

RE: UBCM's free transit for youth

Free transit for youth sounds like a good idea in theory, but it may not be good in practice.

Public transit is not really free for anyone; someone has to pay for it.

In December 11, 1985, when the Expo Line was first opened to the public, it was only supposed to be free for the first eight days.

However, it was actually accessible for thousands of people, for decades after that, due to rampant fare evasion.

In January 2024, a BC Stats report confirmed that BC's annual population grew by 3%; the highest increase since 1974. (BC now has more than 5 million citizens.)

In July 2024, Translink announced that half of transit services will be cut, without a new funding model. (Translink is facing a funding gap of approx. \$600 million each year.)

Last week, at the #25 bus stop across the street from King Edward Skytrain station, I counted 40 people waiting for the bus, at 2:20 pm.

In August 2024, Translink announced that it was "cracking down" on fare evasion; whatever that means.

Last week, I saw two people squeeze between fare gates at Bridgeport Station, and no one stopped them.

The fact is that most people who take public transit now, do so because they can't afford to drive a car.

I agree with Dennis Marsden, a Coquitlam city councillor, who stated "not everybody needs it to be free. I would be more supportive of...some income test to it."

(Translink says that allowing youth to ride free, would cost \$30 million a year.)

Every time I take public transit, I see youth with large Starbucks in their hands; many of whom have manicured nails, and wear expensive sneakers.

I also see private school kids, over the age of 12, routinely get on the bus, without attempting to pay their transit fare (all over Metro Vancouver.)

I very much doubt that their McJobs, (if they have one), have paid for such luxuries, which I can't afford. (As a transit user in my 60's, I budget for transit fare, once or twice a week.)

Age shouldn't be used as a means to determine free services; proof of income should. (Delta offers free recreation to youth, regardless of income, but has raised rates for its older citizens. The result? Some people can no longer afford, to participate in recreation services, in Delta.)

Sincerely,

A.S. Cameron