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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Durham Region Transit Executive Committee
From: General Manager, Durham Region Transit
Report: #2023-DRT-02
Date: January 11, 2023

Subject:

Update on U-Pass and Durham Region Transit Service to Post-Secondary Campuses in Durham

Recommendation:

That Report #2023-DRT-02 be received for information.

Report:

1. Purpose

1.1 This report provides an update on Durham Region Transit's (DRT) U-Pass program, and the current transit service available to individuals travelling to post-secondary campuses within Durham.

2. Background

2.1 Since 2014, DRT has evolved from the circuitous, radial, and one-way loop routes that once dominated local municipal transit networks. The previous networks were oriented around traditional destinations generally within a local municipality. Today, and consistent with industry best practices, DRT plans and operates a predominately grid network. The backbone of the network are several high frequency routes that operate north to south or east to west. A grid network provides the ability to run higher frequency at a lower cost by reducing the total number of routes and minimizing transfer and travel time between destinations within Durham Region.

2.2 In alignment with the DRT Route Ahead 2022-2025 Strategic Plan, one of DRT's objectives is to operate a frequent, reliable, and sustainable service designed to

the needs of all customers and potential riders. DRT made a series of service enhancements throughout 2021 and 2022 to align to this objective.

- a. 920: New route connecting Scarborough City Centre, TTC Line 3 McCowan Station, with Durham Region (north Oshawa campus), increased to operate every 15 minutes in Fall 2022
 - b. 917: New east-west route connecting Pickering Parkway Terminal, Ajax Station, Whitby Station, Durham College Whitby Campus, and Oshawa Centre Terminal
 - c. PULSE 901B: Extension to Oshawa Centre Terminal, offering more frequent travel to Oshawa Centre all day, increased to a combined 10-minute frequency between downtown Oshawa and north Oshawa campus in June 2022
 - d. 902: extended to Bowmanville, offering direct east-west connection
 - e. 905: New route offering more direct travel between Whitby Station and north Oshawa Campus, and consistent travel north to Port Perry and Uxbridge
 - f. Urban routes operate every 30 minutes or better, 7 days per week with On Demand operating at all other times of day (24-hour service)
- 2.3 DRT's U-Pass (or Universal Pass) program was established with Durham College and Ontario Tech University (then the University of Ontario Institute of Technology) in 2006. The Trent University Greater Toronto Area Campus formally joined the DRT U-Pass agreement in 2017.
- 2.4 Universal pass programs rely on the mandatory fare charge being applied to the entire student population as the guaranteed revenue allows U-Pass prices to be set lower than the amount students would otherwise pay for monthly passes for the same period.
- 2.5 U-Pass programs provide multiple benefits to all parties.
- a. Consistent revenue for agencies to support better planning and forecasting
 - b. Unlimited travel for students, for school, work, and social occasions
 - c. More affordable housing options for students to live further from campus
 - d. Reduced traffic congestion in and around campuses and avoidance of car parking requirements by post-secondary institutions
 - e. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions from student transportation
- 2.6 Due to uncertainties with the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on educational programming and transit ridership, the U-Pass agreement has been subject to

one-year extensions with annual fee increases of approximately 1.9 per cent over the past three years. The current agreement expires as of August 31, 2023.

3. Service to Post-Secondary Campuses

- 3.1 It has been reported that while U-Pass rates have continued to increase, DRT transit reductions because of COVID-19 have stayed in effect despite the return of most students to Ontario Tech at the north Oshawa campus. In fact, starting January 2023, more residents have more transit access to the north Oshawa campus than ever before. The DRT network has evolved since 2019 in response to changing travel patterns and demands across the network, resulting in improved access for residents travelling to post-secondary campuses. Attachment #1 summarizes the evolution of the transit network serving the north Oshawa campus since 2019.
- 3.2 Some customers now transfer onto another route, such as PULSE 901, to access the north Oshawa campus. During peak periods at Taunton Road there is a PULSE 901 every 10 minutes. Customers travelling across Simcoe Street on Taunton Road on the 915 between the Harmony Terminal and Ajax Station, benefit from a 15-minute reduction in travel time as their journey is now faster and more direct. On an average weekday there has been a 460 per cent increase in the number of customers crossing Simcoe Street; approximately 585 customers every weekday in Fall 2022 compared to 105 for the same period in 2019.
- 3.3 Attachment #2 demonstrates regional coverage of transit routes serving post-secondary institutions in Fall 2022. Routes indicated in green do not require transfers and connect to major destinations including downtown Oshawa, Harmony Terminal, GO rail stations, TTC Line 3 McCowan Station, Uxbridge, Port Perry, and others. Routes in grey are available via a quick transfer between routes.
- 3.4 Table 1 demonstrates the number of additional Durham residents with improved access to post-secondary campuses throughout Durham Region since 2019. Approximately 90,000 additional residents can now access the north Oshawa campus with a direct ride on one bus compared to the 2019 network. Approximately 221,000 additional residents can access the north Oshawa campus with one transfer or less.

