,120,000	• Public Works - Transit	• Foregone revenue	
Low-Income Seniors ¹	68 persons	• Full subsidy for the \$205 seniors annual pass	• 100% = the total \$205 cost for the annual seniors pass	• \$13,940	• Community Services – Special Supports	• 100% municipal contribution	
Elementary & Secondary Students - passes	Average of 2,768 pass users monthly	• \$50.00 monthly pass	• \$15.00 per monthly pass	• \$450,000	• Public Works – Transit	• Foregone revenue	
Elementary & Secondary Students - tickets	1,576,000 tickets	• \$1.35 ticket	• \$.35 per ticket	• \$550,000	• Public Works – Transit	• Foregone revenue	
School Hour Pass	Average of 918 pass users monthly	• contract	•	• \$40,000	• Public Works – Transit	• Foregone Revenue	
University Transit Pass	Average of 21,420 registrants monthly	• contract	•	• \$1,250,000	• Public Works – Transit	• Foregone revenue	
Columbia College Pass	Average of 738 pass users monthly	• contract	•	• \$110,000	• Public Works – Transit	• Foregone revenue	
OW/ODSP Residential Care Facilities residents - Passes	6,606 monthly passes	• Full rate of adult monthly pass - \$65.00	• 100% - total cost of adult monthly pass - \$65.00	• \$429,390	• Community Services – Special Supports	• \$343,512 —80% Provincial Share	• \$85,878 - 20% municipal share
OW/ODSP Residential	8,000	• Ticket rate	• \$1.70	• \$13,600	• Community Services –	• \$10,880 – 80%	• \$2,720- 20%

¹ Seniors whose fall below a means test administered through the Special Supports Program.

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Target Group	# in 2006	Rate	Level of Subsidy to user	Total \$ in 2006	Dept	Funding Source	
						Provincial Share	municipal share
Care Facilities residents - Tickets					Special Supports	Provincial Share	municipal share
Ontario Works – Mandatory Medical Transport ²	6,848 passes approximate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full rate of adult monthly pass 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% total cost of adult monthly pass - \$65.00 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$445,020 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Services – Employment & Income Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$356,016 –80% Provincial share 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$89,024 – 20% municipal share
Ontario Works discretionary bus tickets ³	N/A ⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ticket Rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$1.70 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$80,343 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Services – Employment & Income Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$64,274— 80% Provincial Share 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$16,069 – 20% municipal share
Ontario Works – Employment Related Expenses	N/A ⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full rate of adult monthly pass or tickets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% subsidy or \$65.00 per monthly pass or \$2.10 per ticket 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$300,000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Services – Employment & Income Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$240,000 – 80% Provincial share 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$60,000 – 20% municipal share
TOTAL MUNICIPAL CONTRIBUTIONS*					\$3,787,611		

*Municipal contributions only include the 20% municipal share of any cost-shared programs with the Province.

Based on the data in Table 1, it is evident that students and seniors have access to subsidized transit from the City of Hamilton regardless of their income levels. In the case of seniors, however, those who cannot afford to purchase the annual subsidized seniors' pass are able to apply to the Community Services Department and may be eligible to receive financial assistance towards their annual bus pass.

The situation is different, however, for those on either OW or ODSP. In these circumstances, clients must meet specific requirements before they are able to qualify for assistance with transportation. Assistance to OW/ODSP clients is provided primarily to those who meet the requirements for mandatory special necessities, reside in a residential care facility, or are actively engaged in an employment search or retraining.

² Cover costs of \$15 or more per month for transportation to and from necessary medical treatments with approved health care professionals and/or drug and alcohol recovery programs.

³ To assist with “urgent” non-health related transportation issues or “urgent” medical appointments which are under the \$15.00 medical transportation threshold and considered when an appointment is considered reasonable and appropriate.

⁴ Due to limitations with the Provincial system (Service Delivery Model Technology—SDMT) used by Ontario Works, we are unable to specify the number of clients receiving this benefit.

⁵ Ibid.

