

Higher transit fares up for approval

By Brock Weir

Get set for a transit fare hike.

York Region is set to approve a new schedule of fees of just how much it will cost you for local York Region Transit and Viva Tickets on September 26.

If passed at the end of the month by Regional Council as it was last week, standard fares are expected to increase by 25 cents to \$4.00.

Express fares will rise to \$4.50, adult tickets to \$3.30, student tickets to \$2.50, senior and child tickets to \$2.00, and express tickets to \$3.80.

For those of you who plan ahead purchasing monthly transit passes, adult monthly passes will rise to \$132, while students will have to pay \$99, seniors and children \$60.50, and express users \$152.00.

The fare hikes were the subject of considerable debate as Regional Councillors, including Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, met last week as the Committee of the Whole for the first time since June. For Mayor Dawe, previous plans at Regional Council have made transit hikes inevitable.

?Council made a decision a number of years ago to increase our cost recovery,? said Mayor Dawe. ?Right now our total transit bill is \$190 million in York Region, of which we recover approximately \$83 million in transit fares. Right now, we're about a 60-40 split in terms of subsidizing. There has been a stated goal that we move towards 50 per cent [cost recovery] which will mean transit fares will go up.?

When policies are set, sometimes the immediate impacts are not clearly brought home, he added.

?There were discussions of if we are still in favour of putting fares up, or if we want to change our model,? he added. ?If we want to look at not raising transit fares, we have to get back and revisit our policy [but] there was no appetite on the part of the committee to go back and revisit that.?

If more people took York Region Transit, any gaps in cost recovery would obviously narrow. Getting people to get on board with that, however, is a big question that will need to be tackled in the future, added Mayor Dawe.

?It comes back to a generational shift,? he said. ?If you go back and look at things like seatbelts and blue box recycling, it was driven by the younger generation up. I think we need to look at encouraging more kids to get on the bus and that carries through. Certainly the Viva Next in the rapid transit corridor will make a substantial difference when that comes through.

?The local bus service is always a challenge and you can see that when you have a lineup of cars outside the school and parents dropping their kids off.?