Table 1: Resident access to post-secondary institutions using DRT

Campus	Residents with direct access (one bus ride)			Residents with access via one or two bus rides (one transfer or less)		
	2019	2022	Change	2019	2022	Change
North Oshawa Campus (Durham College North Campus/Ontario Tech U)	179,446	269,742	50%	246,594	467,945	90%
Trent University Durham GTA	82,259	163,239	98%	470,411	548,983	17%
Durham College Whitby Campus	153,826	240,775	57%	413,772	548,983	33%
Total	415,531	673,756	62%	1,130,777	1,565,911	38%

*Note: Based on 2016 population data, does not account for population change.
Assumptions made as to distribution of dwellings within population area.*

- 3.5 Table 2 compares the number of DRT trips serving each post-secondary campus in 2019 and January 2023. The number of trips serving the north Oshawa campus has increased by 52%, largely benefiting from increased service on PULSE 901, 905, and 15 minute all-day service on the 920.

The number of trips serving the Durham College Whitby Campus has increased by 19 per cent, benefiting from increased service on 905 that provides a one bus ride to north Oshawa Campus and Whitby GO Station.

The number of trips serving the Trent University campus has decreased by 7 per cent. The 910 has not been reinstated due to low ridership and lack of development on Thornton between Highway 2 and Taunton Road. However, customers continue to have access to a new and expanded network. Customers travelling to the Trent University campus have access to a robust network including the PULSE 900 on Highway 2 and 405 that connects to the Oshawa Centre and other DRT routes.

Table 2: Number of trips serving post-secondary institutions

Campus	Fall 2019		Jan 2023		Change (%)
	North/East	South/West	North/East	South/West	
DC North Campus / Ontario Tech U	298 trips	425 trips	457 trips	645 trips	52%
DC Whitby Campus	81 trips	83 Trips	97 trips	98 trips	19%
	305 – 40 trips	305 – 39 trips	917 – 42 trips	917 – 42 trips	
	910 – 41 trips	910 – 44 trips	905 – 55 trips	905 – 56 trips	
Trent U – Durham GTA	141	143	132	132	-7%
	900 – 100 trips	900 – 99 trips	900 – 87 trips	900 – 89 trips	
	910 – 41 trips	910 – 44 trips	N1 – 12 trips	N1 – 11 trips	
			405 – 33 trips	405 – 32 trips	

4. The DRT transit network evolved during the pandemic in response to changing U-Pass Revenue and Value

- 4.1 In 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, DRT realized its highest ever ridership with more than 11.1 million riders. U-Pass ridership accounted for 26 per cent of total DRT ridership that year. Total U-Pass revenues in 2019 were \$6.6 million accounting for 23 per cent of total fare revenues of \$28.4 million. Based on the operating budget of \$89.4 million, the U-Pass accounted for 7.4 per cent of total operating contributions in 2019.
- 4.2 The U-pass remains DRT's best value fare product. As a universal pass product all full-time students pay an ancillary transit pass fee as part of their tuition each semester. Through the U-Pass, students have access to unlimited travel on all DRT services throughout the four month semester.
- 4.3 DRT is only able to offer the U-Pass at its low price point because of the universal nature of the arrangement with the post-secondary institutions. Based on a survey of post-secondary students in 2018 (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic), DRT estimated that approximately two thirds of post-secondary students were making use of the U-Pass for travel at some point during the semester. The conservative estimate for the percentage of students traveling with their U-Pass for the Fall

2022, has increased to approximately 50 per cent, a growth rate that is consistent with overall pandemic-related transit ridership recovery trends.

- 4.4 The current U-Pass rate for the 2022-23 academic year is \$147.25 per four-month semester. This is equivalent to a monthly pass rate of \$36.81, a 69 per cent discount on the standard adult monthly pass cost of \$117.00. It is also nearly \$10.00 less per month than DRT's \$46.00 Transit Assistance Program monthly pass available to social assistance clients receiving Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program benefits. It takes only 12 trips (or 6 round trips) a month at the regular PRESTO fare of \$3.25 for the U-Pass to pay for itself.

