

RE: Durham Region Transit Executive Committee Report #2024-DRT-12, U-Pass  
Negotiation Framework

To Durham Region Transit Executive Committee Commissioners,

I wanted to provide my input regarding the U-Pass framework. In Peterborough, I was a student at Trent University Peterborough for the last four years and benefited from the U-Pass in Peterborough. Being a student I have insight into how students feel about universal transit passes and how best to move forward that is fair to everyone.

The current U-Passes at Durham College, Ontario Tech, and Trent Durham provide an amazing deal on transit passes for students as stated in the staff report. Important to note **the U-Pass is mandatory for full-time students with no opt-out provision**. This means that all students must pay even if they do not regularly use transit. I think this is a good thing – it allows for lower fees for all students, encourages students to use transit, and can even provide those who regularly drive a way home from a night out. However, an implication for negotiations is that students might not accept a sudden increase in the fee, especially those who do not regularly use the pass. You have to convince not only transit riders but also students who don't use the service. A key question would be what percentage of students currently use the U-Pass to better understand the makeup of students who will be voting in a possible student referendum.

Next, I want to turn to Table 1, the referendum thresholds. The threshold for Durham College is too low at 2% as that will not even cover inflation these days. **Durham Region Transit should make agreements with Durham College and Ontario Tech conditional on the referendum threshold being at least a 5% increase**. This should be agreeable to everyone and be able to cover inflation under normal circumstances. At Trent University Peterborough a referendum was passed this year to have the transit fee be increased by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) instead of a maximum of 3% annually. The vote was close at 52% in support, highlighting how students are not too keen on increased fees.

Looking now at student support, DRT may have difficulty with any referendums that may be required to implement these agreements. Despite the wonderful improvements that the staff report highlights, students likely still hold negative opinions about DRT due to crowding, unreliability, and route changes. Thinking back to the delegations made to the Transit Executive Committee by representatives from the Ontario Tech Student Union. **It will be critical that DRT engage with students at all three campuses in advance of any referendum**. Grand River Transit in Kitchener, Waterloo, and Cambridge seemingly made a wonderful effort to engage with students at various institutions when there was a referendum, and I would encourage DRT to reach out to see what worked well there.

**One idea that could gather more support for the U-Pass is allowing students to use their U-Pass in the summertime, even if they are not taking summer courses**. There is variation between universities, but some charge for the whole year and some charge by

term. **This could take the form of charging by the year instead of term or having an optional summer extension for those not in summer courses, possibly even at an increased fee (but still discounted).** This could be an idea to take to students to determine support and add some additional benefit to their U-Pass as a concession to increasing the fees.

One piece of information from the report that was missing was what other U-Pass frameworks in Ontario cost and how they work (opt-in provisions, coverage, etc.). This will be key as student unions will look to get similar deals that are in other municipalities. Here are some I was able to quickly gather.

<b>University</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Cost as Charged</b>	<b>Cost/Semester</b>	<b>Opt-Out?</b>
Ontario Tech	Oshawa	\$150/term	\$150	No
Trent University (UG)	Peterborough	\$324.26/year	\$108.09	No
U Waterloo	Waterloo	\$118.97/term	\$118.97	Limited
McMaster (UG)	Hamilton	\$241.79/year	\$80.60	No
Carleton	Ottawa	\$223.48/term	\$223.48	Limited
Queen's	Kingston	\$122/year	\$40.67	No
Western (UG)	London	\$288.25/year?	\$96.08	No

Fees for the 2023-2024 Academic Year.

UG = Undergraduate

Finally, it would be greatly helpful for the U-Passes to be a Presto Mobile Wallet Solution as the E-Ticket Solution requires scanning a QR code to the Presto reading instead of simply tapping, adding additional time and frustration for all.

There is a benefit for both DRT and the students to the U-Pass agreement and this should be emphasized. I strongly support DRT staff negotiating with the student unions to have a fair deal for DRT, students, and transit riders. Recommendation C means that DRT is serious about wanting additional money and that students know the pass will go away if increases are not supported.

I thank the DRT staff for their work.

Kind regards,

Noah Edwards

Oshawa Resident