



An Open Letter to OC Transpo & Ottawa City Council:

Opposition to U-Pass Fare Increases

We, the undersigned: the student representatives, community advocates, and politicians of Ottawa, are writing to express our genuine concern regarding the City of Ottawa's decision to include a 5% increase to students' U-Pass fees each semester, in the City's Draft Budget 2025. We firmly believe that such an increase, cited by the City of Ottawa as "necessary" to uphold the "long-term stability" of Ottawa's transit system, is against the interests of students and the sustainability of transit for all in the city.

OC Transpo receives over \$38 million from student fare revenue each year, solely from U-Pass holders. An estimated \$19 million in revenue comes from the University of Ottawa, with nearly \$12 million received from Carleton University students. Over 74,500 students across the city use a U-Pass annually, accounting for over 7% of Ottawa's core population. Students, as a demographic in our city, are one of the most frequent and reliable sources of revenue for OC Transpo.

We maintain that appropriate communication, consultation, and a relationship of mutual trust and understanding is essential to navigating the recent challenges with Ottawa's transit system. Addressing the projected \$120 million hole in the upcoming transit budget requires the cooperation and collaboration of stakeholders like students,

who know our transit as well as anyone. We are grateful for those in the community who feel the same.

The City of Ottawa's decision to raise the U-Pass rates to 5% undercuts a mutual relationship of trust by disregarding the existing contracts between our respective postsecondary institutions and OC Transpo, the likes of which limit fare increases to this extent across the Board. Should the City of Ottawa and OC Transpo have wished to work towards a different vision for this contract, this process should have begun and ended long prior to the release of the Draft Budget. Students feel blindsided, and rightly so.

We believe that such an approach is fundamentally working in bad faith with the students of Ottawa. Many of our students live on fixed incomes, are incapable of finding affordable places to live, and bear the stress of balancing economic survival and the rigor of an academic degree. This potential increase is another nail in the coffin for a city that is supposed to support its students, and is placing the burden of said increase on the backs of an economically and mentally exhausted student body.

The goal of growing and maintaining ridership in the City's transit system cannot be accomplished without students. To begin to address shortfalls, more actions need to be taken to increase student ridership, not deter them. We've seen this play out already, with recent cuts to service. A significant increase to U-Pass fees threatens to deter new student arrivals who are off-put by one of the highest student transit fare rates in Canada.

Students aren't the only ones feeling the pressure. Our seniors are facing a potential fare increase of up to 120%, and free/discounted passes for youth are to be increased or in some cases, cut entirely. Transit is not working, and no longer affordable, for those who need it most.

We strongly encourage members of the City of Ottawa's Transit Commission to oppose a potential increase in U-Pass fares outside of the scope of the pre-existing contracts with postsecondary institutions. We further encourage the City of Ottawa to firmly commit to better consultation and collaboration with student unions, and students at-large, when decisions of this magnitude are made.

We will be calling on students at-large to help us in opposing this decision and to work towards a more equitable, sustainable, and especially: affordable transit system here in Ottawa.

Signed,

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