



CITY COUNCIL REPORT

TITLE:

FREE YOUTH TRANSIT PROGRAM

PRESENTER:

Greg Brown

DEPARTMENT:

Transportation Services

ATTACHMENTS:

DATE:

8/7/2026

CLEARANCE / APPROVALS:

Todd Burton General Manager

Dave Wardrop City Manager

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That City Council authorize the implementation of the Free Youth Transit Pass Program effective September 1, 2026, subject to the contribution agreement with the Province of Manitoba providing funding of up to \$1 million to offset lost transit revenue from September 2026 through August 2027, and that transit fares for eligible youth participants be waived for the duration of the provincially funded program.

BACKGROUND:

The Province of Manitoba has announced the implementation of a province-wide Free Transit for Youth Program effective September 1, 2026. The Province is establishing a contribution agreement with the City of Brandon providing up to \$1,000,000 for the program to run from September 2026 through to August 2027, to offset lost fare revenue and associated operating costs resulting from the elimination of youth transit fares.

Brandon Transit currently provides free transit service to children aged 0-5 and has experienced positive outcomes through improved accessibility for families. The proposed provincial program expands free transit access to youth aged 6-17 and aligns with Brandon Transit's commitment to providing accessible and equitable transportation for all residents.

Administration is proposing that eligible youth access the program through a Brandon Transit Smart Card system administered through both the Brandon School Division and the the Brandon Transit Information Centre. This approach maintains accountability, enables ridership tracking, and provides youth with familiarity and confidence in using public transit.

The proposed program would require eligible youth to provide proof of age and receive a transit smart card valid for one year, renewable annually at no cost.

ANALYSIS:

The Free Transit for Youth Program will improve access to education, employment, recreation, and community services for Brandon residents aged 6-17 while reducing transportation costs for families.

Based on Brandon Transit's experience with the U-Pass program and observations from other Canadian transit systems, Administration anticipates a significant increase in youth ridership once fares are removed. To ensure accountability and effective program management, eligible youth will be issued a Brandon Transit Smart Card. This approach provides a consistent process for operators, allows ridership tracking, and supports ongoing program evaluation.

Administration supports limiting eligibility to youth aged 6-17 to simplify administration, and avoid impacts on existing programs such as the U-Pass. The proposal also includes making the Class Pass Program free while maintaining registration requirements to support service planning and demand monitoring.

Overall, the program is expected to increase transit use, improve mobility for youth, and support the development of long-term transit users while being funded through the Province's contribution agreement.

LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS:

Implementation of the program will require a resolution from City Council as part of the execution of the Provincial Contribution Agreement.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT:

The Free Transit for Youth Program supports Council's strategic priorities by improving accessibility, affordability, and mobility for Brandon youth and families. The program promotes social inclusion, supports access to education, employment, and recreation, encourages sustainable transportation, and helps build long-term transit ridership through increased use of public transit at an early age. Additionally, the smart card system supports effective program management and data-driven service planning.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The Province of Manitoba has committed funding of up to \$1,000,000 annually through a contribution agreement with the City of Brandon.

Provincial funding will be used to offset:

- Lost youth fare revenue.
- Smart Card revenue.
- Customer education and outreach activities.
- Potential increased operating costs resulting from ridership growth.
- Potential service adjustments required to accommodate increased demand.

The program is expected to be revenue-neutral to the City to the extent that Provincial funding is sufficient to offset fare revenue losses and operational impacts.

RISK ASSESSMENT:

The primary risks associated with the program are increased ridership demands, potential misuse of transit privileges, and future changes to provincial funding. These risks will be mitigated through smart card registration and tracking, ongoing monitoring of ridership and service capacity, and annual program reviews. Provincial funding of up to \$1,000,000 annually is expected to offset lost fare revenue and additional operating costs associated with the program.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY:

Comprehensive communications is being developed, including:

- Media releases and public announcements.
- Information campaigns through Brandon Transit channels.
- Direct collaboration with the Brandon School Division and local schools.
- Social media promotion.
- Transit Information Centre support and registration materials.
- Educational materials regarding transit safety, etiquette, and trip planning.

Program performance results and ridership data will be reported to Council annually.

CONCLUSION:

That City Council authorize the implementation of the Free Youth Transit Pass Program effective September 1, 2026, subject to the contribution agreement with the Province of Manitoba providing funding of up to \$1 million to offset lost transit revenue from September 2026 through August 2027, and that transit fares for eligible youth participants be waived for the duration of the provincially funded program.