

## **TRANSIT AFFORDABILITY**

a study focused on persons with low incomes in the Region of Waterloo

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november 2004

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### Executive summary

This report presents findings and recommendations from a study on the affordability of transit for people with low incomes in the Region of Waterloo. The study focused on the effectiveness of the discount bus pass and discount ticket programs, which are supported by Grand River Transit and the Employment and Income Support Division of Social Services. Interviews were held with people living on low-incomes – including transit users and non-users – as well as representatives from agencies administering the programs and other key people in the community. Open-ended questions guided discussion with 68 patrons (46 in person, 6 by telephone, the remainder in three focus groups). Fifteen agency representatives answered a questionnaire through email and discussions were held with eleven individuals from participating agencies and the community. Interviews included people receiving Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program and other forms of assistance as well as people who were working.

The overwhelming majority of people appreciated the two programs, which help improve the affordability of public transit in the Region. Concern remains as to what extent they increased affordability and made positive contributions to individuals' lives and to the community. Themes that emerged from the study include:

- Discount tickets and discount bus passes are not accessible to all riders for whom the affordability of public transit is a concern because:
  - the availability of passes and tickets falls short of the number of people who are eligible;
  - eligibility criteria may exclude some people for whom affordability is a legitimate concern;
  - awareness of these programs and their eligibility criteria are sometimes lacking.

- Some patrons who receive discount passes or tickets felt that:
  - the monetary cost of a bus pass is still unaffordable;
  - other costs associated with transit are high, notably the challenges involved in using transit and in obtaining and using the discount bus passes and tickets.
- The extent to which discount bus passes are available to the 'working poor' remains a question.
- There is a strong link between quality of life and transit affordability, accessibility and service.

We make four general recommendations and, with them, include more specific recommendations.

#### 1) Increase support for the discount bus pass and discount ticket programs to further improve affordability and accessibility of public transit for people with low incomes.

Bus passes provide greater transit accessibility for patrons, so we **recommend a greater allocation of funds toward discount bus passes relative to discount tickets**. We also recommend that consideration be given to **targeting extra bus passes to specific users, notably the working poor**. In addition, we **recommend expanding eligibility for the discount to students, seniors and families**. This could include providing a further discount on the reduced bus passes and expanding the Sunday family pass to weekdays and/or to a monthly pass.

We recommend **exploring ways that the availability of discount tickets might become more predictable or regular**, and ways in which discount tickets could be **applied**

**toward more general use** – rather than for specific agency programs – to ease demand for discount bus passes. Building on partnerships between agencies and the Region could be considered as a means for facilitating expansion.

**2) Continue efforts to improve service, with particular attention to diversity and to the needs of people who rely heavily on public transit.**

Not surprisingly, suggestions included **more frequent, regular, and extensive service** throughout the week and on weekends and holidays. Patrons also suggested other service improvements and made suggestions regarding facilities, accessibility, and communications. **Extending the transfer time** may be of particular significance as a way to increase affordability. We also recommend continued efforts to encourage a culture of respect and sensitivity.

**3) Facilitate greater community involvement, specifically including low income patrons, in the design, planning and implementation of public transit and the discount programs.**

We **recommend presentation of this report within the communities involved in this study**, providing opportunities to discuss the recommendations that could inform and prioritize their implementation. We recommend that this dialogue involve representatives from Grand River Transit, the Social Services Department and/or Regional Council in order to **provide an opportunity for patrons to address decision makers directly**.

In addition, we **recommend formation of a community working group(s) comprised of people with low-incomes, people from social service agencies, and other informed and interested community members**, to help manage implementation of the suggestions and recommendations contained in this report. We also recommend

ongoing involvement of the low income community.

**4) Consider particular areas for further consultation and research, notably the needs of the working poor and strategic consideration of related programs.**

Given the smaller number of working people reached in this study, we **recommend consultation designed to concentrate only on effectiveness of these programs for the working poor**.

We suggest considering a strategic assessment of the agencies participating in the discount ticket and bus pass programs, questioning the effectiveness with which they address the needs and the target groups that are the objectives of the two programs.

We recommend research into innovative funding strategies and partnerships that might facilitate expansion of the discount bus pass and discount ticket programs.

Many patrons spoke of challenges regarding the affordability and accessibility of public transit and of their reliance on transit as their main means of transportation. Patrons also expressed their appreciation for the discount programs and GRT services. A more complete discussion of findings and recommendations, including further suggestions, are found in the report.

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# 1. introduction

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This study was undertaken to investigate the affordability of public transit in Waterloo Region. More specifically, it focuses on the effectiveness of the discount bus pass and discount ticket programs run by Grand River Transit and the Employment and Income Support Division of Social Services. Opinions and suggestions about the programs were gathered from persons with low incomes and from agencies administering the programs. The majority of persons interviewed were patrons of public transit, and also recipients of discount tickets or owners of a discount bus pass. Synthesis of our findings and development of recommendations were facilitated by discussions with key informants and the Steering Committee.

The discount bus pass and ticket programs were designed to make public transit more affordable for people with low incomes. Bus passes are made available at a discounted monthly price to people who have incomes that fall below a set point – the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO). Tickets are made available to various social agencies in the Region at a discount price (equivalent to the reduced ticket price). These agencies, in turn, provide them to people in need.

These programs are relatively innovative among transit programs for two reasons. One is that they target riders based on income rather than on age or student status, the other that both programs are implemented in cooperation with local non-government organizations and social assistance agencies.

The central finding of this study is that the discount bus pass and discount ticket programs do increase affordability

of public transit. Individuals who own a discount bus pass or find their transportation needs met by discount tickets are appreciative. However, there are caveats. First, while the programs assist those who obtain passes and tickets, need continues to outweigh availability. Second, although the discounts provide a savings, the costs involved in making use of the programs – monetary and otherwise – can be a burden. Third, significant issues with transit service for those we spoke with diminish or impinge on its affordability. Finally, we found strong ties between affordability, transit and quality of life. In summary, while each program provides for select needs for some patrons with incomes below the LICO neither program, nor their combination, is enough to make transit affordable for low income people in the Region.

As is so often the case, ‘the devil is in the details’ – reasons for the degree of success or lack of success, and ideas on how the programs might be improved, are to be found in particulars. We will describe those particulars and what has been learned through interviews with patrons and agencies in this report. We expect that many of the issues and challenges raised in this report will be familiar to many and that few will be surprised by our assertion that change and resolution of these issues present challenges.

## 1.1 report outline

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The findings of this study are discussed in several sections. The first section provides a short summary, briefly responding to the question of affordability and drawing attention to quality of life as a central issue. This is followed by two sections that focus on the discount bus pass program and the discount ticket program, respectively, and a third section that focuses on transit service. The last section presents suggestions for improvement from agency respondents and patrons as well as recommendations. The final section provides a short conclusion.

There are several appendices, which describe our methods

“we believe that without the support of Grand River Transit in supplying discounted bus tickets, our learners would be unable to attend classes regularly. Many of them are recipients of ODSP and have no other means of transportation. Without this program, they would be unable to attend classes at all.”

“I would rather have a bus pass than the fridge full of food for all the freedom it gives me.”

(Appendix 1), provide some background material (Appendix 2) and tabulate some responses that are not included in the text (Appendix 3 and 4).

We have attempted to present findings, impressions, background information, and other insights in a manner that personifies and illustrates their impacts and facilitates understanding of the interrelationships among them. We have decided to present recommendations throughout the findings, elaborating on them in the recommendations section, which also contains additional more comprehensive recommendations.

"The people we work with cannot drive, most do not have access to vehicles or drivers, and taxis are prohibitive. This means that they must walk or use transit. While walking can be a healthy activity, when shopping for groceries, coming home late at night or in inclement weather it can be difficult. Walking or riding a bike might even be unhealthy."

One patron spoke about working late-night shifts at a factory on the outskirts of Kitchener. With no buses in the evening or early morning he had a two hour walk. "It wasn't too bad in the summer, but got much worse in the winter. Unable to find alternative transportation, he just couldn't keep the job going."

## 1.2 study origins and formation

This study was requested and funded by Waterloo Regional Council. Concerns about transit affordability were raised with Council by the Friends of Public Transit (FPT) in the spring of 2004. This small community group was concerned about the impact of a proposed transit fare increase on low income persons and families in the Region. The Civics Research Co-operative (CRC) in collaboration with the FPT, Grand River Transit

(GRT), and the Employment and Income Support Division of the Regional Social Services Department, finalized this study with the following objectives and research process.

### 1.2.1 objectives

- Evaluation of, and potential innovations to regional programs aimed at lessening the impact of transit fares and fare increases on low income riders.
- Documentation and reporting of findings to the GRT, Regional Council, and program administrators. Reporting may include informal meetings or roundtables between project partners and community members.
- Engagement and participation of individuals who face economic and social challenges in Waterloo Region.

### 1.2.2 research process

Information on the effectiveness of the discount bus pass and discount ticket programs was gained through interviews with individuals whose incomes were near or below the LICO. We spoke with individuals who made use of discount tickets or owned a discount bus pass, as well as local agencies administering the programs. An attempt was made to speak with persons living throughout Waterloo Region and in places that were convenient and conducive to conversation. Interviews were arranged through contacts at St John's Kitchen, the Cambridge Self Help Food Bank, the Emergency Food Hamper Program, and Preston Heights and Chandler Mowat community centers. (See details in Appendix 1, which describes methods.) In addition to person-to-person conversations, there were three focus groups. We conducted a few telephone interviews, but chose to focus on in-person interviews, which we found more informative. Representatives from agencies providing discount tickets or bus passes were surveyed through email. Conversations with key informants occurred throughout the study. In total, we spoke with 79 people (Table 1), and received emails from fifteen agencies.

Decisions regarding the study and its direction were reviewed and overseen by a steering committee. Our method and approach was informed by conversations with key informants and the steering committee. The research was carried out by



associates of the Civics Research Co-operative, notably Eric Tucs, Cynthia Franklin, and Beth Dempster.

Interviewees covered a diversity of ages, and lived in Kitchener, Cambridge or Waterloo. None lived in the outlying areas of the Region (Figure 1). Many had made use of discount tickets or a bus pass, and the overwhelming majority relied upon public transit to move around the Region. Table 2 lists the income sources of interviewees. The majority of persons interviewed received some form of social assistance, few were underemployed or working in low-paying jobs (see Appendix 1).

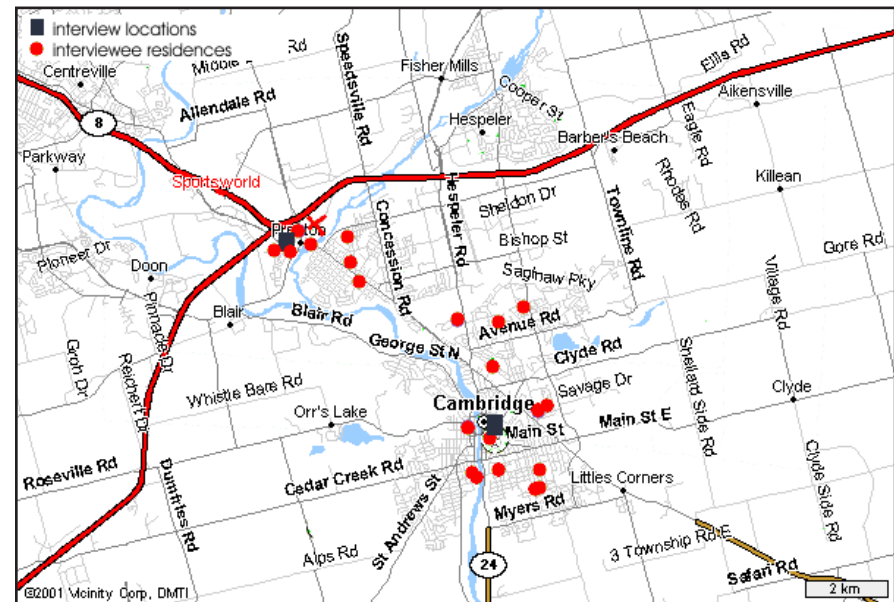
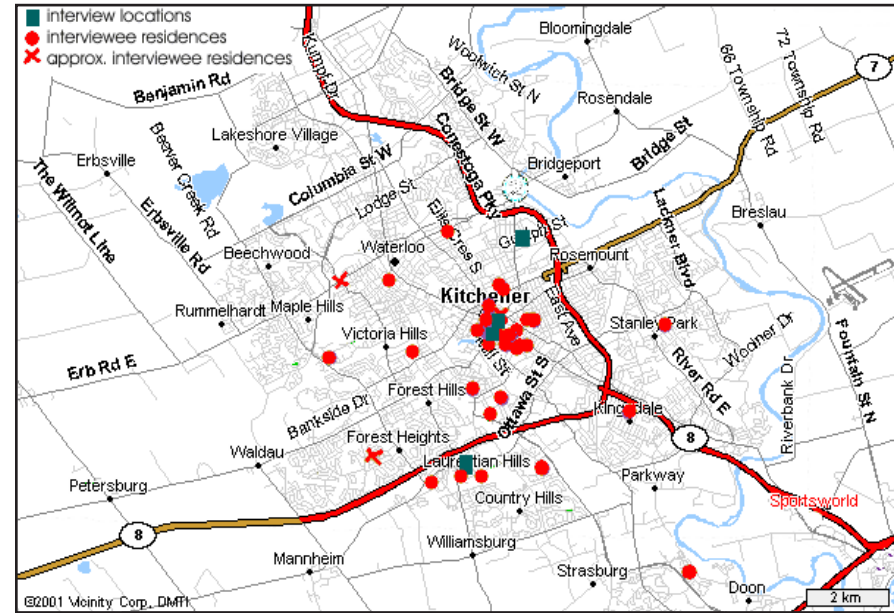
**Table 1: Study Information Sources**

Patrons (total interviews)		52
Face-to-face interviews	46	
Telephone interviews	6	
Patrons (3 focus groups)		16
<b>Patrons total</b>		<b>68</b>
<b>Key informants</b> (face-to-face interviews)		<b>11</b>
<b>Agency representatives</b> (email questionnaires)		<b>15</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>79</b>

**Table 2: Interviewee Sources of Income**

Canada Pension (4 with other supplements)	6
Ontario Works (4 with other supplements)	14
Ontario Disability Support Program (1 with other supplements)	10
Social Assistance (unspecified)	5
Employment Insurance	1
Work	9
Did not answer	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>

**Figure 1: Interviewee residential locations and interview locations**



Interviews were guided by a set of open-ended questions that were focused around affordability, the discount programs, and public transit. Questions gave individuals an opportunity to bring forward the challenges and issues they felt were most important. To help highlight meaning and significance, we have included tables that tally responses to questions of central importance. In such cases, focus group responses are listed separately because the interactive nature of these groups precluded identification of individual responses. Tables that list responses reflect shared and individual interests and concerns.

