



NEWS RELEASE

June 4, 2020

Durham Region Transit: safety, reliability and sustainability during COVID-19

WHITBY, ON – On Wednesday, June 3, members of the Transit Executive Committee (TEC) met virtually and at Regional Headquarters for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in mid-March. The meeting included a strong focus on the implications of the pandemic on Durham Region Transit (DRT), as follows:

- **Ridership:** While ridership was exceeding expectations in the first ten weeks of 2020, due to the sudden 70 per cent decrease in ridership due to COVID-19, a 20 per cent reduction in service hours was implemented on March 23. A similar decrease was experienced with On Demand/Specialized Services, with an 82 per cent decrease from 2019. Additional service reductions of 18 per cent will be introduced June 8 in response to sustained decreases in ridership projected through the summer, when customers have greater access to alternative active transportation options. DRT has prepared a phased approach to service restoration and are ready to implement as ridership grows.
- **Fiscal implications:** With the government stay-at-home directives, DRT, as with the broader transit industry, has incurred significant revenue and cost impacts in the past several weeks. Should current ridership levels and fare suspension continue through the remainder of 2020, the year-end net fiscal deficit is forecasted up to \$20.4 million. Ridership projections for the final six months of 2020 (50 per cent of budgeted) indicate an additional \$5.5 million in revenue may be generated with the resumption of fare collection, and combined with \$8.3 million in cost avoidance opportunities being implemented (such as service reductions, fuel and maintenance savings, freeze on discretionary spending, vacant positions), the year-end deficit projection is reduced to \$6.8 million.
- **Additional safety practices:** DRT continues to be at the forefront of health and safety protocols to ensure the continued well-being of our customers and staff. Pending the implementation of additional COVID-19-related safety practices, such as the installation of protective barriers for operators, DRT will resume front door boarding to facilitate fare collection effective July 2. DRT also continues to strongly recommend to customers to follow the May 20 recommendation from the Province's Chief Medical Officer of Health (Ministry of Health) and

wear a face covering during their travels, particularly in situations where physical distancing may not be possible on the bus. Ridership levels will begin to increase and wearing a face covering will help protect the safety of others on the bus.

- **Fare payment:** With the resumption of fare collection on July 2, the 2020 fare structure will see no change to the price of monthly passes across all fare categories, including the popular co-fare program with Metrolinx that enables customers to travel with DRT for only \$0.80 when connecting to and from GO Transit. While cash fares are increasing by \$0.25, PRESTO single ride taps will increase by \$0.05 while still offering customers savings of \$10 for every 14 trips compared to paying by cash. The pandemic has highlighted the need to shift to contactless electronic fare collection options that help reduce the risk of contagion transmission. As such, DRT will temporarily eliminate paper transfers when paying by cash or tickets, accelerate the adoption of PRESTO-based fare collection, and is investigating e-ticketing platforms that can be implemented quickly and efficiently. DRT will be providing up to 4,000 free PRESTO cards to help support this transition, the distribution of which will be evaluated and implemented later this month.
- **Fare incentives:** DRT is resuming attractive fare incentives that make transit more appealing to customers. These incentives include the popular 2-for-1 Youth pass for July and August; the Kids ride free incentive that was launched in 2019; the forthcoming Y10 Youth loyalty fare incentive that runs September to June; and the Transit Assistance Program (TAP) for low-income individuals. With the exception of Kids ride free (which requires no passes or fare paying accompanying passenger), these incentives are all PRESTO-based.

Other highlights of the General Manager's report include:

- Christopher Norris, Acting Deputy General Manager, Operations, [presented](#) on the Rural Review project, sharing in-depth recommendations and robust implementation plans and deployment strategies for 2020 through to 2022.
- Training for the articulated buses is in progress. The buses will be going into service later this year, providing additional capacity for customers during the COVID-19 physical distancing era.
- Key projects – such as the electric bus pilot program and the Autonomous Vehicle Innovation Network (AVIN) pilot project – are in progress, with a temporary postponement on the AVIN pilot due to the pandemic.

Quotes:

“We are committed to ensuring transit remains a safe, reliable option for the residents of and visitors to Durham Region,” states Regional Chair John Henry. “We’re pleased to offer free PRESTO cards to help hasten the transition to contactless payment and provide easier and more accessible ticketing options that ensure the continued safety of our customers and employees.”

“DRT is mitigating the fiscal impact of the pandemic wherever possible, while continuing to deliver sustainable, reliable service that meets ridership demand and can effectively respond to potential future challenges facing public transit,” says Mayor of Ajax and Chair of the Transit Executive Committee, Shaun Collier. “By recommencing fare collection on July 2, we anticipate additional revenue generation and are hopeful the year-end deficit projection will be reduced to \$6.8 million from

the current \$20.4 million.”

“As the economy reopens, Durham Region Transit, like other transit agencies throughout the province and country, is committed to providing sustainable, reliable and safe public transit for our customers and employees,” says Bill Holmes, General Manager. “While the service adjustments in March and starting June 8 were necessary to align our capacity with current and expected ridership, and to respond to our growing deficit, plans to phase-in additional service are well underway. We are poised to increase service when ridership stabilizes and grows, which we hope will be very soon.”

More information about updated safety practices and onboard protocols, fare collection, incentives and payment, including free PRESTO cards to assist with the transition to paperless fare payment, will be available on durhamregiontransit.com/COVID-19 and broadly communicated publicly in the weeks ahead.

Office of the Premier release from May 20, 2020:

https://news.ontario.ca/opo/en/2020/05/as-ontario-reopens-people-urged-to-continue-following-basic-public-health-measures.html?utm_source=ondemand&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=p

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