

Pilon, Janet

Subject: HSR Fare Assist Program Pilot**From:** Nolan, Tim**Sent:** November 7, 2023 11:36 AM**To:** clerk@hamilton.ca**Subject:** HSR Fare Assist Program Pilot

To the Clerk,

The message below is being sent to members of City Council for deliberation at its meeting on Wednesday, November 08, 2023. Please advise of any questions. Thank you so much.

Tim Nolan

To Mayor and Members of City Council,

The Accessibility Hamilton Alliance (AHA) writes to request Council respectfully reconsider its decision with regard to the HSR Fare Assist Program Pilot.

Should Council and the HSR continue as planned with the Fare Assist program there will be a significant and adverse impact upon persons who live both with a disability and in poverty. The program as cited by the HSR Director will make transit better for across-the-board for HSR passengers. However, for the most vulnerable and economically challenged HSR passengers the program as designed will cause irrevocable harm.

The AHA was established in 2022 to address concerns with accessibility as they affect seniors, persons with disabilities and taxpayers in the City of Hamilton and beyond. The AHA has been supported by many individuals and organizations across the City and province. The undersigned are supportive of this correspondence and position undertaken by AHA on the Fare Assist matter.

There exists an indisputable correlation between disability and poverty. Hamilton has one of the largest populations of persons with disabilities (27.7%) per capita compared with Ontario and Canada. There is equally a strong correlation between disability and poverty with 28% of people with disabilities living below the poverty line (Canada Survey on Disability, 2017) with an annual income of less than \$19,100 annually. The unemployment rate for persons with disabilities is between 24% - 69% depending upon severity of disability (Canada Survey on Disability 2017). The median income for people with severe disabilities is less than half of that for people without a disability (Canada Survey on Disability, 2017).

Many people with disabilities survive with income only from Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program; that means a monthly income of less than \$1,300 or less than \$16,000 annually. Rent alone consumes as much as 77% of total support. This leaves very little for food and even less for transit. Property insurance is nothing more than a passing thought. Transportation then is but a luxury to the most vulnerable disabled.

No cost transit for persons with disabilities, and in particular persons with disabilities living at or below the poverty line, in Hamilton has been a benefit for at least 25 years and as many as 75 years. The City by its actions has established a dependency upon affordable transit which it cannot now simply reverse without some form of substitution for its most economically and disabled citizens. No cost transportation is more akin to an income support mechanism than it is a free ride.

The AHA understands that Hamilton may be the only transit property in the local area which currently grants no cost transit to persons with disabilities. However, other municipalities have granted near 0 transit costs by requiring persons with disabilities pay only a nominal annual fee for transit (e.g. \$10 per year in London). Were a person with a disability to take four return trips weekly aboard a bus, and assuming they qualify for the 30% discounted fare, they would pay \$15.50 per week or \$804 annually. From where is this money supposed to come when their annual income is below \$19,100 annually or less?

According to HSR staff many community agencies purchase bus tickets from the HSR to support people who use their programs. But, typically it is only people with more severe disabilities who participate in community programs. What about the rest of the people who have no connection with community agencies and therefore do not receive any bus fare support? Who covers the cost of this bus fare support to community agencies? The City? A great deal of effort, time and cost can be saved if the City were to simply waive bus fares rather than to transfer funds to agencies to pay for bus fares.

In the opinion of the AHA the Fare Assist program ought to be paused in order that many of the foregoing issues involved in transit for people with disabilities can be more closely explored. However, it is understood that Council may not have the appetite to put a pause on the program.

Council, then, at the very least must respect the significant and adverse affect this program will have upon the disabled poor in our community. In this regard Council must at the very least direct staff, now, to revisit the Fare Discount Schedule with the view to ensuring that the most economically vulnerable disabled members of Hamilton continue to travel aboard the HSR at no cost for the life of the pilot. Additionally, City staff ought to be directed by Council to consult persons with disabilities and advocates (including agencies) about how people with disabilities and their transit practices can be tracked during the life of the pilot such that the HSR has the necessary metrics to make a more informed decision about transit needs of people with disabilities at the conclusion of the pilot.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of:

The Accessibility Hamilton Alliance
Above and Beyond
The Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB) Hamilton Chapter
The Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB) National
The Canadian National Institute for the Blind
The Ontario Disability Coalition

40 individuals from the community who also endorse the letter and can be identified upon request.

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