Not all responses were tallied or tabulated. Those that we felt important are discussed in the text to further enrich understanding of patrons' interests regarding these programs and public transit. Of note here are comments from key informants – which frequently deepened our understanding of conversations with patrons, and offered critical insight. For example, where a patron offhandedly said 'Sure, I guess the pass is affordable', a key informant emphasized that 'affording' a bus pass for this particular person meant that they would be relying on emergency food hampers to get them through the month. In addition, key informants and agency representatives – given their responsibilities and roles in various organizations or groups – understood the issues and challenges relevant to this study in ways others did not. Such insight added to our understanding of the complexity and nature of 'affordability'. Other responses that cannot be tallied – especially stories and quotations from participants – are presented throughout the report in text boxes. We have altered names and places to preserve anonymity.

### 1.3 acknowledgements

We acknowledge and appreciate the willing participation of the many people we interviewed as well as those who assisted in the design, development and implementation of this study. This includes several people, such as members of the Steering Committee, Wendy Halley, and individuals from St. John's Kitchen, the Cambridge Self Help Food Bank, the House of Friendship's Emergency Food Hamper Program, the Working

Centre, Lutherwood, the Downtown Community Health Centre, Preston Heights Community Centre, and Chandler-Mowat Community Centre. Their assistance has been invaluable.

We also acknowledge the efforts of the Friends of Public Transit, the support from Grand River Transit and the Employment and Income Support Division of Social Services.

We appreciate and acknowledge the support and the funding provided by Regional Council.

Finally – and perhaps most importantly – we acknowledge the contributions made by individuals and agencies over the years, which led to these programs, as well as the support that has enabled their continuation.

#### **Transit Affordability Study Steering Committee**

- John Cicuttin, Transit Development Manager, Grand River Transit
- David Dirks, Director of Employment and Income Support Division, Region of Waterloo
- Stephanie Mancini, Friends of Public Transit, The Working Center
- Mary Ann Wasilka, Friends of Public Transit, Resident
- Sandy Roberts, Marketing and Communications Manager, Grand River Transit
- Gethyn Beniston, Grand River Transit
- Eric Tuca, Civics Research Co-operative
- Cynthia Franklin, Civics Research Co-operative

**The Civics Research Co-operative** is a not-for-profit co-operative concerned about issues of equity and sustainability. Our interests include increasing public participation in civic affairs, assisting in the expression of multiple voices as a way to decrease marginalization, and bringing disparate groups together in ways that may allow them to speak, to listen, and to work together. To find out more about the co-operative, please visit [www.civics.ca](http://www.civics.ca).

## 2. affordability and quality of life

The question that underlies this study is whether or not the discount bus pass and discount ticket programs improve affordability of public transit in the region for people with low-incomes.

"Low income riders continue to face the difficulties of making ends meet and food comes before transit, so women and children end up isolated at home, frustrated and unable to move forward in life. If discounted bus tickets are discontinued or limited, it will adversely affect the families."

We begin by summarizing key points that arose as responses to this question. In addition, Table 3 tallies the responses of patrons and agencies to this question and Table 4 to the question of program effectiveness. The latter is interpreted as a general consideration of whether the programs are improving affordability and accessibility of transit for low-income people in the Region.

- 1) Questions about transit affordability lead to issues surrounding quality of life. Affordable transportation not only provides access to essential services but also improves a persons capacity for developing and maintaining health and well-being through access to amenities and community.
- 2) The discount programs do increase the affordability of public transit, however they do not make transit affordable – there are many people in the Region, for whom transit is still unaffordable because:
  - there are not enough discount passes and tickets to meet the need;
  - costs – which include factors such as time and effort – are still too high for some people despite the discounts; and
  - some people still appear to be living in poverty, although their incomes are above LICO, making them ineligible for discounts.
- 3) Transit affordability is inextricably linked to transit service: unless transit routes and schedules reflect the needs of patrons, discounts are moot.

**Table 3: Affordability**

**a: Is the discount bus pass affordable?  
– patron responses**

not affordable	15
not affordable because of needs	6
affordable	3
subsidized* but affordability remains an issue	3
subsidized* and affordable	7
interview focused on other issues	16
<b>total responses</b>	<b>50</b>

**b: Do the discount programs make transit affordable? – agency responses**

yes, unqualified	0
yes, to some degree	3
not especially so (total)	7
still difficult to afford	4
depends on agency resources*	3
other reasons	5
no	1
<b>total responses</b>	<b>11</b>

**c: Affordability – key informant responses**

Discussions with key informants covered a range of issues. Those who specifically commented on affordability, emphatically referred to the *unaffordability* of the bus pass even with a discount. In addition, they spoke about the *unaffordability* of living, in general, for people with incomes close to, or below, the Low Income Cut-Off.

\* People on OW or ODSP can receive transit subsidies in return for volunteer work.

\* Not affordable because agency cannot afford to purchase tickets, which are then passed out for free.

\* Responses here and elsewhere are synthesized from answers to several questions. The sum is not necessarily equal to the number of respondents because questions focused on issues most pressing to patrons.

There were few identical or unanimous replies to our questions: For some patrons, the discount programs and schedules met needs and suited capabilities well. For others, the programs and schedules were something of a stressor. The difference between these assessments appears to reflect contingencies and circumstances. One comment was very nearly unanimous among patrons, agencies and key informants: an appreciation for the efforts of the Region in providing discounted transit service.

## 2.1 income levels

The discount bus pass and discount ticket programs were designed to increase the affordability of public transit for those with low-incomes – defined here as incomes below the “Low Income Cut Off” (Commentary 1, Table 6). Individuals with a low income might include those who are underemployed or in low-paying jobs, those receiving an income through Ontario Works (OW) or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), or those receiving an income through the Canada Pension Plan, or Employment Insurance.

One of our first questions to patrons was whether or not their household income fell below the Low-Income Cut Off. The vast majority said it did (Table 5). Some patrons identified themselves as *well* below the LICO, a few were uncertain or preferred not to disclose their income level. We did not delve into their financial situations or budgets in detail, but many patrons considered their income inadequate to cover living expenses.

Agency respondents and key informants – also not specifically asked about patron budgets – commented on the financial difficulties faced by people living on low incomes. Some noted increasing difficulties: The standard of living has “decreased significantly in the last ten years” making transit “less and less affordable.” Others drew attention to increasing use of food banks. The Food Bank of Waterloo Region notes that:

*while the number of different people served (23,500) remained relatively unchanged in 2003 compared to the year previous, the total number*

**Table 4: Effectiveness**

**a: Are the programs effective?  
– patron responses**

yes, without qualification	7
yes, but concerned about affordability, service, awareness, availability, ease, and abuse.	43
ineligible to respond	2
<b>total responses</b>	<b>52</b>

**b: Are the programs effective?  
– agency responses**

programs are helpful	15
programs could be improved (total)	13
limited availability	8
limited eligibility	9
limited service	4

**Table 5: Interviewee Incomes and Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO)**

below LICO	42
above LICO	1*
Uncertain or declined to answer	9
	52

\* This individual, who was well above LICO and consequently ineligible for the discounts, was excluded from tallies on other questions.

She looks after him because he's on disability – but the government allowance she receives as a care giver (instead of hiring a nurse) is below the poverty line. Making ends meet is difficult. “How can people be treated this way?”

**Commentary 1: LICO, low incomes and measuring poverty**

Two considerations regarding the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) are relevant to this study. First, as mentioned by Statistics Canada, the LICO is not a de facto descriptor of poverty nor perhaps is it even a delimiter: there are many considerations at play. Since it started publishing LICOs, Statistics Canada has clearly stated that the numbers do not provide a rule for measuring poverty; at most, they were meant to show to what extent some Canadians are less well-off than others.

Having an income above LICO does not suggest that you can obtain the “necessities” of life, including food, clothing, shelter and a multitude of other purchases from transportation to books. What we have heard from patrons and others, however, suggests that having an income at or below LICO means that the necessities of life are being compromised – often in significant ways.

Second, *Opportunities Waterloo Region*, a local poverty reduction group, has developed an estimate of the income necessary to live comfortably in Waterloo Region. Comparison of this income with LICO shows a difference (Table 7). Additionally, in the same table, compares these with the median income in Waterloo Region and earnings from jobs at minimum wage. Together they indicate that the challenge of making ends meet is not only a concern of people receiving government subsidies or pensions.

Low-income lines have been used as a de facto definition of poverty because of the inherent difficulties in knowing what poverty is and how it might be assessed, yet a need for clear evaluative criteria for establishing eligibility for programs such as the ones discussed here. Those at Stats Canada suggest that we do so with tremendous caution.

➔ These comments suggest that using the LICO as the main criteria for delimiting eligibility, should be investigated and re-considered (§ 6.2.2, G2).

(Information from Statistics Canada, based on Ivan P. Fellegi, Chief Statistician of Canada)

**Table 6: Low Income Cut Off Waterloo Region, (Gross, 2001)\***

Family Size	Monthly Income	Annual Income
1 person	\$1244	\$14,694
2 person	\$1555	\$18,367
3 person	\$1934	\$22,844
4 person	\$2342	\$27,650
5 person	\$2617	\$30,910
6 person	\$2893	\$34,168

\* Table is from the discount bus pass application form, data is from Statistics Canada.

“I get paid a little more than minimum wage, and it’s really hard on that amount to provide for my two kids. I really want to work and set a good example for my children, but every year it seems to be more and more difficult with the same little amount of money and bigger bills. I can’t see it getting any better, so maybe I’ll have to go back on assistance.”

Single mother of two in Waterloo Region (waterlooregion.org)

**Table 7: Comparison of LICO, moderate cost of living and select earnings for a four person household**

Costs and earnings for a four-person household (two adults, two children under 12)	monthly	annually
<b>Cost of living, moderate lifestyle (net income)*</b>	<b>2589.60</b>	<b>31 075</b>
<b>LICO (gross income, 2001)</b>	<b>2342.00</b>	<b>27 650</b>
One parent earning a wage at the median for Waterloo Region (Statistics Canada, Community Profiles).	2159.75	25 917
Two parents, both working full time at minimum wage.	2480.00	29 760
Two parents, one working full-time and the other half-time, both at minimum wage.	1860.00	22 320
One parent receiving Ontario Works	1178.00	14 136

\*The cost of living includes items considered necessary for a moderate lifestyle such as food, shelter, transportation, basic phone and cable, a basic savings account, as well as some funds for recreation. It does not include child care costs, or non-insured health expenses such as dental, vision, prescription drugs, and disability aids (Opportunities Waterloo Region).

*of hampers and number of times that individuals and families required food hampers increased. As well among those accessing food hamper programs, the number of individuals claiming full-time and part-time employment as their primary source of income rose, as did the number of single parent and two-parent families. These increases may be the result of a significant decline (-7%) in the number of hamper recipients claiming Ontario Works (welfare) as their primary source of income (Food Bank of Waterloo Region, Annual Report 2003-2004).*

## 2.2 budgeting, trade offs

Indications of the non-affordability of public transit included budgetary constraints where patrons spoke of applying their resources carefully to make ends meet. There was continual reference to trade-offs: choosing between one need and another. In the interviews, we heard of detailed planning over expenditures, and on complex decisions about whether to direct resources toward food or clothing or transportation;

"\$35 would help, but transit is still not really affordable. Things are tight, very tight. With my son going to the YMCA summer day camp, I couldn't come up with \$2.25 as well as his fare, but I don't like him going alone (he's 13)... Sometimes it means giving stuff up..."

As noted on the first page, another patron considered the trade-off between food and the freedom offered by unlimited transit with a bus pass straightforward.

wondering if a trip was essential, how long the walk might be; and the continual urge to reconsider plans. The costs incurred for taking a trip were measured in dollar amounts, but also in terms of how else to achieve similar ends – and its comparative cost.

Affordability or non-affordability also encompasses the ease with which provisions or services are acquired. We heard about the need to provide justifications and expla-

nations; of having to explain personal circumstances repeatedly in order to receive support; of justifying requests for a discount ticket in every case, or the monthly check for eligibility on bus passes at bus terminals. For some patrons this was a difficult and demeaning process. However, the majority did not raise this as a concern, which speaks positively of the process and people involved in their administration and distribution.

→ Currently, the bus pass application process is designed to be simple and respectful; to minimize the need for 'proving' one's poverty. Given responses, it seems this approach should be maintained (§ 6.3.6, P7).

## 2.3 getting about

Finally, there is the question of transportation itself – also an aspect of affordability. The vast majority of interviewees indicated that public transit was their primary – if not only – means of transportation (Table 8, a and b), especially during the winter months. This is a stark contrast to average patterns of use in the Region (Commentary 2). Public transit was used for all needs, from grocery shopping and medical appointments to recreational outings, visiting family or friends, getting children to daytime activities, and volunteering. Secondary means of getting around included walking and cycling and, in rare circumstances, access to a friend's, partner's, co-worker's or family member's car. Walking and cycling – which is not necessarily a healthy activity for some – sometimes involved long distances through inclement weather, in spite of the possible risks and difficulties involved. The car – given its expense and inaccessibility – was used in cases where the bus offered little benefit, such as on weekends or non peak hours and in minimally serviced areas of the region.

"I use the bus for everything, to get wherever I'm going."

"Our clients already face enough challenges in their lives, and anything which makes life a little easier is welcomed."

