



## MEETING BRIEFING NOTE

**DATE:** April 2, 2021

**PREPARED FOR:** Honourable George Heyman, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy  
Honourable Rob Fleming, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure

**ISSUE:** U-Pass BC Program

**PURPOSE:** Public post-secondary students in Metro Vancouver are advocating for free transit for the fall and winter semesters (September 2021 through April 2022).

**MEETING:** Lori MacDonald, Executive Director, Student Union, Emily Carr University of Art + Design, with Metro Vancouver Post Secondary Student Caucus representatives (Full list in Attachment 4) on April 7, 2021

### PROPOSED KEY MESSAGES

- **The Province has committed to fund the U-Pass BC program for five years—until April 30, 2025. This long-term commitment is an extraordinary undertaking by the Province.**
- **When COVID-19 disrupted the traditional delivery of post-secondary education, all parties worked to find a solution within the current U-Pass BC framework to accommodate the changed circumstances for students.**
- **Each student association and post-secondary institution has implemented opt-in and opt-out criteria with the goal of best accommodating their student populations.**
- **The student recommendations depart from the underlying principles, terms and conditions of the U-Pass BC Program. If implemented, students would not be a contributing partner to the program,**

### PAST INTERACTIONS:

- *Students have met with past Ministers of Advanced Education and Skills Training and Transportation and Infrastructure regarding the U-Pass BC program.*
- *Leading up to the current five-year U-Pass BC agreement, students met with representatives from the Premier's office.*

### BACKGROUND:

The U-Pass BC program is founded on all ten public post-secondary institutions in Metro Vancouver and their student associations collectively agreeing on the terms and conditions and paying the same mandatory monthly fee for U-Pass BC. Student associations hold referenda to vote on the mandatory fee which provides unlimited access to the TransLink system. TransLink has 20 agreements regarding the U-Pass program—one with the Province, one with each of the student associations and one with each of the institutions.

With a mandatory fee, it is understood that some students will pay the fee and choose not to use the transit pass.

In spring 2020, when campuses were closed and delivery of courses went on-line, all parties worked to find a solution that could be quickly implemented and recognized the lower demand for transit by post-secondary students. Each institution implemented opt in / opt out criteria that provided more flexibility, and in many cases, allowed for students who were not residing in Metro Vancouver, or not taking any in-person classes,

The students have revised their December 2020 request (Attachment 2) to waive the mandatory monthly U-Pass fee for the Spring and Summer semesters, while still providing students with access to a U-Pass Compass Card. The new request, received March 31, asks that the students' monthly U-Pass BC fee for all eligible students for the fall and winter 2021/22 semesters be waived (Attachment 3). Students estimate their contribution at \$24 million per semester. This would result in more than 135,000 students being eligible - currently 94,000 are eligible.

The students have proposed that the Province apply Safe Restart funding to cover the student monthly fee for this period. They have also proposed that fees paid by students to date be applied to cover the \$24 million funding gap for the fall and winter semesters. The fees paid by students were contributed as per the student association and post-secondary institution's U-Pass BC Agreement with TransLink and are not at the discretion of the Province.





## Attachment 1: Program Chronology

U-Pass stands for Universal Pass, referring to unlimited access to TransLink's network and a common set of parameters for all participating student associations and institutions.

2003	Vancity was the sponsor of a U-Pass program for UBC and SFU contributing approximately \$300,000 per year.
2009	<p>Capilano University and Langara College join the Vancity U-Pass program.</p> <p>Students formed a consortium from ten public post-secondary institutions and student associations and lobbied the provincial government to support a U-Pass program.</p>
2010	<p>The Province agrees to financially support U-Pass BC through an agreement with TransLink. Students agree to hold referenda to confirm acceptance of a mandatory monthly U-Pass BC fee—the same fee (\$31/month) across all ten participating institutions, regardless of the student population.</p> <p>Treasury Board approves up to \$12 million per year for three years for the U-Pass BC program.</p>
2013	Provincial funding was renewed for three years to April 2016.
2016	Provincial funding was extended for two years to April 2018.
2018	<p>Provincial funding was extended for 20 months to December 31, 2019. The student fee for this period was \$41/month. From 2010 through to December 2019, the Province contributed over \$85 million.</p> <p>BC Stats conducts a survey of students and graduate students to determine the perceptions of the U-Pass BC program and, in particular, whether the Program influenced the use of transit following graduation.</p>
2019	<p>Students lobby for a long-term agreement. Treasury Board approves a 5-year (64-month) agreement with TransLink valued at \$86.1 million. By the fifth year, the students' monthly fee will be \$46.</p> <p>Students hold referenda to vote on the term and mandatory fee structure. All student associations approve the new U-Pass BC program.</p>
2020	<p>January 1 the new 5-year U-Pass BC agreement comes into effect.</p> <p>April -- Student Associations and institutions decide to suspend the U-Pass BC program as of May 1 due to the pandemic closing campuses and courses being delivered on-line.</p>



	<p>September—Student Associations and Institutions agree to re-start the U-Pass BC program with modified student eligibility criteria. Each institution made a decision as to how to categorize a student taking on-line courses which then determined whether or not the student paid the mandatory monthly U-Pass BC fee.</p> <p>Over 94,000 students were eligible for U-Pass BC, compared to 138,000 in 2019. 37% of eligible students used their U-Pass BC in September and took 9.5 million journeys, compared to 23.9 million journeys in 2019.</p> <p>October – Journeys using U-Pass BC increased to 10 million from September. In October 2019, there were 25 million U-Pass BC journeys. The majority of journeys are one or two Zones.</p>
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in the program conditions.

