

Near \$17 million investment will address transit shortfalls due to COVID-19

Ridership on York Region Transit has taken a hit due to the global pandemic, but, on Friday, the Province announced an investment of nearly \$17 million to address the financial impacts being faced by local transit systems.

\$16.7 million will be coming to York Region to help municipalities continue to deliver critical transit services.

During the peak of the pandemic, ridership dropped up to 90 per cent of normal levels for some of Ontario's transit systems, which resulted in significant financial impacts for municipalities, said the Province.

Added Caroline Mulroney, Minister of Transportation: We heard from municipalities and we are responding to their need for more support as COVID-19 continues to result in lost revenue and additional cost for transit systems. Transit operators have done an incredible job keeping transit operating during this challenging time and this support will help ensure there is reliable transportation [so] people can get to work or pick up essential items.

The money is in addition to funding already provided under Ontario's Safe Start Agreement, which has tasked municipalities with working with the Province to explore options to ensure local transit is safe, sustainable, affordable and integrated both during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

To this end, the Province is allowing municipalities to use Safe Restart Agreement funding towards new initiatives to make it easier and more affordable to travel between different transit systems like adding capacity for on-demand micro transit and increasing fare and service integration across the Region.

Public transit is critical in helping ensure members of the community can get to where they need to go and in supporting York Region's economic recovery, said Newmarket-Aurora MPP Christine Elliott. This additional funding of over \$16 million will help York Region continue to provide safe and reliable public transit to members of our community now and in the future.

These sentiments were echoed by Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa.

The financial challenges of the pandemic have been difficult for every municipality, including York Region. I am very happy to hear our government is investing an additional \$16,719,831 to support public transit in our community during this difficult time. This is a very exciting announcement for the residents of my riding and all of York Region who depend on these critical services.

The funding, noted Regional Chair Wayne Emmerson, will be particularly important as the Region opens back up into the Red (Control) Zone.

As more businesses and public spaces begin to open across York Region, more residents will be turning to transit to safely travel to and from work and other destinations, he said. This funding will ensure safe and reliable transit options that support the economic vitality of our communities.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter