

#### 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,



to be exempted from the U-Pass program (and not pay the mandatory U-Pass fee). It is important to note that this meeting is with the Metro Vancouver Post Secondary Student Caucus, which is not the official representative body for students in negotiations for the UPass program. That body is the U-Pass BC Advisory Committee (UAC), which is a formal consortium that collectively makes decisions about the U-Pass BC program. The Metro Vancouver Post Secondary Student Caucus is independent of the UAC. However, the outcome of the April 7 meeting with the Ministers will be reported at the UAC April meeting.

#### **DISCUSSION:**

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 <u>all</u> 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.

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## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Over 64 months, beginning January 1, 2020 through April 30, 2025, the province committed up to \$86.1M to the U-Pass BC program. In Fiscal 2020/21, due to the 5-month suspension of the program, the Province will pay TransLink \$8.5M \$.16; \$.17 In Fiscal 2021/22, the Province's commitment to TransLink is \$15.8 million, assuming no suspensions of the program.

#### Attachments:

- 1. U-Pass BC Chronology
- 2. Original Student Caucus Request December 2020
- 3. Student Caucus Request March 31, 2021
- 4. Student Representatives Attendees

PREPARED BY:	REVIEWED BY:	DATE:
Linda Harmon, Director Transit Branch	Deborah Bowman, ADM, Transportation Policy & Programs Department	21-Apr-1
778 974 5313	Nancy Bain, Executive Financial Officer Finance and Management Services Department	-
	Vanessa Gedney on behalf of Kaye Krishna, Deputy Minister	21-Apr-2





# **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	Capilano University and Langara College join the Vancity U-Pass program.		
	Students formed a consortium from ten public post-secondary institutions and student associations and lobbied the provincial government to support a U-Pass program.		
2010	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.		
	Treasury Board approves up to \$12 million per year for three years for the U-Pass BC program.		
2013	Provincial funding was renewed for three years to April 2016.		
2016	Provincial funding was extended for two years to April 2018.		
2018	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.		
	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.		
2019	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.		
	Students hold referenda to vote on the term and mandatory fee structure. All student associations approve the new U-Pass BC program.		
2020	January 1 the new 5-year U-Pass BC agreement comes into effect.		
	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.		



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.

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.

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.



# Attachment 2: Initial Student Caucus Request December, 2020

U-PASS BC PROGRAM STATUS
December 14, 2020
REQUEST FOR IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION INTO U-PASS BC SPRING AND SUMMER 2021 SEMESTERS

Student Associations in Metro Vancouver have been working with the U-Pass BC partners: TransLink, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and postsecondary institutions in the region since March 2020 to respond to the challenges of program operations due to COVID-19.

Interim measures included refunds for the month of April 2020, a program suspension between May 2020 to August 31, 2020 and amended program eligibility for the Fall 2020 semester.

The key recommendation of Student Associations in June 2020 to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure was full subsidization of the program for one year with no fees charged to students in the region to access public transit. The second preferred option was the ability for students to access public transit with an opt-in option at a fee commensurate with the U-Pass BC rate and the third preferred option was for students to access the program with an opt-out model allowing for increased exemptions. Recognizing of the constraints of the program principles in adapting to the COVID-19 situation, a solution was arrived at through deliberations between the U-Pass BC Advisory Committee members, TransLink and Ministry staff, that allowed for a lower level of some flexibility with the option for program partners to select defined categories of students for participation. Partners were able to include only students with classes that have some campus access, or all students, whether they were studying entirely online due to the pandemic. Systems were implemented to exclude students living outside of the region.

Upon the receipt of usership data from TransLink for September and October 2020, it is evident that this model has not been an adequate solution for students.

Based on the report of U-Pass BC data provided by TransLink for October 2020, 39% of the 94,594 eligible students used the program. Using these numbers as an indication of usage for the semester results in estimated revenue collection of \$9.8 million<sub>1</sub> from students who, for reasons largely due to the pandemic, never used the benefit. Indeed, it appears that students in Metro Vancouver continue to provide the most guaranteed stream of revenue to TransLink.

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 substantially eroded most students' 161% of eligible students didn't use the program in October 2020, totalling 57,207 people (eligible students ordinarily pay \$42.50 per month, or \$170 for a four-month semester). capacity to benefit from the U-Pass BC; this undermines the implicit trade-offs inherent



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:

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#### 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.



# Attachment 3: Revised Student Caucus Request March 31, 2021

REQUEST FOR IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION INTO U-PASS BC FALL 2021 AND SPRING 2022 SEMESTERS

March 31, 2021 U-Pass BC Student Association Caucus

Recommendation:

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### Recent Challenges:

Student Associations in Metro Vancouver have been working with the U-Pass BC partners: TransLink, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and post-secondary institutions in the region since March 2020 to respond to the challenges of program operations due to COVID-19. Interim measures included a program suspension between May 2020 to August 31, 2020 and amended program eligibility options for the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters.

The key recommendation of Student Associations in June 2020 to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure was full subsidization of the program for one year and no fees charged to students in the region to access public transit.

