

Street Talk column January, 2006

On the Brink

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893 words (plus tables)

Affordable public transportation no longer a dream

Cathy hasn't been able to give back to her community by volunteering at a local agency.

Frank hasn't been able to find a job that will help him support his family.

Mary hasn't been able to visit her daughter and newborn grandson who live on the other side of Calgary.

What's keeping these Calgarians from realizing their dreams?

Affordable public transportation.

But beginning on January 2, 2006, for the first time Calgarians living on low incomes will be able to purchase a half-price monthly transit pass.

The City of Calgary has become the first municipality in Alberta to implement a Low-Income Transit Pass Program, allowing thousands of Calgarians to participate in the economic, social and family life of their community.

Why is this program so important? Affordable public transportation increases self-sufficiency and improves lives by facilitating access to employment and training opportunities, volunteer work, medical appointments, recreational activities and community services. Individuals who are able to work because they have access to affordable transportation give back to the community through increased purchases of goods and services, payment of income tax, and reduced dependence on social services. Discounted transit passes also benefit businesses and other employers by increasing the labour pool and reducing turnover.

Murray Crosby is a charming, personable man in his 50's. He lives with a developmental disability and struggles to make ends meet on the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program.

Purchasing a \$70 monthly transit pass was never an option for Murray. Says Murray, "\$70 is a lot of groceries, and as much as I need to get around, I also need to eat."

For a person living on AISH, paying the full fare of \$70 is equivalent to the average Calgarian paying \$225 month for a transit pass (based on the 2003 average Calgarian income of \$36,300). Would you pay \$225 to ride the bus or C-Train?

Thanks to the Low-Income Transit Pass Program, Murray will no longer have to worry about spending the last week of every month trapped in his home because he can't afford to take the bus, Kathy will be able to volunteer in her community, Frank will be able to get a job and Mary will be able to visit her new grandson. With the more affordable Low Income Transit Pass, they will have a newfound freedom and independence they never dreamed possible.

The low income transit pass program began for AISH recipients on August 1, 2005, and so far over 2,000 people living on AISH have purchased \$35 passes. That's 2,000 Calgarians better able to participate in our community thanks to The City of Calgary's leadership and support. It is expected that thousands more will use the program now that it has been expanded to other people living on low incomes.

To qualify for the program, applicants must be 18 years of age or older and a resident of Calgary for the past 12 months. Applicants must also produce photo identification and last year's tax assessment showing total single or family income of less than 75% of Statistics Canada's 2004 low income cutoff (see table for financial eligibility).

Size of Family Unit	In order to qualify for the low income pass, total before tax (gross) income cannot exceed the following amounts
1 person	\$ 15,253
2 persons	\$ 18,999
3 persons	\$ 23,345
4 persons	\$ 28,343
5 persons	\$ 32,147
6 persons	\$ 36,256
7 or more persons	\$ 40,366

So if you are a mother with two dependant children, you will be able to purchase the \$35 pass if you had a 2004 before-tax income of less than \$23,345.

Low income Calgarians interested in applying for the pass should look at Line 150 of their Revenue Canada Notice of Assessment form, which will show the total before-tax income. Tax returns will not be accepted as proof of income. If you do not have your Notice of Assessment you can call Revenue Canada at 1-800-959-8281.

STEP 1:

To find out how to get a Low-Income Transit Pass Program application form, call Calgary Transit at 262-1000 or visit www.calgarytransit.com

STEP 2:

The completed application form, original Notice of Assessment, and photo identification must be presented in person by the applicant, legal guardian or trustee to:

Calgary Housing Company
 1701 Centre Street NW
 8:00 am – 4:30 pm Monday to Friday

Applications will not be processed on the spot, and The City of Calgary reports that notification of approval or denial into the Low-Income Transit Pass Program will be mailed approximately two to three weeks after the application is submitted.

STEP 3:

Once approval is received, bring your photo identification to one of the designated Low-Income Transit Pass sales locations, listed in the table below. Low-income transit passes are not available for purchase at any other locations.

An applicant may designate a pre-approved delegate (i.e. family member) to purchase a pass on their behalf. The delegate's name must be provided during the application process. Only the applicant or pre-approved delegates may purchase the passes.

Participating Locations	Cashier Hours of Operation	Payment Types Accepted
Calgary Transit Customer Service Centre 224 – 7 Avenue SW	10:00 am – 5:30 pm Monday to Friday	Cash, credit card or debit card
City Cashiers 3rd Floor, Municipal Building 800 Macleod Trail SE	8:00 am – 4:30 pm Monday to Friday	Cash or debit card
Village Square Leisure Centre 2623 56 Street NE	6:00 am – 9:30 pm Monday to Friday 8:00 am – 9:30 pm Saturday 8:00 am – 5:30 pm Sunday 11:00 am – 4:30 pm Statutory Holidays	Cash, credit card or debit card
Southland Leisure Centre 2000 Southland Drive SW	5:30 am – 9:30 pm Monday to Friday 7:30 am – 9:30 pm Saturday 7:30 am – 5:30 pm Sunday 11:00 am – 4:30 pm Statutory Holidays	Cash, credit card or debit card

STEP 4:

The City of Calgary hopes that Calgarians living on low incomes will use the Low-Income Transit Pass Program to fully participate in all the wonderful opportunities our city has to offer. Social service agencies hope that the Province of Alberta will offer to support the program here in Calgary and across Alberta in the seven other municipalities with public transit systems.

Share your story! Please tell us how the Low Income Transit Pass program will make a difference to your life. For example, by getting around Calgary more easily will you be able to find a job, take your children to activities or volunteer in your community? Email your story to info@vibrantcalgary.com

Ramona Johnston is Manager of Vibrant Communities Calgary, a local non-profit poverty-reduction organization whose Fair Fares Action Team worked with The City of Calgary to develop the Low-Income Transit Pass Program.



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