Over the 2022 academic year including Fall and Winter semesters, a full-time student will pay \$294.50 for eight months of unlimited travel on DRT. Under the U-Pass program students save more than \$640.00 compared to a standard adult monthly pass, and more than \$310.00 compared to DRT's lowest priced youth monthly pass (Y10) available to students aged 13 to 19 years. A summary of the cost and discount rate of various DRT pass products is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 – Summary of DRT Pass Product Discount Rates

Pass Product	Cost Per Month (or equivalent)	Cost Per Four Months	Discount Rate from Adult Pass	Total Four Month Savings
Adult	\$117.00	\$468.00	-	-
Youth	\$93.50	\$374.00	20 per cent	\$94.00
Youth 10-month loyalty pass (Y10)*	\$76.05	\$304.20	35 per cent	\$163.80
Senior	\$46.00	\$184.00	61 per cent	\$284.00
Transit Assistance Program (TAP)	\$46.00	\$184.00	61 per cent	\$284.00
U-Pass	\$36.81	\$147.25	69 per cent	\$320.75

*Requires purchase every month of the school year for discount rate.

- 4.5 During the summer of 2022 DRT surveyed 14 comparable transit agencies across Ontario and Canada for information on their U-Pass rates. Agencies reported monthly equivalent U-Pass rates of \$12.82 to \$37.50 compared to their standard monthly pass rates between \$73.50 and \$106.00. These represent a range of monthly equivalent discount rates of 53 per cent to 83 per cent (compared to DRT's discount rate of 69 per cent as shown in Table 1).
- 4.6 The survey also demonstrated that the DRT monthly U-Pass cost per revenue vehicle hour is 33 per cent lower than the average of the responding agencies (\$0.0008 compared to an average of \$0.0012).
5. **Follow-up to Ontario Tech Student Union delegation, December 8, 2022**
- 5.1 The Ontario Tech Student Union delegated at the December 2022 Transit Executive Committee (TEC) meeting where they shared information and recommendations arising from their internal student transit survey.
- 5.2 The recommendation to introduce frequent, express routes between residential areas and north Oshawa campus is inconsistent with established transit planning and design practices. Introducing new routes that duplicate service on the existing network would be highly inefficient. Advancing the overall transit network through increasing investment will benefit all residents and customers by providing access to a more frequent, reliable transit network.
- 5.3 The recommendation to increase public transportation services in municipalities with less transit availability to discourage single-occupancy commutes is consistent and supports the recommendation in the Ridership growth through accelerated investment in revenue service report (2021-DRT-32). To reach the transit modal shift of the Transportation Master Plan by 2031, DRT requires significant annual operating and capital investments.
- 5.4 The delegation also recommended that equitable access be provided to transit services across Durham Region. Since September 2020 and the launch of the enhanced On Demand service, all Durham residents have access to public transit services regardless of where they work, live or are travelling with the Region all at the same fares. Within urban areas of the Region, residents can now access DRT services 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Services within rural areas of the region were also expanded to start earlier and end later. DRT service levels are based on the established [DRT service guidelines](#). These service guidelines support DRT to plan and deliver services within available funding.

5.5 The delegation also commented on the January 2023 service changes. During their verbal update, the General Manager highlighted that DRT was implementing selective service adjustments in January to address reliability challenges experienced during the fall. DRT has reallocated revenue service hours to routes that require more running time to maintain reliability while ensuring capacity to meet ridership demand. For example, the frequency of PULSE 900 trips between Pickering and Scarborough will be reduced from 20 minute to 30 minutes. This revenue service time will be added to trips on corridors that have experienced longer travel times due to recent increases in traffic delays on some main corridors. DRT will also expand the scheduled service network, including extension of the 112 to Seaton and the 103 to the Finch and Altona area, the 502 in Bowmanville, and additional trips on the 905, PULSE 916, and 917.

6. Relationship to Strategic Plan

6.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:

a. Environmental Sustainability

- Goal 1.4 - Demonstrate leadership in sustainability and addressing climate change

b. Economic Prosperity

- Goal 3.4 - Capitalize on Durham's strengths in key economic sectors to attract high-quality jobs

c. Service Excellence

- Goal 5.1 - Optimize resources and partnerships to deliver exceptional quality services and value

7. Next Steps

7.1 As part of the 2023 Budget and Business Plan process, DRT will be bringing forward recommendations to enhance the overall transit network, and the extension of the U-Pass agreement.

