

### Gridlock, Taxes and Fare Free Transit. (FFT)

Good morning to The Committee Chair, Mme. Mayor, Members of Committee, Staff and Fellow Residents, and thank you for the opportunity to delegate on the subject of Fare Free Public Transit, Report Number: TR-02-24

The report offers ways to incentivise transit use and as such has to be welcome.

The first analysis is the impact of Fare Free Transit followed by potential incentives in the form of Fare Caps and Fare Reduction Incentives for frequent transit users.

Starting from the premise that the goal of the incentives is to increase transit usage, to take cars off the roads and address the city's gridlock problems, I have to suggest that while caps on user fares and incentives for frequent users have a value, particularly for lower income wage earners who use transit daily for work and essential journeys, they will do nothing to put new bums on bus seats which is what we need to do to reduce current levels gridlock.

Gridlock levels people rightly fear will only get worse in an ever-intensifying city.

To increase ridership we must incentivise new riders which the report clearly says Fare Free Transit will achieve. It also suggests that FFT will help Burlington reach its Transit Plan objectives which include reducing gridlock.

We also know from transit studies across the world that increasing transit service frequency, also suggested in the report, incentivises new transit ridership.

Both of these come at a cost which already burdened taxpayers may be reluctant to bear.

So any investment in FFT must demonstrate positive returns to the city, its economy and its taxpayers.

The bulk of that investment is the loss of revenue from fare paying passengers.

The report agrees that FFT will bring rapid ridership growth. From 3.2 million riders (3.87 million boardings) in 2024 to 6 million (7.3 million boardings) by 2029. At a cost of \$6.2 million in 2025 and rising proportionally as ridership increases.

As well as incentivising existing and new riders we must incentivise the non-transit, car driving public whose taxes will help pay for this.

So what's in it for car drivers? Because let's face it even in a perfect transit friendly city, cars and their drivers are not going away anytime soon.

The most convincing argument for them must surely be the reduction in gridlock that will improve their commutes.

How is that achieved and how does it help non-transit users.

The increase in transit rider boardings, due to FFT projected in the report would result in 3.43 million fewer car trips per year, This means 13,000 fewer car trips every weekday in Burlington. Might Burlington Transportation Services provide estimates of the impact of those 13,000 car trips on Burlington's gridlock?

Would that add analytical data as Burlington Transit consider the FFT option in their upcoming 5-year Transit Plan update?

Ontario Premier Ford, quoting Toronto Regional Board of Trade, estimates the provincial cost of gridlock at \$11.0 Billion annually.

That equates to \$2,325.0 per Ontario car commuter.

Burlington Economic Development Corporation (BEDC) estimates there are 45,675 daily car commutes in Burlington.

This suggests a staggering negative annual economic impact of \$106.2 Million in Burlington alone.

Might BEDC provide details of that positive impact on our city economy arising from reduced gridlock for the upcoming Burlington Transit 5-year plan update?

That \$6.2 million in foregone revenue, our citizens investment in reduced gridlock, will not vanish into a black hole.

Given that public transit users are often our most economically challenged or low wage-earning residents, almost all of that \$6.2M will go directly into primary local economy spending on food, clothing, shelter and day to day necessities. Given the socio-economic situation of most transit users, it will not be stashed in savings accounts or spent on luxury SUVs or travel.

Using a generally accepted economic multiplier of 2.5 for new spending introduced at the lower end of the local economy, that would inject some \$15.5 million annually into the city economy. The equivalent of some 2,000 new employment opportunities in Burlington.

Stimulating local small and medium size businesses, still struggling post pandemic, and lifting many of our economically challenged families out of hardship.

At a time when Provincial and Federal Politicians are returning \$200.0 and \$250.0 to taxpayers in "Affordability Cheques", FFT puts money directly into the pockets of those who need it most and will spend it to boost the economy.

Perhaps the most readily quantifiable benefit for Burlington taxpayers is the 98 hours the average Burlington commuter spends gridlocked each year from the same TRBT study.

That is lost family time we can never get back. It makes the yearly cost of \$73.80 per Burlington household of that \$6.2 million lost fare revenue seem like the ultimate bargain.

If I may finish with some fundamental questions about fairness and equity in municipal services.

Transit users and car drivers pay the same city taxes.

To ride a bus across Burlington transit users pay \$3.50, each way, for that privilege.

Car drivers pay nothing to use those same city roads and traffic services to get to the same destinations.

Public transit users tend to be less well off or face other challenges that those who can afford a car do not.

A single parent traveling to work is penalised \$35.00 each week just to get to work then similar amounts to shop for groceries or take their kids to city or school programs.

Why do we penalise our least able citizens while drivers use city roads, "Fare Free" so to speak?

Some argue that Burlington should be increasing transit fare and revenues to reduce property taxes.

Following that logic, would the city consider a \$3.50 charge for people to use our libraries?

Or \$3.50 to take a walk in our parks?

Most would be appalled by that idea.

I ask This Committee and Council to be equally appalled by road use fees for non car owners, which is what bus fares really amount to.

So my request, as this Committee and City Council take this report under consideration, is that The Fare Free Transit option in the report be prioritised as our best and most equitable option to reduce gridlock in our city, meet the targets of our Burlington Transit and Integrated Transportation Plans, our mandated intensification targets and our long term goals of walkable, livable, fifteen minute communities and to give direction to Burlington Transit to prioritize that Fare Free Option, working with Transportation Services and BEDC to further quantify the benefits of and incorporate No Fare Transit as they update their 5-year Burlington Transit Plan.

Thank you for taking the time to hear and consider this delegation.

Jim Young.  
Aldershot, Burlington.