

Free Transit Day for seniors up for budget debate

By David Lea
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

The possibility of expanding an Oakville Transit pilot program that allowed seniors to ride free one day a week last summer will be up for debate Dec. 13 during the Town's 2013 Budget Committee's deliberations.

Given the green light by Town Council in June, the program let seniors ride the bus free every Monday from July 2 to Sept. 24.

"As you can see from the ridership results, we had a pretty striking increase," said Transit Director Barry Cole.

"We took the 13 days of the pilot for 2012 and we compared it to the same 13 Mondays in each of those previous years. Where we had a decline from 2,900 (in 2010) down to 2,200 (in 2011), we went up to 15,151 rides for those 13 days during the period of the pilot."

Cole said Monday Oakville Transit rides were up 20 per cent after the pilot was completed.

However, Tuesday rides also went up during the pilot period — despite not being free — reaching an increased rate of 22.5 per cent by the time the pilot was over.

Total senior ridership on Oakville Transit was up 14.9 per cent as of September with increases on all but two rush hour-only bus routes.

Cole also reported that revenue from senior ridership dropped by 13.1 per cent. Yet the free rides cost the Town \$11,306 — far less than the

\$20,000 initially anticipated.

Cole said maintaining the free transit day for seniors program would cost \$45,200 annually.

"There were other soft benefits that were seen," said Cole.

"(Improved) personal mobility, independence and opportunity, a greater degree of engagement in social activities, a higher level of activity, access to other community services, a sense of belonging- these were all the things people suggested to us that were of benefit to them."

Oakville Transit also conducted a survey in conjunction with the pilot program. It found 62 per cent of the seniors who participated in the pilot had used Oakville Transit before.

It found cost prevents many seniors from continuing to use Oakville Transit and that their main purpose for using transit was for shopping and/or to get to medical appointments.

Cole said the greatest number of respondents (26.1 per cent) said Monday should be the free transit day for seniors if the program continues.

The majority of those who did ride for free, did so between 9 a.m. -4 p.m.

The pilot project was not the only transit matter discussed with Cole suggesting modifications to Oakville Transit routes 1, 2, 5A, 11, 21, and 24, which would improve efficiency and ultimately reduce the transit budget by \$326,000 annually.

These modifications would include the creation of Route 5A — a new service to the north Oakville community, increased frequency on Route 1 (Trafalgar), a reduction to peak service only on Routes 11 (Linbrook) and 21 (Clearview), the elimination of late evening service on Route 2 (Lakeshore), and the redirection of Route 24 from Upper Middle Road to the Trafalgar and Dundas corridors.

Cole said new service is also being considered for Route 120 (East Industrial).

The route would offer rush hour service only to North Service Road East and, in particular, the new industrial development area including

the Siemens and Carttera sites.

The route is expected to cost \$138,100 per year with Oakville Transit proposing a one-year trial in 2013 to be funded from the Town's Innovation Reserve.

Cole said 56.6 per cent of Siemens employees surveyed said they would use Oakville Transit to travel to and from work.

Eighty two per cent of these employees also said a route connection to the Oakville GO Station was very important.

All of the proposed modifications and new routes will be further discussed during the budget committee's deliberations in December.

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Recipes By Niagara Cooks author Lynn Ogryzlo, Winner of The Best Local Cookbook in Canada award. www.NiagaraCooks.ca

Ingredients	Method
1 cup (250 mL) unsalted butter room temperature	Preheat the oven 350°F (180°C).
3/4 cup (180 mL) brown sugar	In the bowl of an electric mixer, beat butter until creamy smooth. Add the Kurtz Cabernet Wine Jelly, eggs and vanilla and mix until blended.
3/4 cup (180 mL) white sugar	Sift in the flour, baking soda, salt and cocoa powder. Beat slowly until smooth. Do not overbeat. Stir in the chocolate chips and incorporate with a wooden spoon. Spoon mounds of cookie dough on a cookie sheet 1-inch apart. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes.
4 Tbsp (60 mL) Kurtz Cabernet Wine Jelly	Remove from oven and cool on a cookie rack. When completely cool, dust with icing sugar and drizzle with chocolate sauce. Makes 36 fudgey cookies.
2 Eggs	
1 tsp (5 mL) pure vanilla extract	
2 cups (500 mL) all-purpose flour	
1 tsp (5 mL) baking soda	
1 tsp (5 mL) salt	
1/3 cup (80 mL) unsweetened cocoa powder	
3 cups (750 mL) semi-sweet chocolate chips	
icing sugar for dusting	
chocolate sauce for dipping	

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More info? Call Jack Smye, 905 339 3588

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