**Table 8: importance of transit – patron and agency responses**

**a: importance of transit – patron responses**

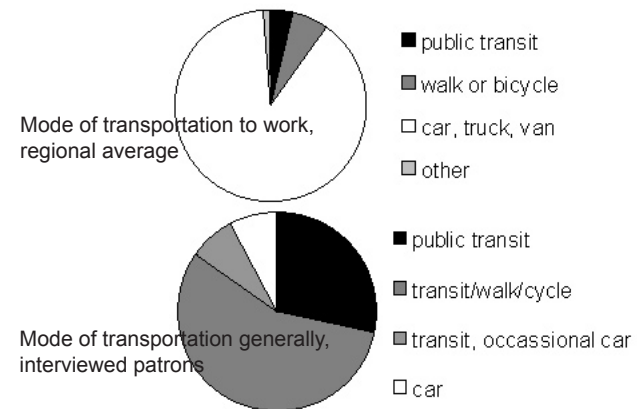
rely heavily on public transit to get around		41
occasional use of public transit		3
do not use public transit (total)		4
concerned about service and patron unruliness	walk 2	
	2	
no comment		4
Focus groups talked about transit as important. Many of the participants relied on public transit to meet all of their needs.		

**b: importance of transit – agency responses**

vital, essential	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our clients cannot drive, do not have access to vehicles or drivers, and taxi costs are prohibitive, so they rely almost exclusively on public transit. The only other option available is to walk.</li> <li>The only transportation available to them are the free transit tickets that we provide.</li> <li>Public transit is a vital service for low income individuals. The transit system is their only means of getting around the Region – including doctors appointments, grocery shopping, visiting friends, participating in community activities, making use of available community services, job searching, getting to work, etc.</li> </ul>
very important	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attending school, gaining skills to find or keep employment, AND participating more independently and fully in their communities would not be possible for many students without the transportation subsidy</li> <li>Quality of life and opportunities are created when you address transportation barriers.</li> <li>It means that they do not have to work on the streets to get the money to go to the doctor's office.</li> </ul>
important	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helps people get to the places they need to go, such as school, medical facilities, employment, look for housing, to attend to personal tasks.</li> </ul>
no response	3	

**Commentary 2: Patterns of transportation use in the Region of Waterloo**

Cars remain the predominant mode of transportation among people in the Region of Waterloo. This leads to social expectations and land-uses that rely on such transportation. In contrast, the predominant mode of transportation among people interviewed for this study was public transit. While some people were pre-selected for their interest in transit (because they had a discount bus pass or could speak to public transit) others were selected because they would be eligible for the discounts but did not use them. Predominant alternatives were walking and cycling – and very occasionally, a car – typically one owned by a friend, family member, or co-worker. Many of the challenges that patrons described arise because of their reliance on public transit for moving about the region. Shopping for groceries, taking children to extra-curricular activities, going to a movie, getting to a late-night shift are challenging when the urban landscape demands modes of transportation that are beyond the reach of individuals. Many of the challenges facing anyone developing public transportation systems are the inherited land use patterns and regional policies that are reinforced by contemporary culture.



Agency respondents also noted the importance of transit – not only as a way to get about, but as a contributor to quality of life. Many agency respondents pointed to the vital importance of being able to access services and amenities for well-being. For those relying upon public transit, affordability entails not only its dollar cost, but the costs involved in obtaining a discount bus pass or ticket, and how well transit services addresses their needs and aspirations.

“Getting to Scouts depends upon getting a ride because the bus gets there too late - especially if we want to have supper first. In winter, we need a ride home.”

“I use bus ten times more when have a pass instead of tickets. I’ll go on bus for something to do. It gives a sense of freedom.”

**Commentary 3: Affordability, Service, Quality of Life**

The link between affordability and service will be familiar to anyone who has considered transportation planning issues. There is, we think, a constant play between two factors: 1) asking users to make use of, and pay for, services to sustain the system, and 2) providing, and paying for, services that encourage use and support riders. Evaluating the costs and benefits is an much as issue for the riders as it is for the GRT. That roughly half of the costs of operating GRT are recovered from fares indicates that the Region accepts the importance of maintaining public transit as a public good.

What is noteworthy to us, is the link between affordability/service and quality of life. Being able to move *where* you want to, *how* you want to, *when* you want to contributes positively to well-being. For those people in the Region who are reliant upon public transit – and who are already stressed by their circumstances – these abilities are restricted by the affordability, accessibility and flexibility of public transit, with subsequent impacts on their quality of life. The strength of these linkages was clearly indicated through interviews and responses.

**2.4 summary**

In summary, there were four key points raised by interviewees. The first three are, perhaps, least surprising: incomes are low and budgets are tight; affordability involves much more than dollar amounts; and these discount programs and transit are important. The fourth point was made specifically by agency respondents and key informants and can be inferred from patron responses: the discount programs and the affordability, accessibility and usability of public transit have a tremendous impact upon quality of life (Commentary 3). The benefits from improved transit affordability and accessibility extend far beyond being able to get from one place to another. Increased mobility – especially through the convenience of obtaining and using a bus pass – provides greater opportunity for attending to basic needs ranging from medical appointments and grocery shopping, to involvement in the community.

- ➔ Recognize the importance of transit as the primary means of transportation and, effectively, an essential service (§ 6.1, R2).
- ➔ Recognize the interconnections among transit affordability, transit service and quality of life (§ 6.1).



### 3. discount bus passes

#### 3.1 appreciation

The majority of patrons and agencies stressed an appreciation for the discount bus passes – and a much stronger preference for bus passes over tickets. Passes had fewer procedural trap-pings and allowed riders unlimited access to transportation. This freed people from constantly calculating the expense and affordability of each and every trip. As one patron said bus passes can “take a load off the mind.”

There was reference to particular concerns – among them, affordability, limited availability, awareness of the program and its eligibility requirements, and challenges involved in obtaining them (Table 9, a, b). One of us found that appreciation seemed especially emphasized in Cambridge, perhaps in part due to a rumour that the program was going to be discontinued.

A brief discussion of interests, concerns and issues regarding the bus pass follow.

#### 3.2 costs

Not surprisingly, patrons were very appreciative of the \$21 (previously \$20) discount for a bus pass, with some pointing to the difference that a \$20 savings makes to anyone living on a limited budget. As emphasized by one agency respondent, “the \$20.00/month they save ... is making a tremendous difference to their standard of living. \$240.00 a year extra might not be much to some people, but it makes a big difference to them.”

Those with low paying jobs considered carefully whether or not they could afford the pass – which was often an issue around whether or not public transit addressed their needs, rather than just around the monetary cost of a discount pass.

As indicated in Table 1 (above),

“It does make a big difference, \$20 is enough for groceries in a week - but \$35 is still a lot of money.”

many patrons felt that the pass, at \$34, was still a stress on their budgets, or remained unaffordable. Agencies also pointed to individuals for whom the cost of the pass – even with the discount – was beyond their means. Again, trade-offs or compromises – if not sacrifices – were raised. For example, one patron was confronted with having to decide between a bus pass or recreational activities for their children. Others pointed to the costs of public transit for families, rather than individuals, as the overriding factor in determining the affordability of transit. Finally, foregoing a discount bus pass never meant making use of a more appealing alternative – but a very careful assessment of what was possible with fewer dollars – typically involving longer walks and greater exertion. (The costs of service and procedural issues are covered in later sections.)

There were also a number of patrons who could afford the discount bus pass because of subsidies for transportation received through other programs, rather than the discount program alone. Individuals on OW or ODSP can work a number of volunteer hours (20 and 2 hours, respectively) and receive a \$55 subsidy (previously \$54). Some, on occasion, applied these funds to regular tickets or the discount pass. Others in the community raised claims of unfairness in two regards. One was the varying amount of volunteer hours required to qualify for a discount pass – given that different people had different capacities and opportunities for volunteering. The other was not playing by the rules: People obtained a subsidy and then purchased a discount pass, regular tickets, or discount tickets.

“I’ve never been to Rim Park...”

“Having a pass does relieve pressure.”

“They shouldn’t be surprised that folk look for the \$20 to make ends meet.”

**Table 9: Comments on bus pass program, patron and agency responses**

(Numbers tally the number of respondents who raised each interest as key. Since some raised more than one interest, totals exceed the number of respondents.)

**a: patron comments on the bus pass program**

appreciation for the bus pass		
	most	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Without the pass getting around is a real stress. Its security. I feel much better with it there.</li> <li>Yes, they help a lot - especially the pass.</li> <li>Awesome, the pass makes a big difference.</li> </ul>
concerns regarding the bus pass		
affordability is still a challenge	23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The pass is too expensive.</li> <li>Its just not affordable. With three kids, its really expensive to travel.</li> <li>There's not enough money left for a pass after stuff like rent and food. \$20-25 would be better.</li> <li>\$54 on OW too high, \$34 is better but... I get most of the things I need, by walking.</li> </ul>
lack of awareness	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I learned about the discount bus pass program by accident.</li> <li>Never heard of the discount pass.</li> <li>Don't know what I can use.</li> </ul>
lack of availability	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tried to get a bus pass a couple of months ago. Was put on the waiting list and haven't heard anything. I figure the waiting list is so long, there's not much sense in checking back.</li> <li>Had to wait on a waiting list for 6 months.</li> </ul>
procedures can be challenging	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The process is not fun.</li> <li>I'm not sure about going to get a discount pass. Having to prove that you're below the low income cut off is demeaning. People look at you differently once they know.</li> </ul>
accessibility can be challenging	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The bus terminal is the only place to get a monthly pass, usually there is a huge line up.</li> </ul>
misuse	1	
no concerns expressed	10	

**b: agency comments on the bus pass program**

program is helpful (at least in some ways)		
general comment	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Passes are very helpful to our low income clients.</li> <li>Quality of life and opportunities are created when you address transportation barriers; it creates freedom, independence.</li> <li>People only have to budget for this expense once a month.</li> </ul>
makes transit more affordable	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The reduced fare bus pass program is very useful for the people who qualify. It reduces the costs to make it reasonable for many people to be able to afford taking the bus.</li> </ul>
improves freedom and mobility	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bus passes are useful for individuals to go independently to appointments, look for housing, attend to other tasks.</li> <li>Transit can improve the quality of life for many people. It provides access to many resources in the community.</li> </ul>
program is not particularly helpful		
general comment	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does it have a substantial and positive impact? Not in our experience.</li> <li>Bus passes are restrictive in that it is only for a BUS PASS when availability of tickets could be more cost effective</li> </ul>
still unaffordable	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I could also see how it would not accommodate the working poor, if their income exceeds the means testing.</li> <li>It is often difficult to come up with the \$32. Many months even those who qualify for the sticker cannot afford a pass.</li> </ul>
unavailable	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The program is tapped and new people are not able to access the program who would indeed qualify</li> <li>Program is not readily available. Once you don't have a pass it can take a very long time to again come off the waiting list to get it again.</li> <li>The program, from my understanding is not able to accommodate any new applicants</li> </ul>
type of pass	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It would be good if we could buy ½ month bus pass for people who start programs in the middle of the month</li> <li>Families with children over the age that they ride for free still must pay for their children at the student rate.</li> </ul>
service constraints	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Routes do not always provide service to the particular areas and at the particular times needed for either work shifts or children's activities.</li> </ul>

Agency representatives and key informants, especially those working with homeless people, noted that such practices need to be recognized within the context of poverty. People are dealing with difficult and hard tradeoffs, and any source of income is spread thinly among various needs (Commentary 4). As one patron stated, the solution might be to raise welfare rates, minimum wage, and adjust LICO baselines.

- While there may be a temptation to suggest more detailed screening, such a suggestion should be balanced against the comments on stigmatization (§ 6.3.6, P8).
- Improving awareness of the discount programs and other programs, and their various eligibilities may be helpful (§ 6.2.4, G6).

### 3.3 availability and eligibility

#### 3.3.1 number

Patrons and agencies alike noted the “huge” waiting lists for bus passes. The Working Centre has a waiting list of over 300 people and “[the number of] stickers allocated to Cambridge residents was depleted quite early on...” Some patrons mentioned that they had not even bothered registering because of the size of the waiting list. Other individuals we spoke with were uncertain over their eligibility for discount passes, in spite of their income levels. These comments indicate that the ‘waiting list’ likely surpasses the recorded numbers.

Many identified the small number of passes available as the biggest concern with the program. Some drew attention to the Cambridge area – in other words, that Kitchener received a bigger allotment of passes than Cambridge. Perceptions will not necessarily account for proportional differences in population.

- The most straightforward response to these concerns is to make more passes available (§ 6.3.2, P1).

Discount passes are obtained through applications, which are considered once a year, followed by distribution of a sticker to those who qualify. Given that demand outstrips supply, patrons were concerned about relinquishing their sticker – due

#### Commentary 4: acquiring the necessities of life?

Several patrons mentioned that they received a bus-pass subsidy by volunteering and then purchasing a discount bus pass, discount tickets, or regular tickets.

To us, as to the majority of key informants we spoke to, this practice is an indicator that the discount passes are not affordable, and that patron incomes are inadequate.

As both agency representatives and patrons said, \$20 is a considerable amount of money. The income gained by applying the \$55 went to meeting other needs – and we had no reason to suspect poor judgment. Those who can get one, buy a discount pass, those who can make other transit arrangements or do with less, purchase transit tickets, others apply the funds to greater needs.

We would be disappointed if this particular finding ended up limiting resources to this community.

“Some patrons take the \$55 and put it to other means because their income is so low.”

to the real risk that they would not get it back because the need is relatively high. It is possible that shorter term passes would help distribute this resource more effectively. For example, most patrons we spoke to use the bus more often in the winter than the summer. Key informants mentioned seasonal passes and half-month passes.

- Possible variations on the current system that introduce a greater number of fare types may be worth consideration (§ 6.3.6, P9).

The lack of availability has created a situation whereby individuals who have a need for the discount pass are not able to obtain one. Among these are the working poor – one of the groups for which the discount bus pass was intentionally designed. Since many people on social assistance are also below the low-income cut-off – perhaps well below those with low paying jobs – they are also unable to afford a regularly priced

pass. Once again, passes are limited, and focusing upon one group as opposed to another may increase “representation”, but does not meet community need. With people from these two different groups in need of the pass – and with limited resources – the program does not effectively meet the real needs of either community.