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The proportion of the total OW/ODSP caseload that is currently eligible for assistance with transportation is low. For example, in March 2007 a total of 2,690 ODSP clients received assistance with medical transportation out of a total caseload that month of 14,206 representing only 19%. For the same month, a total of 919 OW clients received assistance with transportation⁶ out of a total caseload that month of 10,138 equalling 9%.

For those low-income citizens not in receipt of social assistance there currently are no programs administered by the municipality that can be accessed for assistance with transportation⁷.

C. Other Municipal Programs:

In order to develop an Affordable Transit Pass Program for the City of Hamilton, staff researched and analyzed other similar municipal programs. During this research, staff was only able to locate two other municipal programs whose target group included the broad range of individuals that would be considered low-income (Calgary and Waterloo)⁸. Nine other municipalities were also reviewed for Report ECS07038, but the focus of their low-income programs was restricted to persons with a disability.

All of these programs were reviewed to obtain information on:

- eligibility criteria;
- verification processes;
- in-take procedures;
- reduced pass distribution;
- partners;
- level of subsidy;
- program budget; and,
- funding source.

Appendix A attached to Report ECS07038 summarizes all of the data available on the 11 municipal programs reviewed.

⁶ 577 for mandatory special necessities, 28 for community participation expenses, and 314 for employment related expenses.

⁷ The Federal government offers a \$500.00 tax credit for those who provide evidence that they have purchased monthly public transit passes. For the City of Hamilton in 2007, the \$500.00 credit covers roughly only 7 months of public transit passes per year.

⁸ Staff acknowledge that others may exist in Canada and the United States, but could not be identified within the timeframe available for the research.

ANALYSIS/RATIONALE:

The City of Hamilton experiences a significant rate of poverty with one out of every five citizens living below the Low-Income Cut-Offs (LICOS) calculated by Statistics Canada. To be more proactive in affecting a positive change in both the rate of poverty in our community and the quality of life for those individuals who find they are living below the LICOS, the City of Hamilton is a co-convenor with the Hamilton Community Foundation of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction.

The recently released, “**Starting Point Strategies**” (March 2007) provides an initial framework for the development of strategies to reduce the levels of poverty in the city of Hamilton. In addition to the strategies identified in the report, the documents highlight the critical link between poverty reduction solutions and the basic foundational community supports required to sustain poverty reduction efforts. Accessible and reliable transportation is identified as one of nine significant foundational community supports.

To enhance the accessibility of public transit for low-income citizens, Council could approve \$500,000 to operate a 12-month pilot project of the Affordable Transit Pass Program. In order for staff to develop the pilot project further, it is necessary for Council to approve both the level of subsidy and scope for the pilot project (i.e. target group).

A. Level of Subsidy:

Staff reviewed the data collected from the other existing 11 municipal programs. The level of subsidy available in the 11 other municipal programs reviewed ranged from 15% to 60% with most municipalities offering a 50% reduction of their adult monthly passes for their low-income programs. If Council approved a 50% subsidy for the Affordable Transit Pass Program based on the adult monthly pass for the City of Hamilton, that recommendation would be consistent with most other low-income transit programs offered in other municipalities. Further, the Region of Waterloo discovered that when they initially only offered a 25% subsidy, their program uptake was extremely low. An evaluation of the program in Waterloo revealed that the initial level of subsidy was not enough of an incentive on the behalf of potential users to proceed with the application process, etc.

B. Scope of the Pilot Project:

Table 2 below presents a range of target groups that could be considered for the Affordable Transit Pass pilot. The options presented include a progression from those only on ODSP, those on OW only, both ODSP and OW recipients, the working poor only, and all low-income (working poor⁹ and all those in receipt of ODSP and OW).

⁹ Working Poor would include those whose family incomes combined fall below the current 2005 Low-Income Cut Off levels for the City of Hamilton which vary by family size.

