

TRANSPORTATION: Regional council has options today

Proposed YRT fare hikes don't sit well with riders

BY SEAN PEARCE
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You could be forced to shell out more to ride York Region Transit/Viva if York Regional Council sign off on a staff recommendation calling for fares to jump by an average of 7.86 per cent almost across the board.

The recommendation is to be considered by regional council at today's committee of the whole meeting and, if approved and adopted at the Sept. 26 council meeting, would increase the cost of every YRT/Viva fare except for the region's share of the GTA weekly pass.

As part of the staff proposal, all cash fares would rise by 25 cents to \$4 for a one-zone trip, \$5 for a two-zone ride and \$4.50 for an express run and all monthly passes, except for express, would jump by 10 per cent with the cost of adult, student and senior/child passes hitting \$132, \$99 and \$60.50 respectively. An express pass would go from \$145 to \$152.

As for YRT/Viva tickets, an adult ticket would jump 30 cents to \$3.30,

a student ticket would rise 20 cents to \$2.50 and a senior/child ticket would increase 15 cents to \$2. An express ticket would go from \$3.50 to \$3.80.

Transit users were largely critical of the increases proposed.

Vineela Dandamudi took YRT/Viva up from Scarborough for a job interview and said any fare hike would only prove to be an added burden for her and other unemployed people looking for work. She also took exception with the long wait between buses.

Richmond Hill's Irina Dvorkina was also unimpressed by the idea.

"I travel a lot and bus fares are much more here than they are in Europe," she said. "It's already twice as much and it shouldn't be their only option every year."

Enid Challenger of Newmarket wasn't too worried about the possibility of an increase on her own finances, given that she's retired and doesn't use transit often, but she did express concern for those who rely on the service as part of their daily commute to work or school.

"Those will be the people affected most," she said.

That said, not everyone was opposed to the proposed hike.

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"York Region knows what is needed," one transit user said. "We'd all like to see no increases, but they know where they stand."

The recommended increases, if adopted, would put the region's cash fare well above the GTA average of \$3.21 and would also see it above the average price when it comes to tickets and adult and student monthly passes.

It would, however, be below the average \$62.25 for a senior/child monthly pass.

The report before council also makes mention that YRT/Viva is usually the first transit agency to set out its new fare schedule each year.

Regional staff wouldn't com-

ment in advance of today's committee meeting, but the report notes YRT/Viva ridership has increased 20 per cent over the past five years with revenues rising from \$45.8 million in 2008 to \$57.6 million in 2012. That increase in revenues, the report says, comes from a combination of both higher ridership and increased fares.

Seven years ago, the region set out to eventually recover 50 per cent of the cost of providing transit through fares with the remainder being subsidized through the property tax base. And while ridership has grown, so has the cost of transit in the region meaning the revenue-to-cost recovery ratio has continued to hover around the 40-per-cent mark, the report said.

It further notes that KPMG conducted an independent review of the region's fare structure in the spring and came up with a series of recommendations predominantly involving the reduction of discounts applied to tickets and passes as these were identified as leading the average fare to trend lower.

The three options developed through the study included increasing cash fares only by 25 cents, leaving cash fares as they are and increasing the cost of monthly passes and tickets and a mixture of the two.

The latter option is being recommended by staff and is expected to bring in \$3.6 million in revenue, while also achieving an estimated revenue-to-cost recovery ratio of 42.2 per cent.

PROPOSED HIKE

If council approves the staff recommendation, the hikes will take effect Jan. 1:

- All cash fares except express: \$4
- Express cash fare: \$4.50
- Adult ticket: \$3.30
- Student ticket: \$2.50
- Senior/child ticket: \$2
- Express ticket: \$3.80
- Adult monthly pass: \$132
- Student monthly pass: \$99
- Senior/child monthly pass: \$60.50
- Express monthly pass: \$152



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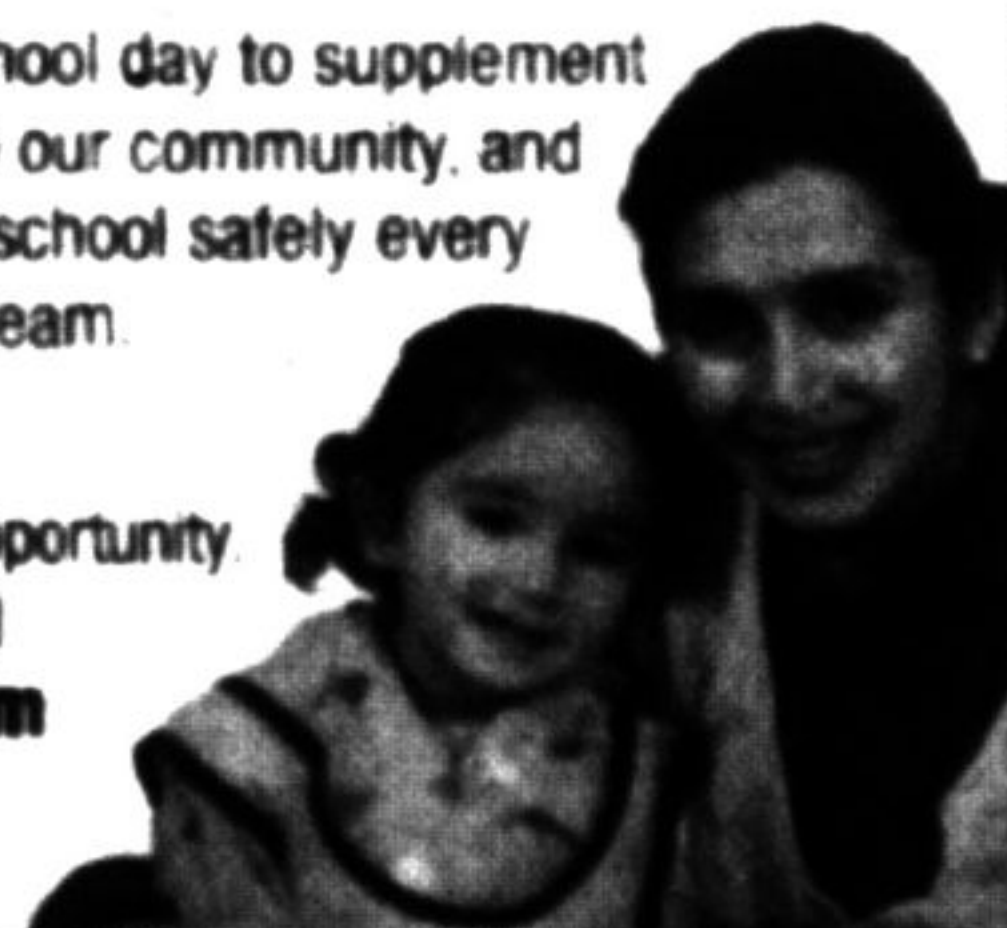
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