- Making more passes available would assist with this concern; however, considering particular allocations for different purposes may also be helpful. For example, having specified number of passes allocated to working poor and people on social assistance – perhaps according to percentages in Regional demographics or some other measure considered appropriate (§ 6.3.2, P3).
- More in-depth research on low income use/need is warranted in order to understand issues, concerns and possibilities (§ 6.3.4, P5).

“The first two weeks of work is very difficult because you cannot take advantage of the programs but you haven’t been paid yet.”

### 3.3.2 eligibility

Eligibility criteria arose in several ways during our interviews. Some patrons were uncertain of their eligibility for a discount bus pass. In other cases, eligibility requirements for the pass seemed unrealistic given individuals’ situations or circumstances, leading to gaps in the program. For example, one agency representative expressed disappointed that newcomers, such as people enrolled in ESL programs were not eligible for discount bus passes. In another case, patrons commented on the cost of trips with partners and families: While a bus pass increased the affordability of trips for the individual who had it, the cost of trips for the whole family remained prohibitive. Agency respondents, key informants and patrons suggested that different types of discount passes would be beneficial. Those noted as possibilities included passes for students, seniors, or households.

- Explore possibilities for making a range of passes available for particular target groups. Enlisting (further) management support from local social assistance organi-

zations may facilitate development and implementation of such variety (§ 6.3.3, P4).

Another concern that was identified by key informants and agency respondents – and confirmed by comments from many patrons – is that LICO is well below a livable income (See Commentary 1, above.)

- Consider raising the level of income above LICO, perhaps adopting criteria from local agencies (§ 6.2.2, G2).

### 3.3.3 location

In terms of both stickers and passes, patrons and agency representatives noted difficulties with the locations at which these were available. Two issues were identified: that stickers are only available at Lutherwood and the Working Center and that monthly passes are only available at the bus terminals. Regarding the latter, concerns pointed to the need to travel to these locations, as well as the line-ups once there.

- Consider other locations at which stickers and passes could be made available – ones that hold the trust of patrons and the Region (§ 6.3.5, P6).

## 3.4 awareness and communication

Confusion over the number of options regarding discount and reduced passes, uncertainty or confusion over eligibility, and a general lack of awareness about these programs came up several times in conversation with patrons and agencies.

In particular, some agencies and transit users had not heard of the discount bus pass program. Patrons often noted that they learned of the programs by word of mouth and from unexpected sources. One agency respondent politely noted that they “have not heard of the program, but would like to.” Patrons were in some cases uncertain of eligibility in spite of incomes that were

“I didn’t know there was a discount bus pass.”

“Many people learn about the program through word of mouth – which means whether or not they get one depends on having a circle of friends that are in the know.”

well below the LICO. Others were making use of opportunities to use reduced passes through educational programs, or because they were seniors. There was a lack of clarity as to whether or not these people – still with low incomes – were eligible for the discount passes. This lack of awareness and understanding extends to the variety of programs that exist, including the Regional programs offered by GRT/SSD as well as other programs and subsidies that may be available.

- Recognizing that full awareness of all the programs may not be desirable in order to ensure their use for particular patrons, improved communication about the programs and subsidies that are available could be beneficial (§ 6.2.3, G3).

### 3.5 stigmatization

Patrons spoke both appreciatively, and on occasion of feeling uncomfortable or uneasy when applying for or using the discount pass. Some patrons spoke of the whole process of obtaining a bus pass as demeaning – although this is less of a concern regarding a bus pass than with bus tickets, primarily because the process of obtaining a pass happens less frequently. Most made no mention of distress around the bus pass program in any of its facets, and appreciated that the monthly discount passes looked almost identical to the passes of other patrons. However, some felt that having the sticker on the back of the GRT ID card means that they are identified as low-income persons, and are subsequently open to differential treatment.

- Continued attention to ways in which stigmatizing people can be reduced is beneficial. Altering the location of the sticker on the ID card could be considered, however alternatives may be more problematic (§ 6.3.6, P8).

We emphasize that there were very few comments regarding the demeaning nature of this process – which we take as a positive comment on the workers charged with this task.

One patron, who did not have a discount bus pass, said that he hesitates going to get one because he will have to talk about his income and admit that he is below the low income cut off. He finds the idea of this process very “demeaning.” “People look at you differently once they know.”

- The current application process, which attempts to be as simple and respectful as possible, should be continued. While there may be some consideration of ways in which to increase scrutiny in verification process, this should be done with care and consideration (§ 6.3.6, P7).

### 3.6 program goals

The questionnaire asked agency representatives to state what they thought the goals of the discount bus program were and should be. Some respondents described goals related specifically to providing transit for people with low incomes. Many more respondents, however, saw the program as responding to much broader goals (Appendix 4). Typically, attention was drawn to the essential role transit plays in getting people to where they need to be – resulting in multiple benefits as a consequence of increased transit accessibility. Respondents noted that passes improve access to necessary services, but they also increase self-reliance and capacities for participating in school, employment, recreational and social activities, and community activities. These, in turn, benefit emotional, social, and physical well-being.

- Recognize transit as an essential service, providing broad benefits and the subsequent value of bus passes for providing for this need due to the flexibility and freedom they offer (§ 6.3.2, P2).

## 4. discount tickets

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As with the bus pass program, patrons and agencies appreciated the discount ticket program. To us it seemed there were considerably more reservations expressed than were expressed for the bus pass program (Table 10, a, b).

### 4.1 agencies distributing tickets

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Currently thirty-one agencies purchase tickets for a discount, distributing them to low income persons for different needs. Agencies include not-for-profit and community groups as well as government or quasi-government institutions. Their services can be generalized into five categories:

- *emergency services* such as emergency food distribution or shelter;
- *disability support services* such as for people with mental handicaps;
- *education programs*, including adult education;
- *capacity building programs*, including programs that facilitate improvements in health and well being, as well as job-search, and personal and family counselling; and
- *multiple objectives*, including combinations of the above.

Appendix 3 categorizes the agencies that responded to the questionnaire and lists their criteria for distributing tickets. Many spoke frequently of the limitations they face due to small budgets, which must cover a range of concerns and services.

### 4.2 cost

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Both patrons and agencies pointed out that the discount ticket program helps to stretch a small budget. For agencies, this meant being able to provide assistance to more people – a response that arose several times (Table 10b). Respondents noted situations in which people would not be able to attend programs without free transit tickets – and also pointed to the benefits patrons gain by attending these programs. Many agency respondents also noted, however, that their budgets can be very tight and their capacity to assist is far out-weighted

by the need for assistance.

For patrons, the *financial* cost of tickets was not raised as an issue since, in most cases, tickets are provided to patrons for free. (There is at least one agency that re-sells tickets at the discount price to people who would qualify for a free ticket, but who can ‘afford’ to pay the discounted price.) The cost of tickets, however, is expressed in other ways. Patrons noted that there are uncertainties about where and when they might be able to get tickets, that they are restricted to particular uses, and are often in short supply. Some also talked of the negative impact that asking for individual tickets and having to explain their intentions and needs in every instance gave rise to. All of these costs hinder the affordability of tickets – even if the ‘price is right’.

- ➔ Some exploration into ways of making ticket distribution more predictable or regular might alleviate some patron concerns (§ 6.4.2, T2).
- ➔ Recognizing the diversity of costs involved, points again, to quality of life concerns (§ 6.1).

The foregoing factors also point to reasons why people prefer discount passes. Some agencies noted, however, that passes are not necessarily required or cost-effective in some circumstances, yet tickets, as currently administered, are not quite sufficient.

- ➔ The preference for passes over tickets suggests that if more funds are made available for supporting these programs, there should be a greater increase in the number of bus passes over the number of tickets (§ 6.3.2, P2, Commentary 5).

### 4.3 availability and restrictions

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Patrons pointed to the sporadic, limited availability of tickets

“Tickets are a hassle.”

“With the bus pass I have a freedom that I don’t with tickets.”

**Table 10: Comments on discount ticket program, patron and agency responses**

(Numbers tally the number of respondents who raised each interest as key. Since some raised more than one interest, totals exceed the number of respondents.)

**a: concerns regarding discount ticket program – patron responses\***

raised as appreciation among those who commented	
appreciation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I really do appreciate the help.</li> <li>Getting tickets is easy. I just get them when I have appointments.</li> </ul>
raised as a stronger concern among those who commented	
availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are just not enough tickets.</li> <li>Not enough tickets for everyone.</li> <li>When out-of-the-cold runs out of tickets, I've known someone who had to walk a long way to the next shelter.</li> </ul>
access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to improve the program? – More places where you can get free tickets...</li> <li>I don't know when the lady who gives them out will be there and available.</li> </ul>
eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It must be work-related to get a ticket at the Working Centre but I needed a ticket for going to the doctor.</li> <li>Every social worker is different and getting tickets depends on who you talk to.</li> </ul>
raised as a lesser concern among those who commented	
awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only heard about the program through word of mouth.</li> </ul>
misuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People sell tickets on the street that they get for free.</li> </ul>
<p>*The qualitative nature of interview data on this topic precludes accurate counting of responses. Concerns are ranked according to a sense of their importance which was achieved by integrating commentary from across responses.</p>	

**b: comments regarding discount ticket program – agency responses**

benefits		
program is helpful	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See comments in Table 4b, above.</li> </ul>
stretches agency budget	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The reduced ticket costs allow us to provide more tickets to more individuals within our limited budget.</li> </ul>
no-one left out	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From my limited experience I am not aware of gaps, although there may be.</li> </ul>
challenges		
meets some needs, but...	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I think overall, this program does increase access for low income riders. We find, however, that the working poor often earn more money than the established ceiling for "low income", but still have trouble affording bus transportation.</li> </ul>
not enough tickets available	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An increase in the number of reduced transit tickets yearly to ensure that there are no gaps would be an improvement.</li> </ul>
ineligibility	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low income people not involved with programs at agencies that can provide tickets are unfairly excluded from this benefit.</li> <li>Tickets are available for only restricted purposes – when the real issue is the basic need to get around town for basic life needs</li> </ul>
still unaffordable	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It aids people in accessing public transportation, however, many state that the cost is high for them even with the discount tickets.</li> </ul>
not easily accessible	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People often do not know where they can purchase the tickets.</li> </ul>
unavailable service	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People who need transit when it is not running do not benefit. Many low income wage earners have jobs that require them to start or finish work at hours when public transit no longer runs.</li> </ul>
other reasons	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People do not like to have to "justify" why they need each ticket</li> </ul>

– which arises from several factors. The biggest is that individuals may not know where tickets are available, or when and how they might be accessed. There appear to be few outlets where tickets can be obtained and their locations are not always convenient. Patrons also felt that tickets run out quickly, and supplies on hand were non-predictable. They were often unavailable – sometimes unexpectedly – for meeting a current need. Patrons noted that these factors made it very hard to plan – a particularly challenging circumstance for people who do not have alternative transportation options and cannot necessarily afford an unexpected turn of events.

Patrons and agency respondents alike noted that restrictions on ticket distribution and the modes of accessing them mean that many people who are in need are not able to access this benefit. Tickets are generally provided for specific purposes – in some cases only for urgent needs.

One way around these conundrums – which was mentioned by both patrons and agencies – is to obtain a ticket for one purpose, but save it for use at another time. For example, walking home from a counseling appointment in order to use the ticket to get groceries, where using transit offers benefit, in spite of the challenges inherent in using the bus to carry groceries home. Some patrons pointed to misrepresenting their intentions in order to obtain tickets – not that their intentions were necessarily outside of the general mandate of the discount ticket program, but outside of a particular ticket distributor’s mandate. Individuals felt pressed to do this because that’s where they were and had no other option except public transit.

Some agencies, recognizing the difficult circumstances that patrons face, are aware of and sensitive to individuals’ lives and the contingencies that surround them. For example, some key informants and agency respondents indicated a familiarity with the people they assist, which led more readily to situational decisions. For example, not giving a ticket to a youth living close to the program location, but giving one to another who lives at a distance. All of these ‘simple’ decisions, of course, requiring awareness of diversities and context.

- ➔ Although tickets are designed to enable transit for specific purposes, such as attending programs or appointments, consideration could be given to making them available in ways that might enable more general use (§ 6.4.3, T4).
- ➔ The potential of building on agency partnerships could be considered (§ 6.4.3, T5).

All these various challenges for agencies and individuals result in difficult, if not unsatisfactory, exchanges and decisions. Patrons have to argue their cases strongly – some mentioned the need to ‘beg’ for tickets – a process that was likened to ‘pulling a mouthful of teeth’. Agencies – especially those providing emergency services and programs – have to make difficult decisions on who should and shouldn’t receive a ticket – even in situations where there is a real need for transportation in both cases. Patrons spoke of taking long walks – whether or not they can afford one.

- ➔ Provide for greater availability of discount tickets and/or more bus passes (§ 6.1, R1).
- ➔ Reduce scrutinizing to the degree possible, perhaps by developing processes whereby people in need of assistance can be readily identified (§ 6.4.2, T3).

“For people on Social assistance it is often beyond their means to purchase tickets regardless of the price. While we sincerely appreciate the discount on tickets for our agency, we have to be very selective to whom we give them. Our budget simply does not allow us to distribute as many as we would like to.”

“Even ‘Out of the Cold’ runs out of tickets.”

#### 4.4 communication

Communication appeared to be an issue in the discount ticket program – as it was in the discount bus pass program – in several instances. Once again, patrons spoke of word of mouth through acquaintances as the primary means to finding out about programs. Many pointed to the fact that agencies were generally unaware of other agencies that provide tickets. For patrons this meant that learning about where they might be able to obtain tickets for particular purposes was difficult.



There were some uncertainties and confusions in agency responses. For example, mention of tickets as ‘still unaffordable’ for patrons by some agency representatives. The diversity of responses to our questions may arise from different practices among different agencies – which may also be confusing for patrons.

Not all agencies were aware of the discount ticket programs offered by the Region. Communication seemed weak within some agencies as well. For example, there were situations where some individuals within an agency knew of the program and others did not. Some agencies also spoke of challenges within their own organization in regard to ticket distribution and budget allotments. For example, for one agency representative, there was a sense that a different department received a greater allotment of tickets, even though the needs of their own clients seemed greater.

