

Plan gives less fortunate a break on transit fares

BY DAVID FLEISCHER
Staff Writer

A new pilot program aims to help get homeless people and other underprivileged citizens around York Region a little easier.

Community agencies will soon be able to buy tickets for the Viva and YRT transit systems at a 15-per-cent discount.

"When you're trying to budget, you want to get the best bang for the budget," Aurora Councillor Stephen

Granger said.

Mr. Granger saw the need for such a program when he noticed the Welcoming Arms Ministry handing out passes to their clients.

He saw a chance to make it easier for such agencies to manage their budgets while increasing ridership on the region's transit system.

"More ridership benefits the region and it leaves more cash in (agencies') pockets," he said.

The region's finance and administration manager, Paul Tobin, talked with policy and program support services director Cordelia Abankwa-Harris and her team and decided it made sense to start by helping the agencies

who deal with homeless issues.

"We always intended this to be a pilot of some kind and identified the groups who need the most help soonest," Mr. Tobin said.

"They know their clients best and we're trying to get it down to the grass roots."

Ironing out the logistics has been a challenge and the plan does not officially launch until next month.

Agency representatives will travel to municipal offices to purchase the passes and tickets they need at the discounted rate.

Those can then be distributed to their clients who need to get to jobs, other agencies or anywhere else they need.

"It will definitely help us. We've been waiting for this sort of assistance for years," said Rehana Sumar, executive director of Mosaic Interfaith Out of the Cold.

Mosaic uses its own costly van to help clients get to and from shelters when the weather turns cold. Anything which can mitigate their overhead is good news, Ms Sumar said.

The pilot will run until next fall and then the results will be evaluated.

"We really don't know what kind of demand these agencies have," Ms Abankwa-Harris said.

"This really is a pilot to give us an idea what's required on a small scale."

In addition to seeing how many tickets are sold, the region hopes to get a sense of how and where they are utilized.

Whether or not a 15-per-cent discount is enough to make a difference

WHO'S ON BOARD

Some participating agencies:

- ▶ Yellow Brick House
- ▶ Sandgate Women's Shelter of Georgina
- ▶ Leeder Place Emergency Family Shelter,
- ▶ Inn from the Cold
- ▶ Newmarket Youth Shelter
- ▶ MOSAIC interfaith, Out of the Cold
- ▶ The Welcoming Arms Ministry.

is something the region will take into account.

Big companies, such as IBM already get such a discount when they purchase passes for employees.

Every little bit helps and if clients get where they're going, and if more people are using transit, it's a win-win, Mr. Granger said.

"This is absolutely a starting point ... it can become something else," Mr. Tobin said.

Measures of success include how many participants there are as well as the costs and benefits.

Already, the region is considering if it could be expanded to include other agencies.

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Dr. Robert Phillips

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