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To assist committee in determining the scope for the Affordable Transit Pass Program, it might be helpful to reflect on the principles of social inclusion attributed to John Rawls adopted by the City of Calgary and presented in the staff report (ECS07014) on the Social Inclusion Policy¹⁰:

1. Opportunity for participation must be equally available to all and
2. That the greatest advantage goes to the most disadvantaged.

Based upon these principles, it could be argued that citizens who are working and whose incomes fall below the poverty line (working poor) who do not have any access to any assistance with transportation through the municipality could be the focus for the pilot of the Affordable Transit Pass Program. Based upon the success of the pilot, council could consider opening up the program to low-income persons in receipt of ODSP/OW in the future.

To assist in interpreting Table 2, the information contained in each row is described in greater detail.

Row A: Provides the estimated total number of potential users for each of the target groups.

Row B: Sets out to identify the eligibility criteria for each of the target groups. In order to maximize the number of subsidies that could be provided during the pilot project, staff would suggest that if an individual is currently receiving subsidized transit assistance (students and seniors) or those eligible for assistance with transportation through another program like ODSP or OW not be eligible for a subsidized pass through the Affordable Transit Pass Program.

Row C: Restates the eligible number of program participants based upon any exclusions identified in Row B – eligibility criteria.

Row D: To promote the pilot project, there will be additional costs for assistance with communications strategies. Costs for communications could range from \$15,000 to up to \$25,000 to be accommodated within the \$500,000 Affordable Transit Pass Program budget. If the pilot project is approved, staff suggest that program statistics be monitored on a monthly basis and reported to Council quarterly. After the program has been operational for at least six months, a program review will be conducted with program participants. An allocation of up to \$25,000 will be required for evaluation and could be used to assist in the development, implementation and analysis of a user group survey, focus groups, etc. Taking these costs into consideration a balance of \$450,000 would be left for the pilot project. Assuming a 50% level of subsidy, this means that on a monthly basis 1,056 passes would be available for distribution regardless of the target groups selected. On an annual basis, this translates into 12,676 passes.

¹⁰ Fair Calgary and the Fairness Filter – A Brief Overview, Karen Peterson, August 2005

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Row E: Provides the proportion of the eligible target group that could be assisted based upon the number of passes that could be distributed across all target groups as per Row D (1,056 per month) factoring in costs for communications and program evaluation.

Row F: It is recommended that staff from the Special Supports Section of the Community Services Department distribute, receive, and approve applications for the Affordable Transit Pass Program. Since it is not possible to project the numbers of applicants to the program, administration of the program will be done with existing resources. The program will be monitored quarterly, and depending upon demand, it may be necessary to enhance the staff complement within the Special Supports Section to accommodate the number of program participants up to one full-time equivalent for an estimated annual cost of \$50,000.

With respect to the distribution of the affordable transit passes, staff is recommending that for the course of the pilot project, approved applicants be required to purchase their subsidized monthly passes at the downtown Hamilton GO station. As the pilot project evolves, the ability to purchase the reduced monthly passes at multiple sites could be reconsidered. As is the case with the Special Supports Section, depending upon the scope of the pilot approved by Council, a staff enhancement of up to one full-time equivalent may be required at an estimated annual cost of \$55,000.

Taking these potential staffing costs into consideration and the amounts included for communications and program evaluation (\$50,000), a balance of \$345,000 would be left for the pilot project. Assuming a 50% level of subsidy¹¹, this means that on a monthly basis 809 passes would be available for distribution regardless of the target groups selected. On an annual basis, this translates into 9,718 passes.

Row G: Provides the proportion of the eligible target group that could be assisted based upon the number of passes that could be distributed across all target groups as per Row F (809 per month) factoring in costs for communications, program evaluation and potential staffing costs.

Row H: Based on data obtained as part of the Urban Poverty Data, roughly 9% of the total employed population 15 years and older use public transit to go to their place of employment. We also know from that data, that those who are low-income make up roughly 25% of the total employed population who use public transit to get to work. We can apply this percentage as a rough projection as to the potential number of persons in each category who might actually access the Affordable Transit Pass Program if eventually open to all

¹¹ The 50% reduction was based on the current 2007 adult monthly pass cost of \$71.00. The amount of passes that could be distributed during the pilot will be impacted upon by any rate increases approved in 2008 or 2009.