- As noted earlier, improved communication about the programs and subsidies could be beneficial. However, there is a certain tension here: Since these programs are already strained, increasing awareness and improving communication among and between agencies and patrons might simply increase frustration (§ 6.2.3, G3).

#### 4.5 program goals

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As with the bus pass program, agency representatives were asked to describe the goals of the program. Respondents again described goals related specifically to providing transit for people with low incomes, as well as broader goals around well being and community involvement (Appendix 4). (The emphasis was reversed in comparison with goals for the bus pass, in Appendix 4.) In addition, respondents pointed to goals related to assisting their organizations.

#### 4.6 summary

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Discount tickets fill a need. They enable patrons to get to various programs and appointments. Other patrons, however, found that tickets only help in a sporadic, patch-work kind of way. In many cases, agency budgets are stressed to the degree that needs of their clients cannot be met. Confusions around where to find tickets and around their limited availability and eligibility, have costs – just not financial ones. These costs decrease the affordability of public transit and its accessibility to some patrons. For many, buss passes seemed preferable to tickets.

“I know that many of the women who attend my program would not be able to come if they did not receive the bus tickets.”

“Tickets are available for only restricted purposes - when the real issue is the basic need to get around town for basic life needs.”

## 5. transit service and accessibility

The foregoing sections allude to the importance of transit service and accessibility in the question of affordability. Reliance upon, and heavy use of, public transit contributes to both benefits and challenges: If bus service is somehow lacking or presents considerable challenge, an affordable fare is moot. Accommodating an individual's transportation needs – within their capacities – is a critical aspect of transit affordability. Repeated references to the importance of usable, accessible service, point to its central role.

In addition to receiving comments on affordability and the discount pass and ticket programs, we received many comments on transit service. In many instances, patrons were appreciative of the realities involved in making transit run and acknowledged the challenges of working with a diverse public. Still, many expressed frustrations with scheduling, facilities and other aspects of transit service.

Patrons spoke frequently of efforts required to get around on public transit – by planning their days, appointments and excursions around transit schedules and routes, or by lessening expectations of where they could go and when they could get there, if at all. People also spoke of compromised or lost opportunities.

**Table 11: comments regarding service concerns – patron responses**

most	appreciation
39	proximity of routes
35	culture and sensitivity
27	infrastructure and upkeep
7	communication
13	other interests

All of these comments were reinforced by focus group discussions.

To ease discussion over issues and concerns around service, accessibility and use of public transit we have organized comments into numerous categories (Table 11). We found that comments from patrons were reinforced by those from agencies and key informants, who drew attention to the difficulties individuals face in using public transit for all their transportation needs.

### 5.1 issues

The stronger the match between capability and design, needs and services, the greater the ease and opportunity public transit presents patrons. Frustrations centered then, on mismatches – in routes and schedules, in lost opportunities, or in the effort expended to use public transit. The brief listings below expand on challenges such as schedules that reflect “normal” working hours, but not those with different schedules; facilities – ranging from terminal design to the snow around shelters – that do not challenge some, but present risks for those of differing abilities. We also heard of assumptions or expectations regarding the ease with which patrons can move, board the bus, stand, or accommodate fast accelerations or decelerations. Patrons, on occasion, brought forward the added task they have of negotiating with other patrons and service providers who do not appreciate differences. On occasion we heard of impatient drivers, and inconsiderate patrons.

➔ The concerns and issues raised above might best be addressed through participatory processes (§ 6.6.1, C1).

### 5.2 routes and schedules

Routes and schedules were a frequent topic in our conversations with patrons. Patrons appreciated the opportunities that public transit offered them, but were often frustrated by the lack of options presented to them, and the efforts that were required to make use of the system. A summary of comments that were raised regarding bus routes and schedules follow.

#### *proximity of routes and stops*

Patrons looked for better connections between their homes, work, amenities, support and educational programs, social and recreation activities, community events (including Out of the Cold dinners), and children's activities.

Patrons noted the need

“Buses don't suit factory schedules.”

“It's getting better all the time.”

for routes and bus stops that were in neighbourhoods that rely upon and use public transit extensively. The most extreme case of an interest surrounding proximity came from one patron who couldn't understand why a bus stop was relocated in front of a new condominium – when it had been close to the residence of many people who used the bus frequently.

Buses to amenities – such as grocery stores that were affordable – and that used a fairly direct route were mentioned. Several patrons pointed out that some such services already existed, but they also pointed out that services were provided to food stores that were not affordable.

#### *expanded services*

Patrons also spoke about limited service to areas where they worked and lived – especially in the Cambridge area. Concerns included the need for more routes, an increased frequency of bus service, and extended, or perhaps more appropriate, hours of operation. One patron near Preston whose income was well below LICO, said there was little point in using public transit because of the challenges involved in getting to stops, or getting around town on weekends. He owned a car.

Others hoped for an increase in service to Hespler and Preston, and services to towns such as Elmira and St. Jacobs. Those with jobs, or looking into job opportunities hoped for an, increase of services to work – typically to industries and factories in the region, again, at appropriate hours.

#### *travel times*

Patrons mentioned often that trips took a long time because of circuitous and winding routes – adding significantly to the duration of the trip – especially in relation to the time it takes to go the same distance by car. They also noted the infrequency of buses, or the wait time for connecting buses as adding significantly to travel times. For some, standing to wait for half an hour or more presented difficulty.

"I don't like waiting in the bad weather. Otherwise service is good."

"Compared to what I'm used to in other countries, service here is great. They do a good job."

One patron, who lives on a bus route with restricted and infrequent Sunday service said that she would like to volunteer at a community centre on weekends. But since the first bus – at 10:30 – would not get her there early enough, she cannot be involved.

Several patrons emphasized the occasional early departure of connecting buses as adding significantly and unpredictably to trips. In the way of suggestions, one patron put forward the idea that any more than two buses will result in unreasonable delays and surprises. Patrons also suggested more direct routes – including cross town connections in some cases. Some asked for extending transfer times beyond their present limit – which we consider a suggestion that increases the affordability of ticket fares.

➔ Extending the transfer time from one hour to an hour and a half or two hours may actually help people more than increasing the number of tickets available.

#### *uncertainty or non predictability*

Uncertainty and non predictability have already been mentioned above. Patrons also mentioned their surprise at sudden schedule and route changes, and complicated schedules that change daily – especially in Cambridge. Others have pointed to heavy traffic and road construction being a cause of longer trips, delays, and missed appointments.

#### *scheduling*

The low frequency of buses on many routes during the day, limited service during holidays, weekends, and during the early morning or evening were among the most frequently mentioned interests among patrons. Not surprisingly, each impinges significantly upon getting to work or appointments, and meeting other schedules – for their own needs and those of their family or community.

### 5.3 infrastructure and upkeep

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#### *design and infrastructure*

Patrons pointed most often to shelters – their number, design and size – suggesting that there were not enough, that most were too small to fit passengers comfortably, and that many did not provide sufficient shelter from the elements. Some made special mention of the metal seats in shelters being extremely uncomfortable to sit on in the winter. Others pointed out that the materials used to cover bus seats are slippery – and, for some, easy to slip off of as buses accelerate or decelerate.

The Kitchener terminal was also mentioned in two regards: as being unfriendly for anyone with knee injuries, and as too open, leaving individuals exposed to the elements. For those reliant on public transit, or those doing a lot of walking, these facilities and their design present constant challenge. For some of the patrons we spoke with, primarily seniors and those with leg or knee injuries, standing for extended periods of time, especially after a long walk, was hard.

Patrons expressed an interest in seeing more bus shelters and appropriate changes in the design of transit facilities.

#### *surrounding areas*

Patrons often spoke of the areas around shelters – including paths to bus stops across fields or roads – as being hazardous, especially in winter or inclement weather. The flooring of shelters around the Preston community center, in wet weather, is apparently mud. These factors present challenges, especially for those carrying bags, those that have trouble moving or keeping balance, and those with children.

#### *meeting needs*

Patrons we spoke with, more often than not, relied on public transit to meet most of their transportation needs. They

"The terminal has me feeling unsafe."

"Why don't they give up their seats to the elderly? Or to young women who are pregnant? Or the disabled?"

"Sometimes the buses move so quickly that I'm worried I'll fall over."

used the service to obtain groceries, go shopping, or take their family on outings and to community events. This means they were often traveling with bags and buggies or strollers. Patrons spoke of tensions that arose, negotiating with drivers on what they can and cannot load onto the bus, whether the driver will kneel the bus, or whether other riders will make room for them. Some patrons spoke of taking a taxi home after shopping for groceries – noting that it was an expense they could ill afford, but that wrangling grocery bags onto the bus and over snow banks in the middle of winter can be a little too much to take. Another key informant made mention of patrons abandoning emergency food hampers because they could not manage it on the bus all the way home. Issues around meeting needs seems, in part, an issue of design, but we wonder if there are not strategies that the GRT might take which would alleviate the tensions that arise in these situations.

### 5.4 culture and sensitivity

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#### *culture*

At times patrons had a difficult time accommodating the behaviours and disposition of other patrons. Unfortunately, young adults were the group most often mentioned as difficult to deal with. The habits most often pointed to were young riders taunting patrons, being unruly or using foul language, and a lack of sensitivity to the needs of expectant mothers and the elderly. Other patrons mentioned garbage around shelters and graffiti on transit property. Some have said they were put off, others that they were concerned by what their children heard, and still others were frightened for themselves or their kids. In one case, a patron mentioned his being allergic to strong perfumes or colognes.

#### *sensitivity*

Many of the tensions and challenges raised above suggest a need for greater sensitivity on the part of drivers to the interests of patrons, especially the elderly or differently abled, and those reliant on public transit. Patrons spoke of situa-

tions where drivers seemed unaware that patrons might find it difficult to board the bus, get to the bus stop, navigate to a seat, stand, or leave the bus quickly. Fast accelerations or decelerations in particular, made many patrons from this community feel at risk of being injured. For patrons these seemed unreasonable demands or expectations on the part of drivers. Communication between patrons and the driver, specifically the relaying of messages between the driver and patrons regarding calls ahead to waiting busses were apparently, fraught with challenges.

Many patrons found drivers helpful and congenial. A few others commented on instances where drivers appeared rude or unpleasant. In one instance the interviewer wondered if the disposition or attitude of the driver might have been a reflection of particular prejudices.

#### *crowding*

Patrons mentioned crowded buses, especially during peak times, and especially along school routes. Once again, this presents challenges to certain patrons – those with parcels or bags, those who cannot stand for long periods of time, or those who are uncomfortable in crowded and noisy spaces.

### **5.5 communication**

Patrons were not always aware of, or were surprised by, changes to routes or schedules. Some made mention that there seemed many fewer telerider numbers to call in Cambridge regarding schedules and routes. Some thought that the information on the telerider system was often inaccurate. Telephone lines always seemed busy, or consistently led to an answering machine. Finally, some were unaware of contact numbers for general inquiries, or other means and modes of contacting the GRT.

Others brought forward communication challenges – where people were not sure how they might raise their interests, make suggestions or ask questions of the GRT – in person or over the phone. In one case, a non English speaking resident unable to read the transit sign indicating service times – was informed by a passerby that there was no service that day.

- ➔ It may be useful to review the most effective communication lines between these groups and the GRT (§ 6.2.3, G5).
- ➔ Greater attention to the multi-lingual needs of our community in communicating schedules and programs (§ 6.2.3).

### **5.6 other interests**

Some patrons found, on occasion, that GRT staff were unfamiliar with changes to GRT routes and schedules, or found that in trying to make inquiries, offices were open but not staffed. The lack of familiarity with local neighborhoods – which resulted in delays, wrong turns, and frustration – was a concern brought forward by patrons in Cambridge.

Finally, one individual expressed a concern over air quality around the bus terminal, and wondered if buses could reduce their emissions somehow – either by design or practice.

### **5.7 summary**

In this section we have focused upon the challenges and issues surrounding public transit service that were brought forward by the patrons we interviewed. While some of these concerns are specific to the community of people we spoke with, many others are familiar among the general ridership. We would like to emphasize that in addition to these criticisms, many patrons – including many of those raising issues, also expressed an appreciation for the quality of services that were provided.

“Sure, its improved over the past five years. There’s more routes than there used to be.”

## 6. recommendations

One of the objectives of this research was to suggest ways of increasing the affordability of public transit for low-income people in the Region, specifically, through increasing the effectiveness of the discount bus pass and discount ticket programs. Building on the efforts and achievements of individuals, agencies and the Region, this section contains recommendations for refinement of these programs.

The following discussion includes short reference to findings in the preceding sections, suggestions from patrons, agencies and key informants, and summary recommendations. Where possible, we acknowledge implementation constraints, such as limitations arising from resources and administrative capacities; however, our primary intention is to identify possibilities. We also recognize that some recommendations are beyond the scope of the GRT and Social Services; however, we hope they might be facilitated through partnership and that these findings and recommendations may find broader readership.

### 6.1 recommendations: the “affordability and accessibility program”

The discount bus pass and ticket programs improve the affordability of public transit for some low income riders, yet they do not make it affordable for all. Several issues have been identified:

- Discount tickets and discount bus passes are not accessible to all riders for whom the affordability of public transit is a concern because:
  - the availability of passes and tickets falls short of the number of people who are eligible;
  - eligibility criteria may exclude some people for whom affordability is a legitimate concern;
  - awareness of these programs and their eligibility criteria are sometimes lacking.
- Some patrons who receive discount passes or tickets felt that:

- the monetary cost of a bus pass is still unaffordable;
- other costs associated with transit are too high, notably the cost of using transit and the costs involved in accessing these programs.
- The extent to which discount bus passes are available to the ‘working poor’ remains a question.
- There is a strong link between quality of life and transit affordability, accessibility and service.

