



**City of Kingston  
Report to Council  
Report Number 17-245**

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**To:** Mayor & Members of Council

**From:** Mark Van Buren, Acting Commissioner, Transportation & Infrastructure Services  
Lanie Hurdle, Commissioner, Community Services

**Resource Staff:** Sheila Kidd, Director, Transportation Services  
Sheldon Laidman, Director, Housing & Social Services

**Date of Meeting:** September 19, 2017

**Subject:** Universal Kingston Transit Pass Pilot Program - Ontario Works - Pilot Program Review

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**Executive Summary:**

City Council approved a 1-year pilot program, for the period January 1, 2017 through December 31, 2017, to provide universal transit access to all Ontario Works clients deemed eligible by the Housing and Social Services Department. Council further directed staff to evaluate the operational and financial impacts of the pilot program and make recommendations regarding the program to City Council no later than September 2017.

This report provides information about the pilot program and a recommendation to continue the program on an ongoing basis at the conclusion of the pilot program.

**Recommendation:**

**That** Council approve the continuation of the Ontario Works Universal Kingston Transit Pass Program, subject to the Ministry of Community and Social Services continuing to provide sufficient discretionary funding to support the program; and

**That** a minimum of \$200,000 in funding be identified as a transfer from the Housing and Social Services Department to Kingston Transit in the annual operating budget to support the Ontario Works Universal Kingston Transit Pass Program; and

**That** Council direct staff to report back to Council in the event that a change in discretionary funding from the Ministry of Community and Social Service could result in the discontinuation of the Ontario Works Universal Kingston Transit Pass Program.

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**Authorizing Signatures:**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY COMMISSIONER

**Mark Van Buren, Acting  
Commissioner, Transportation &  
Infrastructure Services**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY COMMISSIONER

**Lanie Hurdle, Commissioner, Community Services**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

**Gerard Hunt, Chief Administrative Officer**

**Consultation with the following Members of the Corporate Management Team:**

Desirée Kennedy, Chief Financial Officer & City Treasurer



Denis Leger, Commissioner, Corporate & Emergency Services

Not required

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**Options/Discussion:**

As the Service Manager for the City of Kingston and the County of Frontenac, the Housing and Social Services Department administers benefits to Ontario Works (OW) recipients on behalf of the Province. The provision of transportation benefits is included as an OW Discretionary Employment Benefit and, as such, it is the responsibility of the Service Manager to determine funding allocations. Eligible benefits are cost-shared with the Province in accordance with the prescribed provincial cost-sharing formulae. Discretionary employment benefits are part of the provincial upload of OW, which is currently 97.2% uploaded to the Province and will be 100% funded by the Province in 2018.

Staff from Kingston Transit and the Housing and Social Services Department reviewed options to provide more OW clients with access to Kingston Transit that would continue to satisfy OW program and budgetary requirements and ensure Kingston Transit revenues would not be negatively impacted. Staff identified a joint partnership as an opportunity to provide all OW clients with free universal transit access to Kingston Transit service that would result in an overall positive financial variance to the City as well as reduce barriers to employment for OW clients.

City Council approved a 1-year pilot program for the period of January 1, 2017 – December 31, 2017 to provide universal transit access to all Ontario Works clients deemed eligible by the Housing and Social Services Department (Report 16-368). Council further directed staff to evaluate the operational and financial impacts of the pilot program and make recommendations regarding the program to City Council no later than September 2017.

The results of the pilot program have been positive with no operational or financial concerns identified.

During the first 6 months of the program, from January 1, 2017 – June 30, 2017, OW clients have taken 162,680 trips using Kingston Transit. Based on current ridership projections and continued ridership growth by OW clients, it is anticipated that more than 300,000 trips will have taken place by December 31, 2017.

A survey was recently administered to obtain input about the program directly from OW clients. The survey was administered to OW clients during regular meetings with their case manager. OW clients were asked about how often they use Kingston Transit and the purpose of their trips when using Kingston Transit. Of the Ontario Works clients interviewed, 84% identified that they use Kingston Transit more often than they did before having access under the program. The top 3 reasons Ontario Works clients identified for using Kingston Transit were searching for work, personal appointments, and groceries.

