

COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

*For consideration at the Standing Committee on City Finance and Services meeting on
December 10, 2025*

7. Supporting a Fare-Free Transit Route Pilot in Vancouver

Submitted by: Councillor Orr

WHEREAS

1. The cost of transit fares can pose a barrier to mobility for low-income individuals, seniors, and families in Vancouver, limiting their access to employment, education, health care, and other essential services;
2. In January 2019, Vancouver City Council endorsed the #AllOnBoard campaign, which urged TransLink to implement free transit for youth and a sliding-scale fare system for low-income residents, underscoring the City's commitment to improving transit affordability and equity;
3. Improving transit affordability and access supports the City's climate and transportation goals by encouraging a shift from private vehicles to public transit, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions and traffic congestion;
4. New York City ran a [successful free transit pilot](#) from September of 2023 until September of 2024, targeting five bus routes, one in each borough. The results of the pilot were very positive:
 - a. A 30 percent increase in ridership on weekdays and 38 percent on weekends;
 - b. Assaults on bus operators dropped by 38.9 percent;
 - c. 11% of new riders transitioned from car or taxi to public transit;
 - d. The largest increase in new riders was from individuals earning less than \$28,000;
5. Fare-free pilots based on route have been implemented in [Kansas City, MO](#), and [Boston, MA](#), and fare-free bus systems have been successfully implemented in [Olympia, WA](#), [Albuquerque, NM](#), Richmond, VA, [Orangeville, ON](#), [Luxembourg](#), and elsewhere;
6. Several major bus routes in Vancouver, including Route 3 (Main Street), Route 9 (Broadway), Route 20 (Victoria Drive), and Route 41 (41st Avenue), are well-used, serve diverse communities (including many lower-income neighborhoods), and are iconic parts of the transit network. These routes' popularity and citywide significance make them strong candidates for a high-visibility fare-free transit pilot that could maximize public awareness and ridership impact; and

7. TransLink (the regional transportation authority) is responsible for transit operations and fare policy in Metro Vancouver, and any fare-free transit initiative within the city will require collaboration with TransLink to design and implement the pilot effectively.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Vancouver City Council direct staff to seek to work with TransLink to identify and evaluate options for implementing a one year fare-free transit pilot on two or three bus routes or corridors across the City of Vancouver, including consideration of, but not limited to, Route 5 (Robson Street), Route 9 (Broadway), Route 20 (Victoria Drive), and Route 41 (41st Avenue).
- B. THAT in evaluating potential routes for the fare-free pilot, staff consider criteria aimed at maximizing public benefit and feasibility, including:
 1. Equity Impact - prioritizing routes that would provide the greatest benefit to lower-income residents, seniors, and families by improving access to affordable transportation in their daily lives;
 2. Symbolic and Popular Routes - focusing on routes that are iconic or heavily used in Vancouver's transit network (such as the 5, the 20, the 9, and the 41) in order to generate broad public interest, support, and awareness of the pilot;
 3. Capacity and Congestion Relief - identification of routes that have available unused capacity even during peak hours, and proposals for routes that have the potential to divert some riders from overcrowded routes into alternatives, thereby relieving peak-time congestion;
 4. Geographic distribution - the recommendation of complimentary routes that service different areas of the city, sharing the benefits of fare-free transit.
- C. THAT Council directs staff to request from TransLink cost estimates for each fare-free pilot scenario identified, including the expected lost fare revenue and any additional operating or administrative costs, in order to understand the financial implications of implementing a fare-free route or corridor on a pilot basis.
- D. THAT staff be directed to inquire with TransLink whether the agency would be willing to participate in a cost-sharing arrangement to support any of the proposed fare-free pilot routes or corridors, such as through a contribution of transit operating funds or other resources, and to incorporate TransLink's position on fare-free transit routes and potential cost-sharing in the analysis and options presented.
- E. THAT Council request that the Mayor write a letter to the Province to strongly advocate for a partnership to advance a temporary pilot program for fare-free transit routes across Vancouver and the Lower Mainland.

- F. THAT staff report back to Council with the results of the above evaluation and collaboration, including options for recommended route(s) for the fare-free transit pilot, the estimated revenue loss and other costs associated with each option, and any opportunities for partnership or funding support from TransLink by Q2 of 2026 in order for Council to consider next steps toward implementing the fare-free transit route pilot in Vancouver.

* * * * *