We make four general recommendations, which are expanded in the following sections. The general recommendations are:

**1) Increase support for the discount bus pass and discount ticket programs to further improve affordability and accessibility of public transit for people with low income** (§ 6.2, 6.3, 6.4), ← R1

**2) Continue efforts to improve service, with particular attention to diversity and to the needs of people who rely heavily on public transit** (§ 6.5), ← R2

**3) Facilitate greater community involvement, specifically including low income patrons, in the design, planning and implementation of public transit and the discount programs** (§ 6.6), ← R3

**4) Consider particular areas for further consultation and research, notably the needs of the working poor and strategic consideration of related programs** (§ 6.7). ← R4

### 6.2 recommendations: discount programs, generally (G)

#### 6.2.1 transit fares

As mentioned throughout this report, patrons and others interviewed during the course of this study have made the point that discount passes – and transit more generally – are not affordable (§ 2.1). Not surprisingly, people have suggested lowering the price of fares – whether cash, pass, or ticket – and improving service.

Some patrons suggested dramatically reducing fares. Patrons also suggested reducing fares for young children who are no longer eligible for free transit, but still require adult supervision. Some agency representatives suggested a *greatly* reduced monthly pass for low income people; others suggested free transit – either for low-income people specifically, or for everyone. There was also a specific request for free bus passes for people using shelter systems. One patron offered a suggestion that perhaps touches upon a root cause for the non affordability of public transit: increase welfare rates.

Many patrons also suggested greater diversity in fares to better reflect their circumstances, which may also result in a better use of resources. Ideas that were mentioned include household passes, shorter term passes (day passes, half-month passes), discount ticket/pass combinations, and family passes.

We are aware of recent fares increases. Many of the foregoing suggestions, however, emphasize the continued need for discount options. We **recommend that the discount programs receive increasing support and that efforts be made to reflect the diversity of needs in fares and discount programs.**

G1 →

Increase bus pass program!!

"Pennies count."

### 6.2.2 Low Income Cut-Off

Our impression was that the people we interviewed are living on the edge – with incomes well below what would provide for quality of life. This confirms suggestions that LICO is not entirely realistic as a measure of poverty (§ 2.1, 2.2, Commentary 1). **We recommend that use of the Low Income Cut-Off as the main criteria for delimiting eligibility be investigated and re-considered (§ 3.3.2).**

G2 →

### 6.2.3 Awareness and communication

There seemed to be a lack of awareness about the discount bus pass and ticket programs among patrons and agencies (§ 3.3, 4.4). In addition, some patrons were unclear about their eligibility for the discount bus pass (§ 4.4). Given that there is a limited availability of discount tickets and passes,

greater awareness of these programs might result in nothing more than greater frustration. However, if the aim of these programs is to improve affordability for low-income persons, there seem to be many who are unaware of the programs and their eligibility.

"Our agency is unaware of this program and to our knowledge none of our clients know of its existence either."

Patrons suggested greater information sharing among agencies, specifically with regards to discount tickets. We also recommend **greater information sharing among agencies, patrons, the GRT and Social Services** on the programs and their eligibility requirements (§ 3.4, 4.4), **and greater communication between patrons and agencies over patrons' needs and agency resources** – to enhance availability, accessibility, and strategic decision making or planning. We realize the concomitant requirement of finding ways of increasing availability.

← G3

← G4

← G5

In addition, we suggest a **review of communication strategies between the GRT and low-income patrons** (§ 5.4, 6.6) – including the working poor and those on social assistance, with the aim of facilitating incorporation of their needs in upcoming decisions. As suggested by agency representatives and patrons, efforts to pay greater attention to the multi-lingual needs of our community would help these individuals make use of GRT services. Finally, increasing awareness of other programs or subsidies, and their various eligibility criteria may help ensure people receive benefits without unduly compromising others' opportunities to do the same (Commentary 3).

### 6.2.4 strategic consideration of programs

There appear to be a variety of ways people obtain reduced, discounted or subsidized fares. Some patrons wondered if programs and procedures could be strategically coordinated to increase the availability of resources to a larger portion of the community. Such strategic coordination would require that agencies and clients continue working together to dis-

cover how to make maximum use of the programs that individuals are eligible for – as one patron suggested. In addition, building on, or extending, the existing partnerships among agencies and the region may provide opportunities for more, and more focused, approaches to the delivery of discount bus passes and discount tickets. This might increase the effectiveness of partnerships in dealing with the variety of unique circumstances.

**G6 →** We would suggest **building partnerships that would consider more strategic application of programs** (§ 3.2), paying attention to ways in which more specific recommendations outlined below might be addressed. We note, however, that many of these agencies already manage considerable responsibilities and work within constrained budgets. Additional demands for collaborative partnerships or support systems would have to be made carefully or with the provision of appropriate resources.

“Should educate the agencies about each other, especially if they run out of tickets, they could tell people where else to go.”

### 6.2.5 partnerships

Patrons suggested closer ties between neighborhood groups and the GRT to increase synergies between transit projects and services, and community or neighborhood plans and visions. There was also specific mention of involving local businesses, workplaces, and community organizations in these partnerships. For example, companies could work with the GRT to facilitate, perhaps through subsidies, the use of public transit by workers to their work places. This would address the challenges patrons have mentioned in getting to work (§ 5.2), and would fit with current GRT initiatives regarding demand management.

Patrons also talked of trips to grocery stores, community centers and other amenities (§ 5.2). We again see opportunity for working with businesses or agencies to facilitate or increase transit service to these places. While routes between seniors’ homes and grocery stores

“There is a huge waiting list at the Working Centre for discounted bus passes; the number available is not meeting the need.”

already exist, patrons emphatically pointed out that these stores sell goods beyond their budgets.

We **suggest building and strengthening such community and business partnerships as ways to enhance the effectiveness of the discount programs.** ← G7

### 6.2.6 school boundaries

While not directly related to the discount pass or ticket program, select patrons referred to their children’s ineligibility for reduced youth fares because they lived just within school boundaries. Key informants and agency representatives also drew attention to such circumstances and the challenges they present. Children and youth end up walking considerable distances to school (2 km), or parents have to purchase regularly priced youth tickets, which stress very limited budgets further. Again, we would recommend that **eligibility be based on proximity, needs and assets.** ← G8

## 6.3 recommendations: discount bus pass program (P)

The following suggestions and recommendations refer specifically to the discount bus pass program. Some overlap with the recommendations or suggestions made above regarding the programs or GRT services more generally.

### 6.3.1 affordability

Patrons, agency representatives and key informants all mentioned that some people with low-incomes still found the bus pass unaffordable. They suggested lowering the price of the discount bus pass for those near or below the LICO.

### 6.3.2 availability

Patrons and agencies pointed to several concerns around availability, all indicative of a much greater need for discount passes than there are passes. The most straightforward response is to **allocate more funds to the bus pass program in order to make more passes available** (§ 3.3.1). ← P1



Many patrons pointed to a preference for a discount pass. The pass was more effective in dealing with an individual's transit needs than discount tickets. If more funds are made available for supporting these programs, we suggest a **greater increase in the number of bus passes relative to the increase in the number of tickets** (§ 3.6, 4.2). Giving priority to discount bus passes, however, should not necessarily be at the expense of the discount ticket program. The appropriate allocation of resources between these programs – how they could, together, most effectively deal with individual and community needs – is likely best dealt with through further research (Commentary 4).

P2 →

Making more passes available would address the need for discount passes among the working poor *and* those on social assistance. It may be constructive to **consider allocations for different communities – for example, a specified number of passes allocated to the working poor and to people on social assistance** – perhaps in accordance with regional demographic trends, or some other statistic considered appropriate (§ 3.3.1).

P3 →

### 6.3.3 eligibility

Eligibility for the bus pass program arose in three regards: confusion over eligibility requirements; misuse of the program; and, exclusion despite obvious need for discounted transit. The first two are discussed in sections below. Regarding the last, patrons and agency respondents often suggested discount passes for students, seniors, and families. The seniors we spoke with were uncertain whether or not they were eligible for the discount bus pass. We suggest clarification of eligibility criteria among these communities and also suggest **expanding eligibility for the discount bus pass to students, seniors and families** (§

P4 →

"If the program continues, as in this past year, parents will be willing to purchase bus passes for their offspring and train them on how to use the transit system, rather than driving them everywhere. So I do think that more people will be encouraged to use the transit system."

3.3.2). This could involve offering students and seniors a discount on their reduced passes, bringing them to the same price as a discount pass. For families and households, this could involve expanding the family Sunday pass to weekdays and/or a monthly pass. Enlisting (further) management support from local social assistance organizations, in partnership with GRT and Social Services, may facilitate development and implementation of different types of passes.

### 6.3.4 the working poor

The number of working poor interviewed in this study is relatively small (see Appendix 1). Questions remain, regarding the use or underuse of the program by this community, and the effectiveness with which it addresses their needs. We recommend **more extensive consultation with the working poor to consider the effectiveness of this program for this group** (§ 3.3.1).

← P5

### 6.3.5 location

Patrons mentioned the difficulties introduced by the stickers and bus passes being available at only a few locations at particular hours (§ 3.3.3, 4.3). Their suggestions include having the stickers available at other venues such as community centers, having the passes available at places other than the bus terminal, and having operating hours that would accommodate a diversity of schedules.

We realize there are administrative costs and challenges involved in having the pass and verification sticker available at more locations over extended hours. Some patrons did raise concerns over being stigmatized as poor as a result of applying for, or using, a discount bus pass (see next section). This could be an even greater concern if stickers and passes were available at locations throughout the Region.

Recognizing the administrative and procedural challenges, we think it would be helpful to **consider other locations at which stickers and passes could be made available – ones that hold the trust of patrons and the region and with patrons schedules in mind** (§ 3.3.3). Determination of possible locations and questions around being stigmatized could be

← P6

discussed through the participatory processes mentioned below.

### 6.3.6 discount pass application process

P7 → Contradictory suggestions have been raised over the procedural approach used to apply for the discount bus pass, and its impact upon applicants. Some patrons have put forward a call for greater scrutiny of individuals' eligibility, whereas others consider the current process onerous, or worse, denigrating – closer scrutiny would only make it more so. **We recommend further investigation into the various procedures surrounding the discount buss pass program** (§ 2.2, 3.5) with two principles in mind. First, **ensure appropriate use without being punitive**, and second, **continue efforts to make the process simple and respectful**.

P8 → A few patrons expressed concern that the design of the pass leads to their being stigmatized. We suggest **continued attention to ways in which stigmatizing people can be reduced** (§ 3.2, 3.5). Altering the location of the sticker on the ID card might result in greater comfort in using the pass, but we suspect that an alternative design may very well give raise to different issues of the same nature.

Other suggestions regarding procedural aspects of the discount bus pass program, or their allocation include:

- providing bus passes – instead of funds for their purchase – to individuals who are eligible for a discount pass.
- additional and alternative ways of purchasing a pass, such as through a bartering system.

Another patron commented that first come, first served in applying for the discount pass does not reflect the diversity of needs in the community. Their suggestion was to use an approach that would make discount passes available to patrons based upon their transit needs.

Several patrons mentioned a fear over losing the discount if they turned in their sticker because they were not going to (or could not) use a pass at the time or in the near future. This fear is a reflection of the lack of availability. We wonder if more refined strategies in the application and allocation pro-

cess may allow for more effective and efficient use of the pass on the part of patrons, making the saving in resources available to others in the community. In summary, we recommend that **variations on the current allocation system and procedures be considered** (§ 3.3.1), including the suggestions made above. One particular example would be to consider sticker allocations on a seasonal basis, providing more in the winter than the summer.

← P9

#### Commentary 5: passes vs. tickets

Patrons with bus passes responded more positively to most questions about transit use than ticket users. With a bus pass patrons are freed from a careful analysis of whether or not the trip is affordable, and whether or not there are alternatives to taking the bus that have smaller monetary costs. They can also better accommodate or navigate surprises.

The decision between purchasing tickets or a discount bus pass seems obvious in most cases: if the number of trips that taken using tickets is less than the cost of a discount bus pass, then it is best to buy tickets. However, individuals will inevitably reduce the trips they need to take, and typically do a great deal more walking. There appear to be sacrifices involved that many of us would find stressful. Passes provide unlimited access, excepting the difficulties that arise over routes and scheduling.

Access to means of getting around, other than walking, appears imperative in any city. The increased mobility that public transit offers to riders without a car, enables those patrons to meet their essential needs and to participate more fully and independently in our community. Agencies and other respondents made note of both these more immediate and broader goals (Appendix 4). People pointed more often to the opportunity that the discount pass program offers, in comparison to the current discount ticket program. For example, students who obtain a pass for school use can use it for other purposes.

## 6.4 recommendations: discount ticket program (T)

### 6.4.1 availability

Patrons often referred to the limited supply of discount tickets, and the lack of predictability around their availability at specific agencies. As with the discount bus passes, the most straightforward recommendation is to **make more discount tickets available and/or to increase the discount for agencies**. The latter would provide greater support for those agencies who noted that their budgets could not support the needs of their clientele.

T1 →

"We believe that this program should continue because of the positive impact it has on our community. As a non profit agency we would be held by budgetary constraints and unable to provide this service at full cost."

One agency representative noted an appreciation for being able to trade expired tickets in for new ones and suggested that this practice continue.

"There are never enough tickets available to meet needs."

### 6.4.2 accessibility

Patrons mentioned difficulties in getting tickets due to agencies being closed or having no one on site to obtain tickets from. Patrons suggested extending agency operating hours, perhaps in tandem with other agencies, to supply tickets over a greater portion of the day. Patrons also hoped that agencies might work to ensure there are individuals on site to address requests for tickets on a more consistent basis. Some patrons suggested greater communication and collaboration between agencies, with the intention of pooling ticket "stock," enabling one agency to fill in, when another runs out.

One patron wondered if ticket strips, or an allotment of tickets could be made available for the month, instead of asking for individual tickets – lessening the need for frequent trips and multiple requests from agencies that supply tickets.

Patrons also suggested increasing the number of agencies that

supply tickets.

**Exploration into ways of making ticket distribution more predictable or regular** (§ 4.2), perhaps applying some of the above suggestions, might alleviate difficulties that patrons experience in obtaining discount tickets and ease the demand for discount bus passes, without compromising individual's use of public transit.

← T2

**Reduce scrutinizing to the degree possible** (§ 4.3), perhaps by developing processes whereby people in need of assistance can be readily identified, for example by allowing people with stickers on their GRT ID card to obtain discount tickets.