#### Moving Forward: Re-adjusting for a Spring Semester with Potential Further Restrictions

A COVID-19 recovery plan relies heavily on students being able to access essential services like transit. Programs like the U-Pass BC generate huge numbers in ridership and it becomes clear that this program is going to be one of the major keys to a transit recovery in Metro Vancouver.

In September 2019, U-Pass BC ridership constituted 15.9% of the 23.9 million journeys taken with TransLink; in October 2019, this figure was 16.1% of 25 million journeys. This year, those figures have plunged to 5.5% of 9.5 million journeys and 6.2% of 10 million journeys, respectively. There is no reason to believe that the trends will have improved for November or December, given recent Provincial Health Orders and guidelines.

Left unchecked, these developments could easily impact public opinion among students about the desirability of the program, and would negatively affect the shared objectives of restoring TransLink ridership to pre-pandemic levels and promoting transit usage among students even after they have graduated.

#### Recommendation:

s.13

#### Opportunities:

The U-Pass BC Program should be considered, in our view, an essential component of the long-term recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. By once again getting the vast majority of post-secondary students to use transit on a regular basis and over several years, U-Pass BC will continue to create the next generation of full-fare paying transit users. Supporting students now with a fee subsidization for this program should help to avoid the potentially crippling effects of low transit usage in the region for decades to come.

We are aware of short-term funding support for public transit and hope this is an opportunity to relieve students of the extreme financial burdens they are facing, that have only been exacerbated by the lack of access to affordable or accessible transportation options during the Covid-19 pandemic.







\$19.6 million in revenue collection. These estimates are potentially generous as the months we don't have ridership data for were during the peak of the second wave and the introduction of more restrictive public health measures. We expect the summer 2021 semester to be similar, with a lower number of students assessed the fee due to typically lower summer enrolment.

Furthermore, temporary adjustments to the program has resulted in the total number of eligible students declining by 32% compared to last year. Finally, those students who are using the benefit are paying the same amount but taking, on average, half as many trips as they usually would. In sum, COVID-19 has destabilized many students' capacity to benefit from the U-Pass BC, which undermines the implicit trade-offs inherent in the program conditions and has the potential to create distrust in the program amongst our members moving forward.

### Moving Forward: Re-adjusting for an Academic Year with Potential Further Restrictions

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## Attachment 4: Student Caucus Representatives Meeting Attendees

As of April 1, 2021, list may change prior to April 7, 2021

U-Pass BC Metro Vancouver Students Associations

Wed, Apr. 7,

3:30-4:00pm

Elected Reps	Staff Resource
Samad Raza, U-Pass BC Advisory Committee Student Co-Chair	
Jacob Dorscht, Chairperson, Emily Carr Students' Union	Lori MacDonald, Executive Director, Emily Carr Students' Union
Grace Dupasquier, VP External, Capilano Students' Union	Kate Jarman, Director, Policy & Campaigns, Capilano Students' Union
Alireza Kamyabi, VP External, UBC Graduate Student Society	Natalie Cappe, External Policy Assistant
Claire McCallum, VP External, BCIT Student Association	Stewart McGillivray, Government Relations Strategist, BCIT Student Association
Matt McDonald, Director of External Relations & Mona Mehdizadeh, Director of Graduate Services, The Graduate Student Society at SFU	Pierre Cenerelli, Executive Director
	Michelle Lam, Multipass Program Coordinator, Kwantlen Student Association, Piper Greekas, Student Services Manager, Kwantlen Student Association
	Sydney Sullivan, Executive Director, Students' Union of Vancouver Community College





modifications to the criteria for “eligible students” to allow for greater flexibility (see Attachment for outcomes).

Each PSI and student association chose criteria that would best accommodate student populations. For example, Langara chose to opt-out all students enrolled in classes delivered on-line. UBC chose to charge the mandatory U-Pass BC fee to students whose classes would have been delivered on campuses but were moved on-line. This decision resulted in the majority of UBC students continuing to be assessed the U-Pass BC fee.

#### PAST INTERACTIONS:

- Student caucus, representing Metro Vancouver public post-secondary institution students, met with Ministers Heyman and Fleming on April 7, 2021.

#### DISCUSSION:

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#### GBA+ OR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS:

U-Pass BC is based on the principle of universality across ten public post-secondary institutions in Metro Vancouver. All Eligible Students have access to affordable transit at the same monthly fee.