The second preferred option was the ability for students to access public transit with an opt-in option at a fee commensurate with the U-Pass BC rate and the third preferred option was for students to access the program with an opt-out model allowing for increased exemptions.

Recognizing of the constraints of the program principles in adapting to the COVID-19 situation, a solution was arrived at through deliberations between the U-Pass BC Advisory Committee members, TransLink and Ministry staff, that allowed for a lower level of flexibility through the option for program partners to select defined categories of students for participation. Partners were able to include only students with classes that have some campus access, or all students, whether they were studying entirely online due to the pandemic. Systems were implemented to exclude students living outside of the region.

Upon the receipt of usage data during September and October 2020, it is evident that this model has not been an adequate solution for students. Additionally, since the TransLink system challenges, we have not had access to U-Pass BC ridership data for months after October 2020.

Based on the report of U-Pass BC data provided by TransLink for October 2020, 39% of the 94,594 eligible students used the program. Using these numbers as an indication of usage for the semester results in the estimated revenue collection of \$9.8 million from students who, for reasons largely due to the pandemic, never used the benefit. Indeed, it appears that students in Metro Vancouver continue to provide the most guaranteed stream of revenue to TransLink.

Applying these assumptions to the Spring 2021 semester and recognizing the lack of available data, it is possible to estimate that again, there was the collection of another \$9.8 million1 for a total of

<sup>1 61%</sup> of eligible students didn't use the program in October 2020, totalling 57,207 people (eligible students ordinarily pay \$42.50 per month, or \$170 for a four month semester).



\$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

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 subsequent months, given Provincial Health Orders and guidelines.

Left unchecked, these developments could easily impact student public opinion about the program's desirability, and would negatively affect the shared objectives of restoring TransLink ridership to prepandemic levels and promoting transit among students even after they've 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.



# **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	



#### INFORMATION BRIEFING NOTE

**DATE:** April 30, 2021

PREPARED FOR: Honourable George Heyman, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy

ISSUE: UBC Students - U-Pass BC

PURPOSE: Background on the student associations and institutions response to the need for U-Pass

BC during the pandemic. UBC Students have engaged the media regarding U-Pass BC.

#### SUMMARY:

 Affordable transit for students, even if they are not travelling to campus, is important in rebuilding ridership and economic recovery.

- Student associations at public post-secondary institutions (PSI) in Metro Vancouver are working through next steps with respect to the U-Pass BC program.
- The closure of campuses due to the pandemic has reduced transit use.
- Each student association and institution made independent decisions about modifying the student eligibility criteria for assessment of the mandatory monthly U-Pass BC fee.

## **BACKGROUND:**

On March 20, 2020 TransLink stopped collecting fares on buses and instituted rear-door loading in response to the pandemic. Fares for travel on Skytrain, SeaBus and Westcoast Express remained in place. Since students generally pay for U-Pass through tuition on a semester basis, TransLink offered refunds to students for the month of April.

As of May 1, 2020, through mutual agreement among the student associations, public post-secondary institutions (PSIs) and TransLink, the U-Pass BC program was suspended. The suspension lasted for 5 months.

In June, Graduate Student Societies and a few other students began asking for the U-Pass BC program to be re-instated to provide an affordable transportation option, regardless of whether or not the student was attending on-campus classes.

The U-Pass BC monthly rate for the next five years, which applies to all ten post-secondary institutions, was confirmed through student referenda in the fall of 2019, One of the stated principles which is included in the TransLink, PSI and student association agreement, as well as being part of the Province-TransLink U-Pass BC Contribution Agreement is:

"The Rates set forth in this Agreement for the U-Pass BC Program will be a mandatory assessed student fee payable by all U-Pass BC Students to ensure consistent application and availability of the U-Pass BC Program to students across Metro Vancouver and the participation of all or substantially all Eligible Students enrolled at the PSI."

Representatives of the student associations sent a letter on June 11, 2020, to Ministers Mark and Trevena outlining the challenges with the suspension of the U-Pass BC Program and the growing desire by some students to see the program re-instated. The program was then restarted as of September 1, 2020, with



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.



# FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

s.16; s.17

Table 1: Provincial payments to TransLink during 2020 program suspension.

s.16; s.17

## Attachments:

1. Variations in eligible students with modified criteria.

PREPARED BY:	REVIEWED BY:	DATE:
Linda Harmon, Director Transit Branch	Deborah Bowman, ADM Transportation Policy and Programs	21-Apr-26
778 974 5313	Nancy Bain, EFO Finance and Management Services Department	21-Apr-28
	Kaye Krishna, Deputy Minister	21-Apr-30



# Attachment 1:

Table 1: Example of outcomes from decisions to modify the criteria for Eligible Students

Post-Secondary Student Population		#Students Assessed U-	Percentage
Institution		Pass BC Fee – Sept 2020	Assessed
Langara College	22,606	1,529	6%
UBC	66,747	43,450	65%
SFU	30,000	28,139	94%