← T3

### 6.4.3 eligibility

There was frequent mention – especially from agencies – that only people who participate in agency programs are eligible for discount tickets. Although the discount ticket program is designed to enable transit for such purposes, we recommend **giving consideration to ways that discount tickets could be made available to enable more general use** (§ 4.3). This might address the needs of patrons who cannot afford, or do not require a bus pass, but who use public transit as their primary mode of transportation. The **potential for building on agency partnerships might be considered** (§ 4.3). The difficulty here may be that, as noted by many, agency budgets are stressed. Encouraging agencies to extend ticket distribution to cover more the general intentions of patrons may not be possible without agencies also obtaining increased support.

← T4

← T5

"You don't really know when you'll be able to get a ticket from an agency, therefore its hard to plan."

### 6.4.4 strategic design and planning

We wonder if the current list of agencies and their application of resources contribute most effectively to the goals to the discount bus pass or ticket programs (§ 6.2.4).

**6.5 recommendations:  
transit service (S)**

Patrons often mentioned their appreciation of the services provided by the GRT, while still talking of their frustrations over the lack of options and the efforts required to make use of the system. A list of suggestions regarding transit service, facilities and communication follow.

**6.5.1 Routes and schedules**

There were many call from patrons for more **frequent, regular, and extensive service** throughout the week, with service starting much earlier and ending later in the day than it currently does. A typical 8-5 timeframe is inadequate for patrons with non-standard working hours. In addition, patrons suggested more extensive service during the day. Several patrons suggested increased service to areas like Hespler and Preston, and services to towns such as Elmira and St. Jacobs. **Extended late night service** along specific routes and the **introduction of more express routes** across town were also suggested.

Patrons also asked for a **reduction in the wait periods** between connecting buses. There were also suggestions for **extending the transfer time** from 1 hour to 1 ½ or 2 hours. Such an increase in transfer times would contribute, in our minds, to an increase in transit affordability.

Patrons, especially those reliant upon public transit to meet all of their transportation needs, asked for **greater service over weekends and holidays** and for **more direct service** to places of interest.

**Increased service** around neighborhoods and communities that rely upon public transit was also suggested. Several patrons made specific mention of few direct bus routes near their homes to frequented grocery stores or other amenities, such as community centers.

Where there was service to shops or stores, goods tended to over-extend individuals' budgets.

One patron asked for a **decrease**

"Increase service to make public transit more viable."

**in the number of transfer points** along any route to help reduce travel time. Additional suggestions around reducing the non predictability of travel times included **the use of dedicated bus lanes and right of way at major intersections** throughout Waterloo Region.

We suggest **continued efforts towards transit improvements.** ← S1

**6.5.2 communication and responsiveness**

Patrons mentioned challenges around getting in touch with the GRT to make inquiries or comment. Patrons hoped that the GRT would **continue to work at improving communication and information channels**, which might best be accomplished through the involvement of patrons and agencies. Suggestions focused upon notifying patrons of changes in schedules or services well ahead of time. They also suggested better publicity of how to reach the GRT and greater attention to the needs of people with English as a second language.

**6.5.3 infrastructure and accessibility**

Patrons called for **more shelters, shelters that accommodate more people comfortably, and that better shield individuals from the elements.** Several patrons specifically mentioned a change from metal seats to some other material. Patrons also pointed to the materials used for bus seats as slippery and hoped for a change.

Patrons called for **greater accessibility to facilities**, whether the bus terminal, bus, or bus-stop, and greater ease of movement within facilities and on walkways around shelters and stops. Some mentioned situations in which drivers, for some reason, did not kneel the bus. There was also specific mention of ramps, and manholes near bus stops that presented risks to passengers with canes – especially in winter.

We suggest **continued efforts to improve the accessibility and design of facilities** and recommend the involvement of patrons or agencies. ← S2

### 6.5.4 awareness, respect and sensitivity

*a culture of respect and awareness*

Patrons made mention of being put off, if not offended and frightened, by other patrons – especially youth. Parents in particular, expressed a concern for their children. We suggest **continued efforts**

S3 →

**toward nurturing a culture of respect** and sensitivity to the needs of fellow patrons – especially expectant mothers, the elderly, the injured and people who are differently abled.

"I cannot move any faster because of my health, but he didn't wait."

"The drivers have been great."

*increased sensitivity*

We found patrons frustrated at times by the apparent insensitivity of drivers to their needs and challenges. Patrons included the elderly, injured, differently abled, or those who are entirely reliant upon public transit and have no other option but to use buses to meet all their transportation needs.

S4 →

While no explicit recommendations were made by patrons, we would suggest or **recommend continued effort at increasing the sensitivity of drivers and staff to the needs and capabilities of patrons** who make use of the service. To gain a better understanding of how this suggestion might be implemented, we recommend consultations with patrons and community agencies.

## 6.6 recommendations: community engagement

### 6.6.1 enhancing quality of life through participatory design and planning

Incorporating the needs and capacities of diverse communities and individuals into the design of any system may be best achieved through extensive dialogue and involvement of those communities early in, and throughout, the design process. This is particularly important where needs and capacities are significantly different from the planners and design-

ers already engaged in the process, and where communities have historically been excluded. We think low income riders fit both criteria. While participatory and collaborative efforts can be challenging, there is growing expertise in this area of design and planning, as evidenced by their use throughout Regional government. With regards to this study, **we recommend participatory design and planning** and, specifically, the following as tangible and constructive ways of responding to our findings and recommendations.

← C1

### 6.6.2 community presentations and dialogue

As an initial step towards implementation, we **recommend that this report be presented to the communities involved in this study, with the dual intention of engaging people in dialogue around our findings and recommendations and of informing next steps.** Locations could include, among others, St John's Kitchen and the Cambridge Self Help Food bank. Participation of Steering Committee members and/or other representatives of Grand River Transit, the Social Services Department and/or Regional Council would **provide an opportunity for patrons to address decision makers directly**, which we see as important, especially for this community.

← C2

### 6.6.3 tangible action through a community working group(s)

We **recommend formation of a community working group(s) comprised of people with low-incomes, people from social service agencies, and other informed and interested community members**, to help manage implementation of the suggestions and recommendations contained in this report. The intention would be to consider – collaboratively – implementation possibilities, priorities, opportunities and constraints from a diversity of perspectives. (Also see recommendations on partnerships § 6.2.5.)

← C3

For people receiving particular types of social assistance, participation could be counted toward the volunteer hours required for a bus pass. For others with low incomes, participation might be put toward transit fares. The exact composition of this group would depend upon circumstances and require-

ments. We also recommend that meeting places and times be designed to facilitate participation of low income patrons, including the working poor.

Such a working group(s) could contribute in the following ways:

- represent the community and facilitate communication among diverse communities,
- contribute to the design of facilities, programs, schedules and routes, according to recommendations listed above (§ 6.5),
- help monitor the progress of program and service improvements
- inform and facilitate research and consultation (§ 6.7),
- facilitate community engagement in the design and planning of public transit, and
- liaise with government and non-government organizations.

A further consideration relevant to taking tangible action is to ensure that the results from this study are integrated into current fare review work plan.

#### 6.6.4 ongoing involvement and implementation

**C4 → We recommend the development of opportunities that facilitate stronger and more sustained involvement of the low income community – as well as others – in the design and implementation of these programs, and transit service more generally.**

The primary intention of this recommendation is continuity of voice and involvement at the regional scale, which might begin with the working group(s). Whether a more formal organization would be more effective at achieving these intentions is left for further discussion.

#### 6.7 recommendation: further research and consultation

There are questions around the affordability of public transit that would benefit from further research and consultation. If further research is pursued, we suggest that the working group mentioned in our earlier recommendations become a partner. Their experience would inform its design and methods, and they would be instrumental in facilitating outreach and connection with the community.

Our suggestions include

- a study designed to concentrate only on the effectiveness of these programs for the working poor (§ 6.3.4, P5).
- an assessment of the agencies participating in ticket and bus pass programs, questioning whether or not they are addressing the needs and the target groups that are the objectives for the two programs (§ 6.2.4, 6.4.4).
- research on innovative funding strategies and partnerships.

#### 6.8 recommendation: general suggestions

Finally, a few general suggestions were offered, primarily by agency respondents. While these comments move, in some ways, beyond the scope of these programs and the GRT, they relate to issues of transit and affordability and subsequently seem worth recording.

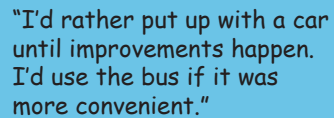
One agency respondent suggested that the transit system is largely supported by low income people, since they are the people least able to afford a car, which is the main mode of transportation within the region. Another respondent pointed to subsidies for road construction, which bring greater benefit to people with cars rather than low income persons or transit users. An accurate understanding of benefits, costs and their distribution can be difficult to gain in such complex situations; however, these comments raise questions that link equity and transportation.

Two other respondents suggested, respectively, using the gas

tax and involving the provincial and federal governments as ways to increase funding for public transit.

There were other suggestions that focused on the adoption of broad perspectives regarding public transit. One suggested free transit for everybody, and another that the “concept of affordable transit for all should be a commitment of the Region.”

The final comments arises from a review of background material (Appendix 2). It relates to the Region’s target to reduce the modal share of automobile use by 2016, which is set out in the Transportation Master Plan. Low income riders might be considered as a target group for encouraging people to shift from the car to public transit in reaching this goal. While the revenue from this group may be smaller relative to other target groups, people may readily shift to a viable affordable system.



“I’d rather put up with a car until improvements happen. I’d use the bus if it was more convenient.”

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## 7. conclusion

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Within the Region of Waterloo, some form of transportation other than walking is almost a necessity. For those without access to a car or unable to rely on a bicycle, this makes public transit a necessity. Many people within the Region who are living on low incomes are in this latter group. The affordability of public transit is a central concern, affecting their quality of life in significant ways.

In some cases, the reasons public transit remains unaffordable extend well beyond the monetary cost of a bus pass or other fare. According to many we spoke with – including patrons, agencies, and key informants – incomes are inadequate, no matter how close they are to LICO. The “solutions,” likewise, go well beyond decreasing the price of transit – although the results of this study indicate this to be a solid first step.

The discount bus pass and discount ticket programs are an effort to make transit more affordable for people with low incomes. This study was an effort to determine its success. The central finding was that the programs do increase affordability of public transit, but that they do not make transit affordable for all.

While the programs were very much appreciated, public transit remained unaffordable, or near unaffordable, for many of patrons we spoke with for multiple reasons. For some, it was because they did not have access to the programs, either due to a lack of availability or because they were ineligible. For others, the programs helped, but still involved monetary and other costs. The latter primarily included two types: costs associated with accessing the programs and costs associated with transit service.

Costs associated with accessing the programs included the difficulties in getting a pass or tickets due to waiting lists and locations, as well as discomfort with possible stigmas, a lack of awareness of the programs, and other factors.

Regarding service, most of the patrons we spoke with were heavy users of public transit – yet they related many ways in

which their needs and capacities were not met by current services. What they wanted most reflects what is wanted by any frequent user – reliable, extensive, frequent, accommodating, safe and friendly service. While recognizing that this region is not easily serviced by public transportation, the difficulties experienced by patrons lead to instances of social and economic exclusion.

The recommendations put forward in this report include suggestions from patrons, agency representatives, key informants and researchers. All of these are synthesized – to greater and lesser degrees – with the findings from the study. These recommendations vary in their scope. Given this, perhaps our strongest recommendation is to encourage a continuation of the dialogue and, more fundamentally, that the communities we spoke with have a much stronger voice at the planning and designing table.



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## appendix 1: research methods

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In designing this study, several factors were considered important. The overriding consideration was how best to gain insights and recommendations from the communities we were asked to consult with: low income riders and non-riders and the agencies that administer discount tickets or discount bus passes. Different approaches were required: more conversational in the case of patrons and more formal in the case of agencies.

Second, was an interest in providing participants – especially the low income riders – an opportunity to express their interests and challenges regarding the discount bus pass and ticket programs. As a focus from the beginning of the study, this gave rise to several decisions regarding research design. In particular, this meant the research would be qualitative – looking for opinions, insights and suggestions from patrons as well as agency representatives and key informants.

A third consideration was our feeling that understanding arises most effectively where the principles and practices of participatory research are applied. At the center of participatory research is collaboration – which is meant to be critical, reflexive, and creative – among the groups involved in the research. Ideally, this includes the “subjects” of the research and covers the entire process from planning and design, through the gathering and formulation of results, to the communication of findings. In this study, collaborators potentially included people with low incomes, and individuals from agencies, Grand River Transit and the Employment and Income Support Division of Social Services.

Such research needs to be adaptive – which means there are changes in approach and method as collaborative learning occurs. It subsequently tends to be more time-consuming – a potential concern, given the time constraints on this study. However, we felt that a study based upon collaboration, interactive learning and open communication best fit the complex nature of transit affordability and the objectives of this study.

Collaboration was strongest in the design of the questionnaire and information package, arrangement of interviews and locations, and in some cases, assistance in soliciting or screening potential interviewees. Plans were made to discuss findings and recommendations among a group of patrons, agency representatives and other interested people, however, this was left for future consideration (§ 6.6.2, C2). Finally, we had hoped that patrons from the community might have been collaborators in presenting the results of this study – in order to provide a means for direct conversation and to build relationship. Time and resources have prevented such involvement, however, plans for discussion of this report within the communities involved in the research are in development.

### Methods outline

Planning for the study started August 2004, with the establishment of the Transit Affordability Study Steering Committee (§ 1.2), and the proposal that the Civics Research Co-operative (CRC) do the research. The initial target for completion, early to mid-October, was revised as the project proceeded. The Steering Committee provided guidance and support, and the CRC research group assumed the responsibility of coordinating, managing, and carrying out this project. Work started with a brief review of previous research pertaining to the affordability of public transit in the Waterloo Region and outreach to a few community members and agencies that might assist in completing the research. This included one individual associated with the Downtown Community Health Centre and others at St. John’s Kitchen and Lutherwood CODA.