7.2 DRT continues to work with the post-secondary institutions in support of the U-Pass arrangement and to discuss emerging issues. DRT will ensure that opportunities continue to be made available to post-secondary students and their

student associations to provide feedback on transit services within Durham consistent with our commitment to engage with all stakeholders.

8. Attachments

Attachment #1: Transition of DRT network serving north Oshawa campus since 2019

Attachment #2: Transit routes serving post secondary campuses in Fall 2022

Respectfully submitted,

Original Signed by:

Bill Holmes
General Manager, DRT

Recommended for Presentation to Committee

Original Signed by:

Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment #1: Transition of DRT network serving north Oshawa campus since 2019

2019 Network	2023 Network
310	<p>The 310 and 304 were merged into a single route, the 304, in September 2019</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provides another direct link between Whitby Station and North Campus. ○ Merging with the 304 provided a strong anchor at Whitby Station and the ability to serve additional destinations in Whitby without a transfer. <p>As part of The Route Ahead strategy, the 304 segment to north Oshawa campus was merged with the 302 in 2020. This change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provides more two-way service in Brooklin, allowing for better intra-Brooklin trips. ○ Provides more Brooklin residents with a one seat ride between Brooklin and north Oshawa campus.
401	<p>Rebranded as PULSE 901.</p> <p>More service than pre pandemic to and from north Oshawa campus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Weekdays: 216 trips a day in Sept 2022 compared to 173 trips in Sept 2019. ○ Similar daytime service levels in 2022 compared to 2019. ○ PULSE 901 provides additional destinations north to Windfields Farm and south to the Oshawa Centre Terminal. ○ New overnight service, N2, with 35 overnight trips between Lakeview, downtown Oshawa, the north Oshawa Campus, and Winfields Farm.
417	<p>The new 905 and 920 provide service on the Britannia and Conlin Road corridors, east of Simcoe Street.</p> <p>More service operates on the Conlin corridor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Weekdays: From morning to evening, service operates every 15 minutes on route 920, compared to every 30 minutes on the former route 417. Additional trips operate on and near the corridor via the 905, providing additional options.

2019 Network	2023 Network
910	<p>Service now provided by the 917 to Durham College Whitby Campus and the 405 to Trent University – Durham.</p> <p>The 917 operates from the Pickering Parkway Terminal to the Oshawa Centre Terminal, providing a more direct service to customers accessing the Durham College Whitby Campus. Similar weekday service levels, with service every 15 – 30 minutes during peak travel times, and every 30 minutes off peak. Service starts earlier and ends later.</p> <p>Saturday service starts earlier and ends later.</p> <p>Sunday service is more frequent on the 917, every 30 minutes, instead of the hourly service provided on the 910. Service starts earlier and ends later.</p> <p>Customers travelling between Durham College Whitby Campus and north Oshawa campus can transfer at Oshawa Centre to continue to and from the north Oshawa, Campus.</p> <p>Customers travelling between Whitby Station and north Oshawa campus travel direct via the 905.</p> <p>In addition to PULSE 900, the 405 provides service on Thornton at Trent University – Durham, and connects the Oshawa Centre Terminal to the Harmony Terminal. The 405 provides similar levels of service to the previous 910 and connects more Durham residents to Trent than the 910.</p>
915	<p>Direct service to and from north Oshawa Campus replaced by the 905 and 920, as part of The Route Ahead.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reduces the need to transfer between routes for customers traveling from the Highway 2 corridor west of Westney Road, and expands service between north Oshawa Campus and McCowan Station in Scarborough. ○ Customers on Taunton between Garrard and Simcoe can access the 905 for direct travel to and from North Campus.

2019 Network	2023 Network
950	<p>Replaced by the 905, and provides a direct link to the Lakeshore GO Train line at Whitby Station, as recommended through the Rural Review action plan.</p> <p>As part of The Route Ahead network, the 950 was merged into the 905, to provide a link to the Lakeshore GO Train line at Whitby Station and residents or visitors with improved transit access to more points in the southern and northern municipalities.</p> <p>Operates to and from Port Perry with terminus in Uxbridge, with similar weekday service and more weekend service compared to the pre pandemic service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Weekdays: Same number of trips as September 2019. ○ Saturdays: 92 per cent more trips than September 2019. ○ Sundays: 80 per cent more trips than September 2019.
Rural areas of Region	<p>On Demand provides access to all addresses in the rural areas of the Region, connecting to scheduled routes such as 902 in Bowmanville, and 905 in Uxbridge and Port Perry.</p>

Attachment #2: Transit routes serving post secondary campuses in Fall 2022

