

## Speaking Notes – Edmonton Low Income Transit Pass Proposal

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Thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council strongly supports the proposal to introduce a low income transit pass. We urge its adoption by Edmonton City Council. We commend the Edmonton Transit System Advisory Board for making a solid case for such a pass.

City council recently established a Mayor's Task Force to Eliminate Poverty in Edmonton. In the community consultations leading to the formation of the task force, 18 focus groups were held with low income Edmontonians. In a document titled “Engaging Edmontonians to Thrive and Prosper: What We Heard,” focus group participants identified the lack of affordability of public transit as a major obstacle to their mobility and independence.

Many low income Edmontonians can't afford a private automobile, and therefore rely on public transit to get to their jobs, medical appointments, or grocery shopping. A low income transit pass for all low income Edmontonians - regardless of their source of income - was identified in the What We Heard document as a key action the city can take to help end poverty.

As noted by ETSAB, Edmonton Transit already provides a discounted pass – priced at 40 per cent of the cost of the adult monthly pass - to residents receiving Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) benefits.

Other Edmontonians, however, with incomes as low - or lower - than those of AISH recipients are required to pay full fares. This includes people receiving other types of income support such as Alberta Works. It also includes working poor Edmontonians who rely on transit to get to jobs, or training, or education programs.

ETSAB also noted that administrative costs would be kept to a minimum by using the same eligibility criteria for a low income transit pass as are already in place for the city's Leisure Access Program. Using the same application process will also be more convenient for Edmontonians facing language and other barriers to accessing services.

A low income transit pass can complement the existing Donate A Ride program, as it does in the City of Calgary which has both programs. The demand for Donate A Ride tickets could be reduced, as some low income residents may prefer the convenience of a discounted monthly pass compared to the inconvenience of having to obtain Donate A Ride tickets.

It is interesting to note that in the most recent 12 month period, the City of Calgary, which has a low income transit pass, distributed 62,000 donated tickets to community agencies. By contrast, the City of Edmonton with a smaller population distributed 85,000 donated tickets.

Another way revenue losses from a low income transit pass can be minimized is through increased utilization of transit by low income Edmontonians. This increase in ridership has been demonstrated after the introduction of the U-Pass for Edmonton post-secondary students. Edmonton Transit estimates that transit use among students in participating post-secondary institutions has doubled since the introduction of U-Pass.

Finally, a low income transit pass could reduce transit compliance and enforcement costs. Some low income people ride the LRT without paying the fare and end up getting tickets they can't afford to pay. These unpaid fines turn into warrants, which turn into arrests and stints in Remand, all of which are paid for by tax dollars.

Many of the changes needed to end poverty in the City of Edmonton will require action by the federal and provincial governments. Implementing a low income transit pass is a tangible way for the City of Edmonton to show leadership in poverty elimination, in a key area within the city's jurisdiction. The Edmonton Social Planning Council therefore urges the adoption – without delay – of a low income transit pass.

Thank you for this opportunity. I welcome your questions.