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Subject: HSR and DARTS payment system and extreme heat

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Dear Councillors, Mayor and clerk,

Ahead of tomorrow's GIC meeting I was to support the advocacy for a truly accessible HSR. All the laudable efforts to make the buses themselves accessible - ramps, kneeling buses, DARTS vans with trained drivers - are of no use to those who cannot pay for the service, either because of the barriers to accessing free tickets for the many riders living in poverty, or because of the barriers to using Presto. The changes to the payment system have excluded the people who are the most dependent on transit. This must be corrected.

Another factor that must be considered urgently is the forecasted extremely hot summer. As we have been reading in the Spec - and most of know from direct experience - Hamilton's emergency department and health system at large do not have the capacity to handle any additional pressure from heat related impacts.

A truly accessible HSR is a basic requirement for those who will be at higher risk of heat stroke and death from the expected combination of extreme heat and humidity - particularly people who are elderly and living with disabilities, and living in over-heated units. Yes, we have cooling centres, but are these people expected to walk there in the outdoors heat? The buses themselves are an already running, efficient system of mobile cooling centres. Let's make HSR and DARTS fare optional on extreme heat days.

During the 2021 heat dome in British Colombia 619 people died due to the heat. In 2018, a heat wave in Montreal led to 66 deaths directly related to the heat. Let's not add Hamiltonians to these grim but preventable statistics.

Thank you for your attention.

Miriam Sager
Hamilton