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target groups. The 25% estimate is used to project the potential annual cost in each target group.

Row 1: The final row provides Council with projected monthly and annual costs if **ALL** eligible target group users requested an affordable transit pass.

Table 2: Potential Scope for a Proposed Affordable Transit Pass Program:

Target Group	ODSP Recipients Only	OW Recipients Only	OW & ODSP Recipients Combined	Working Poor Below the Low-Income Cut-Offs	All Low-Income including ODSP/OW
A. Projected Average Total # of Users (2006)	15,074	10,127	25,201	25,015	50,216
B. Eligibility Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All ODSP clients would be eligible EXCEPT clients receiving financial assistance through ODSP for mandatory medical transportation would not be eligible ▪ Based on data from 2006 roughly 20% of ODSP clients are eligible for assistance with transportation for medical reasons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All OW clients receiving financial assistance through OW would be eligible EXCEPT those receiving assistance with transportation for job search etc. ▪ Based on data from 2006 roughly 9% of OW clients are eligible for assistance with transportation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All ODSP/OW clients would be eligible EXCEPT the estimated 20% of ODSP and 9% of OW clients receive assistance with transportation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low-income citizens do not have access to any other assistance with transportation other than the \$500 tax credit offered by the Federal government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All ODSP/OW clients would be eligible EXCEPT the estimated 20% of ODSP and 9% of OW clients receive assistance with transportation ▪ Low-income citizens do not have access to any other assistance with transportation other than the \$500 tax credit offered by the Federal government
C. Estimated Eligible Average of Users (2006)	12,059	9,215	21,274	25,015	46,289
D. Average # of monthly subsidized	1,056 Average monthly passes or	1,056 Average monthly passes or 12,676	1,056 Average monthly passes or	1,056 Average monthly passes or 12,676 passes	1,056 Average monthly passes or 12,676

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Target Group	ODSP Recipients Only	OW Recipients Only	OW & ODSP Recipients Combined	Working Poor Below the Low-Income Cut-Offs	All Low-Income including ODSP/OW
passes that could be provided during the pilot project (assuming no staffing costs)	12,676 passes over the 12 month pilot	passes over the 12 month pilot	12,676 passes over the 12 month pilot	over the 12 month pilot	passes over the 12 month pilot
E. Proportion of eligible target group that could be assisted monthly during the pilot	9%	11%	5%	4%	2%
D. Average # of monthly subsidized passes that could be provided during the pilot project (with staffing costs)	809 Average monthly passes or 9,718 passes over the 12 month pilot	809 Average monthly passes or 9,718 passes over the 12 month pilot	809 Average monthly passes or 9,718 passes over the 12 month pilot	809 Average monthly passes or 9,718 passes over the 12 month pilot	809 Average monthly passes or 9,718 passes over the 12 month pilot
G. Proportion of eligible target group that could be assisted monthly during the pilot	7%	9%	4%	3%	1.7%
H. Apply a 25% estimated uptake of the Affordable Transit Pass Program and projected annual costs	9,044 estimated # of public transit users \$321,062 monthly or \$3,852,744 on an annual basis	6,911 estimated # of public transit users \$245,340 monthly or \$2,944,086 on an annual basis	15,955 estimated # of public transit users \$567,822 monthly or \$6,813,870 on an annual basis	18,761 estimated # of public transit users \$666,015 monthly or \$7,992,186 on an annual basis	34,716 estimated # of public transit users \$1,232,418 monthly or \$14,789,016 on an annual basis
I Potential Total Cost per month if	\$428,094 monthly or \$5,137,134 on	\$327,132 monthly or \$3,925,590 on	\$755,227 monthly or \$9,062,724 on	\$888,032 monthly or \$10,656,390 on annual basis	\$1,643,259 monthly or \$19,719,114 on

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Target Group	ODSP Recipients Only	OW Recipients Only	OW & ODSP Recipients Combined	Working Poor Below the Low-Income Cut-Offs	All Low-Income including ODSP/OW
All eligible users requests assistance	annual basis	annual basis	annual basis		annual basis

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION:

Council could decide not to approve the Affordable Transit Pass Program Pilot Project, but continue its lobbying efforts with the Provincial government for the inclusion of transportation costs for OW/ODSP clients.