In the first year of the program, Kingston Transit received a transfer of \$200,000 from the Housing and Social Services Department to support this program. The universal transit program approach ensures that the City is maximizing the funding envelope available from the Province for employment-related benefits that might otherwise be underutilized. This initiative was included in the annual OW Service Plan and approved by the Ministry of Community and

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Socials Services (MCSS) as an eligible expense for OW clients in the City of Kingston and County of Frontenac.

Of the \$200,000 identified to support the program, it was expected that the City would receive \$194,400 from MCSS, \$4,400 by the City and the remaining \$1,200 funded by the County of Frontenac. It was estimated that transit revenue would decrease by approximately \$75,000 as a result of providing free transit access to OW clients that would have otherwise purchased a transit fare. The estimated net increase in revenue to the City was expected to be \$120,600 for the 1-year pilot period. Based on year-to-date financial information, staff anticipates that the net increase in revenue will be at least equal to the \$120,600 that was previously estimated.

Staff is recommending that the program be continued on an ongoing basis at the conclusion of the pilot period, subject to the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) continuing to provide sufficient discretionary funding to support the program. The availability and applicability of discretionary funding from MCSS to support this program is subject to change over time. MCSS is currently undertaking significant changes to how they will fund and expect Service Managers to implement OW programming. Staff will report back to Council should a change in funding from MCSS result in the possibly of this program being discontinued.

Staff recommends that a minimum of \$200,000 in funding continue to be transferred from the Housing and Social Services Department to Kingston Transit on an annual basis. Staff will review the funding level annually and recommended any changes to the funding level, if required, as part of the annual operating budget process.

Given the success of the OW transit program pilot, staff met with the management at the local Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) office and senior management at MCSS in August to discuss opportunities for introducing a Universal Transit Pass Program for ODSP clients and explore ways to increase public transit utilization. ODSP and MCSS management representatives were extremely receptive to exploring opportunities to work more closely together. City staff anticipates meeting with ODSP and MCSS representatives several more times before the end of 2017 to discuss these opportunities further.

#### **Existing Policy/By-Law:**

City Council approved a 1-year pilot program for the period of January 1, 2017 – December 31, 2017 to provide universal transit access to all Ontario Works clients deemed eligible by the Housing and Social Services Department (Report 16-368). The pilot program ends on December 31, 2017.

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**Notice Provisions:**

Not applicable.

**Accessibility Considerations:**

Ontario Works clients receive a Kingston Transit pass on site at the Housing and Social Services office at 362 Montreal Street the first time they meet with their case manager. Ontario Works clients are not required to travel to another location to obtain their transit pass.

Copies of this report are available in alternate formats.

**Financial Considerations:**

In the pilot year for the program, \$200,000 was identified as a transfer from the Housing and Social Services Department to Kingston Transit. Of the \$200,000 identified to support the program, it was expected that the City would receive \$194,400 from MCSS with the remainder funded by the City (\$4,400) and the County of Frontenac (\$1,200). It was estimated that transit revenue would decrease by approximately \$75,000 as a result of providing free transit access to OW clients that would have otherwise purchased a transit fare. The estimated net increase in revenue to the City was expected to be \$120,600 at the end of 2017. Based on year-to-date financial information, staff anticipates that the net increase in revenue will be at least equal to the \$120,600 that was estimated.

A minimum of \$200,000 will continue to be transferred from the Housing and Social Services Department to Kingston Transit on an annual basis. Staff will review the funding level annually and recommend any changes to the funding level, if required, as part of the annual operating budget process.

**Contacts:**

Jeremy DaCosta, General Manager - Kingston Transit, 613-546-4291, Ext. 1310

Laura Rabbie, Manager, Program Delivery, 613-546-4291, Ext. 4857

**Other City of Kingston Staff Consulted:**

Lana Foulds, Manager, Financial Planning

**Exhibits Attached:**

Not applicable.