

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Bryna Warshawsky, Acting Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2013 February 19

STUDENT BUS PASS ADVOCACY INITIATIVE

Recommendation

It is recommended that Report No. 015-13 re “Student Bus Pass Advocacy Initiative” be endorsed by the Board of Health and forwarded to the London Transit Commission and London City Council.

Key Points

- More affordable public transportation for youth is needed in the City of London in order for youth to travel to their schools and jobs and to participate in extracurricular activities.
- Students currently receive a discounted price on individual tickets but do not have access to an unlimited, discounted monthly bus pass.
- London is one of the only cities in Southern Ontario that does not have a monthly bus pass for youth.
- Lack of affordable public transportation will contribute to poor attendance at secondary school and non-graduation rates.

Background

Youth Create Healthy Communities is a youth advocacy group facilitated by a Public Health Nurse from the Health Unit. This youth group advocates for health and social issues that impact the lives of youth. The young people are currently engaged in an initiative which would make public transportation more accessible to them. Youth in London want and need affordable bus transportation so they are able to travel to and from work, schools and other events. Affordable transportation enhances access to health and social services, which contribute to overall wellbeing.

Bus Pass Advocacy Initiative

Youth Create Healthy Communities began investigating bus pass advocacy in October 2011 when the youth identified concerns regarding transportation services offered by the City of London to youth. London is one of the only cities in Southern Ontario not offering monthly student bus passes. Cities such as Whitby, Oshawa, Hamilton and Windsor, who are similar in population size to London, all offer a student pass.

According to the 2010 MLHU Report on Vulnerable Youth Engagement, youth expressed the need to address the social determinants of health that impacted their lives. These social determinants were as follows: social support networks, income and social status, employment, education, health services and other key resources. All of these factors can be positively or negatively impacted by access to public transportation.

The steps towards addressing the lack of a student bus pass began with a meeting at the London Transit Commission (LTC) with members of the Youth Create Healthy Communities group and Mr. John Ford, Director of Transportation and Planning, and Mrs. Kelly Paleczny, Director of Finance and Administration. The representatives of LTC suggested the group create a survey of youth's current use of LTC's services. The youth survey was created and distributed through the Health Unit's website and within schools. A total of 1,052 surveys were returned and key findings included the following:

- 47% of students use the city bus as their main mode of transportation;
- 57% of students take the city bus to school;
- 90% of students do not think the adult bus pass is affordable;
- 65% stated they would buy a student monthly bus pass, if offered.

The students are asking the LTC to offer a year-round monthly bus pass for adolescents. Currently, students pay \$1.54 per ticket and have no option to purchase a monthly bus pass (a monthly bus pass is offered to adults and seniors). In one month, the average student bus rider would use 40 tickets, costing \$61.60, to travel to and from school. Over four years in secondary school, each student/family could be paying as much as \$2,464 per teen to attend school. This does not include the additional costs for travelling to employment, recreation or social events. The students are advocating for a monthly bus pass costing \$65.67, which is 6.6% higher than the cost of the 40 rides to and from school. This 6.6% higher cost for the bus pass is comparable to the higher rate that adults pay for their monthly bus pass compared to individual tickets for 40 rides a month.

Youth are at a stage in their life where they are developing lifelong health habits. Young people aged 12 to 17 need a recommended 60 minutes of physical activity a day. Public transportation has been shown to increase one's daily physical activity by eight to 30 three minutes a day. The success of this initiative will not only increase accessibility to transportation, but will help to achieve two of the Health Unit's 2012-2014 strategic directions: 1) to increase physical activity among children, youth and adults; and 2) to reduce health inequities.

Ensuring equity for youth is important to the Youth Create Healthy Communities group. Accessible transportation can have a great effect on one's social determinants of health and can help youth develop a sense of belonging in their community. [Appendix A](#) is a sample letter written by a young person to their city councilor expressing the impact transportation has on their life. The letter is just one of many examples about the impact of affordable transportation for the youth in this community.

Conclusion

Youth Create Healthy Communities members are asking the Board of Health to support this student bus pass initiative, as they continue their advocacy efforts to lobby the London Transit Commission and the City of London for an unlimited student bus pass of \$65.67 per month. Youth are the future of this community.

This report was prepared by Ms. Michelle Cowin, Public Health Nurse, and Ms. Christine Preece, Manager, Young Adult Team.



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This report addresses the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards: Chronic Disease Prevention Standards 3, 6, Child Health Standard 4 and the Foundational Standard.