Two information packages – one for patrons and the other for agencies – were developed by the research group and reviewed by the Steering Committee after approval of the project by Council in early September, 2004. The patron questionnaire was also reviewed by individuals from the community and by representatives from community organizations where interviews were to take place. We sought feedback on

the agency questionnaire from a few agencies selected from among those we were planning to contact. Each information package included a letter of introduction, a consent form, and an open-ended questionnaire. The patron package was developed for in-person interviews and the agency package, for e-mail distribution and reply. Mid-way through the study, the patron questionnaire was revised to better facilitate telephone interviews and administration of the questionnaires in non-interview situations. The revisions built on the findings we had received to date, and included more focused questions (for example with check boxes or yes/no answers) regarding affordability and service as well as some of the open-ended questions.

Further outreach to community groups and agencies also occurred upon approval of the project and continued throughout the interview stage. These organizations were instrumental in helping us arrange interviews with patrons in a number of ways, including drop-ins, telephone calls and appointments. The support, insight and assistance that individuals from these agencies provided was invaluable to the study.

#### *Interviews*

The majority of interviews were done in-person on a drop-in basis. Researchers made arrangements to visit different locations and talk to eligible patrons. This approach was used at St John's Kitchen, the Cambridge Self Help Food Bank, Chandler Mowat Community Center, and the Emergency Food Hamper Program. Visiting times were arranged to coincide with patron/location schedules and were advertised in advance. Some of the challenges are noted below. Agency staff often helped with interviews, for example, screening interviewees to select individuals who more likely wanted to contribute or fit our selection criteria. While this may have led us away from some insights regarding the affordability of transit for some individuals, it also facilitated the process. Other in-person interviews were pre-arranged, through the efforts of people at Lutherwood (Cambridge office) and Preston Heights Community Center, leading to individual appointments with patrons at these locations.

A few interviews were done by telephone, from a list of discount pass patrons that was developed by the Working Center. We found the telephone interviews challenging, however. Answers were consistently shorter, with much less information provided than through in-person interviews, and the general feeling was much more uncomfortable. We also found many people difficult to reach by telephone, even calling at different times of the day. Many people did not have answering machines/service and many did not return calls. We eventually choose to stop using the telephone and, instead, made arrangements to meet patrons at convenient locations (e.g. the Working Centre). We still had difficulty reaching people and also had occasions on which appointments were missed.

Finally, we talked with patrons through three focus groups – all of them held at the Downtown Health Community Center in Kitchener and arranged by key people involved with the groups.

Agency representatives were asked to complete the questionnaire, and return it via email, mail or fax. Of the thirty questionnaires sent, fifteen were returned.

#### *open-ended questionnaires*

Our questionnaires were open-ended – designed to provide an opportunity for individuals to provide information about or to “discuss” the issues they found most important regarding the two programs and the affordability of public transit. Not surprisingly, replies to open ended questions can turn in any number of directions – arriving at less relevant as well as positive contributions. On the other hand, very specific questions can lead conversations in particular direction and almost predetermine findings – also arriving at positive contributions. We did what we could to strike the right balance.

#### **challenges**

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##### *engagement*

A key interest in doing this research was to be sure that both of the participants engaged in the interviews – interviewer

and interviewee – were comfortable and at ease. This not only made it more likely that conversations would be fruitful, but that there would be a quality to them. Venues were chosen carefully, and we chose not to take advantage of any recording technologies – other than pen and paper.

Perhaps the greater challenge in regard to establishing a conversational atmosphere at some places, with some people, was the distrust, animosity, and suspicion that might be held for us as researchers and interviewers. We would be seen as representatives of “the establishment”, and, from their perspective, privileged. The comments of one key informant proved enlightening, suggesting ways that we could lessen this barrier, in particular, by visiting before the days we were interviewing to become familiar with people and location.

#### *representation*

Appropriate representation remains a critical component of good research, however there can be challenges in determining what characteristics or qualities should be represented. We primarily sought interviews with discount bus pass and ticket users, as well as those who would be eligible, but who did not use the programs. We also sought to speak with people who were working as well as those on different forms of social assistance and to speak with people from different areas in Waterloo Region. While we interviewed individuals in each of these categories (§ 1.2), we cannot claim that we have covered the diversity of individuals who could benefit from participation in the programs, and who might have contributed to our findings and recommendations. For example, there are other characteristics such as ethnicity, family size, and age that might also be relevant.

Finally, given the number of people interviewed and without knowing the size and diversity of potential program participants, we cannot perform any kind of statistical analysis, other than the minimal rankings that we have done.

#### *working poor*

One sub-group of the community was difficult to connect with – the working poor. Many factors could have played a role in

this issue, including the fact that they are working – perhaps at more than one job – and thus difficult to reach by telephone or through the various locations we visited.

#### *complexity*

Affordability, accessibility, and usability of public transit go well beyond the price of a bus pass or the convenience of a bus route. Not surprisingly, now that this study has been completed, we feel that some of the core issues would require much more study to grasp – one of them being affordability. In ways, this was expressed in our conversations with patrons. A 30 minute meeting that approached the clinical – despite our efforts to increase comfort levels – is hardly enough time to provide “understanding” of the issues around affordability, accessibility, and usability of public transit in their lives. We feel that we did get a solid impression regarding the programs and the key interests around public transit. We hope patrons remain the authoritative voice on these issues.

#### **analysis, interpretation, presentation**

Throughout the study, findings and impressions were shared among the research group, the steering committee, and, where appropriate, with key informants. This provided a means for checking consistency and coherence, and in some cases to develop next steps.

‘Affordability’, ‘program effectiveness’ and ‘transit service’ eventually crystallized as key categories for organizing information, each with a different set of themes. Both categories and themes arose from our reading of interview transcripts as well as our ongoing conversations with participants.

Comments from patrons and agencies were organized within these categories and themes to help make sense of the volume of information we collected. This was an iterative process involving reduction, sorting and coding around the data, from which patterns and themes emerged. Where findings were tabulated, they were checked against corroborating “data” for consistency.

We tried to include themes that were shared among partici-

pants and still retain unique circumstances and comment from individuals. This iterative process allowed for the stronger themes to emerge as well as unique situations to stand out. It ultimately led to the organization and presentation of findings and recommendations in this report.

Suggestions and recommendations refer to two different but related comments. The former relay what participants said, including specific suggestions for innovations or improvements, as well as description of challenges that point directly to suggestions. For example, 'not enough available' was interpreted as 'it would be good to have more'. Recommendations may have come from participants, but also from researchers. In both cases, they have involved a degree of synthesis on the part of the researchers, bringing together findings, suggestions and other considerations.

Our presentation is largely a narrative one, although mixing numbers, descriptions, and stories. We hope to have retained the voice of participants to some degree, providing insight into their situations and experience by retelling – albeit briefly – their stories. In cases where patron stories or quotations have been included, we have altered them in subtle ways to maintain anonymity for the individuals involved.

Crafting this report is seen as the final component of this research. It is taken as no less significant or subjective than the research design, implementation, and analysis, or the development of recommendations.

### **the “affordability and accessibility program”**

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In 2002, and after consultations with local social service agencies and the general public, the transit subsidies offered by Waterloo Region were enhanced by two programs. The programs are a joint effort of Grand River Transit and the Employment and Income Support Division of Social Services and are administered in cooperation with local social agencies. They were to assist in making transit more affordable for people with low incomes.

#### *Discount Ticket Program*

This program was aimed at providing tickets to people with low-incomes for particular purposes such as attending educational programs, travelling to emergency shelters and doing job searches. Tickets are sold to select social service agencies at a discount rate – equivalent to the senior/student reduced rate. Tickets are distributed by the agencies to patrons, according to criteria set by the agencies. In addition to having a low income, patrons usually have to be participating in a particular program or activity. See examples in Appendix 3.

Those agencies that have historically received discounted tickets from the GRT, are subsidized through the GRT. Other agencies are subsidized through Social Services. Since the initial seven agencies at the start of the program, ticket distributors have increased to the current thirty-one. The latest increase was approved in 2003, following a suggestion made by Council in 2002.

#### *Discount Bus Pass Program*

This program was aimed at providing passes at a discount rate to people living on low incomes – using the Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) established by Statistics Canada as the eligibility criteria (Commentary 1). The objective was to reach the ‘working poor’ – those who are underemployed or working for low wages – and people receiving different forms of social assistance. Discount bus passes are made available through

The Working Centre in downtown Kitchener and Lutherwood CODA in Cambridge.

The bus pass application process was designed to be simple and respectful, using an honour-based approach. Those who complete the application and qualify for the discount receive a sticker with an expiry date, which is placed on the reverse side of the patron’s GRT Photo ID card. Participants can then go to either the Cambridge Bus Terminal or the Kitchener Transportation Centre to purchase or renew an adult bus pass at a discount price.

The initial discount of \$10 per month, recommended after the consultation process in 2002, was increased to \$20 month and has now increased to \$21 so that the recent fare increase is not passed on to low-income patrons. Eligible individuals pay \$34 for a monthly transit pass rather than the (now) \$55 regular price. In the 2004 operating budget, an additional \$38,000 was added to Social Service’s \$200,000 budget for this program, which allows for a total of 918 participants. This is a decrease of 50 people, from what it would have been prior to the fare increase, due to the additional subsidy (\$1/pass) for maintaining the discounted price at \$34.

### **grt fares and transit planning**

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#### *fare structure*

The current fare structure is based on the objective of rewarding the frequent rider. Thus the fares include a relatively high single cash fare, affordable monthly passes, reduced tickets available in strips of five, and each rider gets a one-hour free transfer. While the high cash fare is likely an effective strategy for encouraging more consistent transit use, it penalizes low-income patrons. With limited cash resources, patrons may be unable to purchase strips of tickets – even if they are frequent riders.

- ➔ Consider increasing the number of tickets available and encouraging agencies to re-sell tickets to patrons who can afford the discounted price.

- Allow sale of reduced (i.e. same as students/seniors) tickets to people with stickers on their ID cards.

*fare increase*

Before the most recent increase, bus fares have remained the same for over five years and were lower than most Ontario transit systems. Prior to the fare increase – which was effective July 1, 2004 – the GRT held an open house to collect public comment on two fare change options. Some respondents expressed concern over the increase, noting the potential impact on people with low-incomes. In general, both the current fare structure and the discount programs are comparable with – or more affordable than – other Ontario cities. Discount programs are comparable to other provinces, with the notable exception of British Columbia, where people on disability pensions can purchase an annual bus pass for \$45 (in Vancouver, other BC communities may differ).

*transportation master plan*

The Region's Transportation Master Plan, which guides operational decision-making, has a target to reduce the modal share of automobile use from 84% in 1996 to 77% in 2016. This means that efforts are being made to increase transit ridership, ideally to double it in the same 20 year period. Different sectors of the regional population will be encouraged to use transit in different ways. Specific attention to the needs of people with low-incomes may encourage those who are non-users to become users of the transit system.

- Many low-income patrons do not use transit. If people purchasing tickets or passes are non-users becoming users, then these programs do not have a cost, but rather are a source of revenue for the GRT.
- Consider low income riders as a target group for encouraging more people to shift from using a car to using public transit.

### appendix 3: agencies responding, categorized by type and listing ticket distribution

Agency type	# tickets	reasons for ticket distribution
<b>Emergency Services</b>	800	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ for volunteers to participate in activities</li> </ul>
	4000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ for clients to access shelters and shelter programs</li> <li>▪ for shelter program participants to attend medical, legal and other appointments</li> </ul>
	4300	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ for shelter residents who have no income to attend appointments</li> <li>▪ sell tickets to shelter residents if they have a source of income</li> </ul>
<b>Disability Services</b>	500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to assist with accessing community resources</li> <li>▪ to access emergency shelter between Cambridge and Kitchener</li> <li>▪ to assist with bus training/awareness</li> <li>▪ to assist with outreach support/housing searches</li> </ul>
	500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ most of our clients use the bus pass</li> </ul>
	2500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “we do not participate”</li> </ul>
<b>Education Programs</b>	4000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ for learners who need financial support to get to and from school</li> </ul>
	20000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to help students attend school</li> </ul>
<b>Various Programs</b>	400	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ for participants to attend program</li> </ul>
	400	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to attend programs</li> </ul>
	500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ for attending programs that start mid month when participants cannot get bus pass</li> </ul>
	500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ for clients to attend programs and appointments</li> </ul>
	2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to attend programs</li> </ul>
	4300	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ for clients to come to appointments and others to which they have been referred</li> <li>▪ for volunteers and program participants to participate in our volunteer activities, programs, and events</li> </ul>
<b>Multiple Objectives</b>	5000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ to assist people who have occasional transit needs</li> <li>▪ to assist people who cannot afford a pass or a reduced fare pass</li> <li>▪ for conducting job searches</li> <li>▪ for attending an appointment</li> <li>▪ for participating in a program</li> <li>▪ for responding to an emergency</li> <li>▪ to assist in finding housing</li> </ul>

**appendix 4: discount bus pass and discount ticket programs  
goals as perceived by agency respondents**

goals of the discount bus pass program (7 agency respondents)		
type of goals	responses	example statements
transit specific goals	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To reduce transportation barriers for all individuals</li> <li>▪ To provide affordable transit for those living on a limited income.</li> </ul>
broader, social goals	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Helping more people access different programs, schooling, medical facilities, employment, etc., thus bettering themselves financially, emotionally, psychologically, physically, etc. so as to become better citizens of our cities and country.</li> <li>▪ Provide opportunities for people on a fixed or low income to connect/ re-integrate with the community in which they live.</li> </ul>
both transit specific and social	1	
additional comments	2	

goals of the discount ticket program (10 agency respondents)		
type of goals	responses	example statements
specific to providing transit	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To aid low income people with much needed access to transportation.</li> <li>▪ To be accessible to ALL low income families without demoralizing them.</li> <li>▪ To reduce barriers related to transportation costs.</li> </ul>
broader, social goals	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The goal is to allow as many people to ride the transit system as possible to permit them to be more fully involved in taking care of themselves and in society. This is what it should be. It shows that GRT is not only there to make money, but to also help people.</li> <li>▪ To increase equitable opportunities for participation in community life especially those that increase voice and choice.</li> </ul>
providing support, by supporting agencies	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To allow non-profit organizations to support their low income clients by providing discounted tickets to meet their transportation needs.</li> <li>▪ To assist agencies in providing more tickets to low income individuals.</li> </ul>
including service aspects	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To continually review route systems to increase accessibility for low income users.</li> </ul>