



RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER

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STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

PRESENTED: April 14, 2026 **REPORT:** 26-035
FROM: Climate and Environment **FILE:** 8330-02-2026
SUBJECT: WHISTLER TRANSIT SYSTEM FARE RESTRUCTURING - REALLOCATING FREE WEEKEND PROGRAM FUNDING TO LONG-TERM PASS PRODUCTS

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

That the recommendation of the General Manager of Climate Action, Planning, and Development Services be endorsed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council direct staff to work with BC Transit to terminate the Free Summer Weekends and Statutory Holidays Program offered through the Whistler Transit System; and

That Council direct staff to work with BC Transit to implement the long-term transit pass pricing as outlined in Table 2 of Administrative Report No. 26-035; and further

That Council direct staff to monitor long-term pass sales, revenue, ridership and expenses, over the next year, to evaluate whether the proposed pass price reductions achieve the expected increase in six and 12-month pass sales and report this information back to Council at a future date.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to seek Council direction to implement the end of the Free Summer Weekends and Statutory Holidays Program (Free Weekend Program) and to redirect the \$98,000 of budget currently allocated to subsidize the Free Weekend Program towards lowering fees of local long-term pass products, to prioritize the transportation needs of Whistler residents and support meaningful shifts toward regular commuter transit use.

Information Report

Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

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DISCUSSION

Background

The Whistler Transit System (WTS) is provided through a partnership between BC Transit and the RMOW, and Whistler Transit Ltd is contracted to operate the system. This partnership is formalized through a series of agreements including the the Annual Operating Agreement (AOA) which includes Tariffs and Fares. Under the *BC Transit Act* and BC Transit Regional Transit Model, the RMOW has the responsibility to set fares and service levels in partnership with BC Transit.

On [December 16, 2025](#) Council passed two resolutions to (1) remove budget from the Free Weekend Program in the amount of \$98,000 and (2) to add that budget to fund the reduction of the price of local transit pass products. As a result, Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) staff evaluated, in consultation with BC Transit, how to redirect those funds in the most impactful way towards reducing local transit pass products and to incentivize Whistler residents to shift from the use of private vehicles towards transit.

All transit costs and revenues, including fare revenues, are reviewed annually as part of AOA process. A more comprehensive tariff and fare review is initiated by BC Transit approximately every five years to help optimize transit system operations. BC Transit last prepared a comprehensive review of the WTS in 2025. The proposed pricing changes from that review were adopted by Council at the Regular Council Meeting on [June 24, 2025](#).

One of Whistler's overarching transportation goals is that by 2030, 50 per cent of all trips within Whistler be made by preferred modes, including active transport and transit. Towards this goal, there is clear direction under RMOW's [Climate Action Big Moves Strategy](#) Big Move One "Move Beyond the Car", to "Increase ridership by keeping fares affordable". This is one of a larger set of actions intended to make preferred transportation modes the most reliable, efficient and affordable options in Whistler.

Based on the above, RMOW staff analysed potential pricing changes of long-term pass products and their impact on both, projected pass sales and the annual transit operating budget. The six and 12-month pass products were targeted for reduction in price because they offer the greatest potential to incentivize transit use for Whistler residents, thereby having the greatest impact on mode shift.

Rationale for ending the Free Weekend Program

The Free Weekend Program was first piloted on summer Saturdays in 2016 and then fully introduced on July 1, 2017, as part of the Whistler 2017 Short-Term Transportation Action Plan. Since then, the Free Weekend Program has included free transit on summer Saturdays, Sundays, and statutory holidays (Canada Day, BC Day and Labour Day). Over that nine years the WTS has seen the service levels grow by 40 per cent from 62,000 to 88,645 annual service hours. Since 2020, much of this growth has been concentrated in spring/summer/fall.

In 2021, BC Transit published a report "Fare-Free Transit – A Summary of Considerations for BC Transit" which was attached as [Appendix A](#) of [Administrative Report No. 21-083](#). This report indicated that to service-related considerations such as trip time, service frequency, extended routes, service reliability, and comfort/crowding as being of equal or greater importance to transit cost and affordability, as factors that influence transit use.

When fare-free services were introduced in 2017, weekend transit ridership in Whistler increased by 19 per cent. However, over time, this ridership conversion has declined steadily, as improvements to service (particularly additional service hours to Route 10), has resulted in more regular riders using pass products

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and travelling throughout the week. As such, weekend ridership on Free Weekend Program dates was only five per cent greater than weekday travel in 2025.