Council could also adjust the level of subsidy, either up or down, from the 50% level proposed in the staff report. Any adjustment in the level of subsidy would impact the number of passes that could be made available during the pilot project.

Alternatively, Council could decide to forego a pilot project entirely, recommend a target group, and direct staff to implement an Affordable Transit Pass Program.

FINANCIAL/STAFFING/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

Financial:

There are \$2 million dollars in the Social Services Initiatives Reserve as of December 31, 2006. Consideration could also be given to using some of the revenue generated by increased transit fares to cover the cost of the subsidized low-income passes. This has been done successfully in the Water/Waste Water budget where \$500,000 is taken from the water/waste water revenues to be used for the Utilities Arrears Program. Alternatively, consideration could also be given to equalizing the level of subsidies currently being provided to students and seniors, i.e. reduce the level of subsidy provided to students/seniors (they would be required to pay more) and use the increased funds to offset the cost of the program for low-income citizens. If Council wished to pursue this option, additional information would need to be obtained in order to provide more detail as to how much revenue this option could actually generate. Finally, while there is sufficient Gas Tax Reserve available to fund the pilot project, it should be noted that any future consideration of creating a permanent program of this nature will require identification of a funding source other than Gas Tax, as present commitments and enhancements will fully commit the available Gas Tax funds.

Staffing:

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Since staff is not able to accurately predict the level of program uptake, the potential impact on staffing in both the Special Supports Section of the Community Services Department and the Transit Division of the Public Works Department cannot be fully determined at this time. Staff is proposing that the program be administered through existing resources and reassessed as the pilot evolves.

If it is determined that the program can not be administered with existing staff within the Special Supports Section and the Transit Division, it will be necessary for both of these areas to increase their staff complement by one full-time equivalent each on a temporary basis during the course of the pilot project (in total up to two full-time equivalents)

Legal:

There are no legal impacts anticipated at this time. If, however, Council narrows the scope down to ODSP recipients, there could be legal challenges by persons with disabilities currently not eligible for ODSP.

POLICIES AFFECTING PROPOSAL:

Ontario Works regulations do not impact the pilot project since no cost-sharing would be pursued and issues of potential duplication have been addressed.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities (AODA) will be setting out new standards and place them within regulation for compliance in five new areas of which transportation will be one. The first phase in this process is the development of standards in order to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities on or before January 1, 2025.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION:

Report ECS07038 was completed in consultation with relevant staff within the Community Services Department (Finance and Administration, Benefit Eligibility, Special Supports, Strategic Services and Social Development and Early Childhood Divisions), Public Works Department (Transit Division), and Corporate Services Department (Budgets and Finance).

CITY STRATEGIC COMMITMENT:

By evaluating the “**Triple Bottom Line**”, (community, environment, and economic implications) we can make choices that create value across all three bottom lines, moving us closer to our vision for a sustainable community, and Provincial interests.

Community Well-Being is enhanced.

Yes **No**

Providing low-income citizens with access to affordable transportation will enhance their quality of life and potentially their economic and social well-being.

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Environmental Well-Being is enhanced. **Yes** **No**

The Affordable Transit Pass Program could positively impact ridership on public transit.

Economic Well-Being is enhanced. **Yes** **No**

Low-income citizens have limited financial resources from which to meet the basic needs of themselves and their families. The provision of subsidized transit will provide some financial relief on the fixed cost of transportation freeing up income for other necessities, and promotes attachment to the workforce.

Does the option you are recommending create value across all three bottom lines? **Yes** **No**

Do the options you are recommending make Hamilton a City of choice for high performance public servants? **Yes** **No**