The direct costs associated with the Free Weekend Program is estimated to be ≈\$98,000. Since Umo was introduced, BC Transit reporting indicates that over 50 per cent of riders purchase some form of pass product valid for 30-days or longer and do not receive a direct financial benefit from the Free Weekend Program. What is unknown at this time is how much riders would continue to use transit on Free Weekend Program dates if regular fares were charged.

The rationale for recommending the reallocation of funds from the Free Weekend Program to long-term transit passes is as follows:

- Transit will become more affordable for Whistler residents choosing to invest in six and 12-month pass products.
- The upfront investment of six and 12-month passes will become more attractive and valuable. The Free Weekend Program devalues these passes as it reduces the number of days within the term that those passes are usable in the summer. Many locals use transit heavily on weekends as they are often peak employment times.
- A greater proportion of revenue will be collected from non-regular transit riders and visitors. Weekends and holidays are disproportionately when visitors are in Whistler and require transportation. Free weekends and holidays therefore miss an opportunity to collect revenue from visitors. This effect may be particularly pertinent now that tap-to-pay has been rolled out on Whistler buses.
- Mode shift from personal vehicle to transit is further encouraged, working towards the RMOw’s goal of 50 per cent of trips being made by preferred modes by 2030. Term passes encourage their owners to use transit more frequently because with every use, the pass value increases.
- Minimal effect on infrequent users and visitor ridership on weekends and holidays thanks to the February 2026 implementation of the Umo electronic fare box and credit card tap which vastly increases convenience.

2025 Whistler Transit Fare Structure, Pass Sales and Usage

Table 1 summarizes the pricing structure, sales numbers and the average monthly transit use per user per month for each of the main pass products sold by the RMOw between January and December 2025.

On a month-to-month basis, each long-term pass product has usage of approximately one ride per day. 12-month adult passes made up 13 per cent of long-term pass sales in 2025 and six-month passes accounted for 56 per cent of 2025 long-term pass sales.

Table 1: Long-term pass product prices, sales from January to December 2025, and average monthly pass use across pass products

2025 Conditions	Adult			Concession *			Spirit**		
	Current	Sales	Rides/Month	Current	Sales	Rides/Month	Current	Sales	Rides/Month
30 Day	\$55	1,024	~32				\$30	115	~28
6 Month	\$270	698	~31	\$215	29	~24	\$220	161	~33
12 Month	\$510	54	~28	\$410	5	~37	\$410	18	~30

* Concession products are offered to students and people aged 65 and over.

** Spirit products are offered to participants in the Whistler Experience program organized by the Whistler Chamber of Commerce.

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Analysis

The focus of the long-term pass pricing analysis was to identify the most impactful option to reduce the cost of local pass products to incentivize ridership and support the ‘Big Move One’ goal that 50 per cent of trips within Whistler are made by active transportation or transit. The analysis and final recommendation consider current pricing, current pass sales, proposed pricing, projected sales and available budget.

The resulting recommended pricing updates are outlined in Table 2 below. These recommended pricing adjustments were determined using an iterative process, ensuring the following:

- Creation of a sufficiently attractive level of discount, while remaining within budget (*see Budget Considerations section*); and
- Implementation of progressive and consistent discount of a longer pass term compared to a 30-day pass to promote purchase and use of longer-term products.

Table 2: 2025 long-term pass pricing and proposed future pass pricing

Pass Prices	Adult			Concession & Spirit		
	Current	Proposed	Discount (over 30-day)	Current	Proposed	Discount (over 30-day)
30 Day	\$55	\$55		\$30*	\$40*	
6 Month	\$270	\$247.50	25%	\$215	\$180	25%
12 Month	\$510	\$396	40%	\$410	\$288	40%

* Concession discounts are not offered for a 30-day period, this proposed pricing change applies to Spirit Pass only.

The proposed pricing adjustments result in a consistent 25 and 40 per cent discount when purchasing a six-month pass or a 12-month pass over six or 12 30-day passes, respectively. This is valid for the Adult as well as the Concession passes. Note, that 30-day Concession passes are not offered.

As part of the proposed pricing structure, six and 12-month Spirit Pass prices have been aligned with Concession pricing. To maintain a consistent discount on six month passes over 30-day passes, the 30-day Spirit Pass require a rise in price from \$30 to \$40. This supports the commitment to lower-priced longer-term pass products, simplifies the pass pricing structure of these products, and increases consistency and transparency in pass pricing.

The proposed price adjustments will increase affordability for six and 12-month passes for Whistler residents who don’t have access to subsidized programs such as the Spirit Pass which are exclusive to local employees.

Projected Pass Sales

Table 3 presents 2025 pass sales and projected future pass sales under the proposed price reduction of six and 12-month passes. Two different projected growth models were created to project the total budget implications resulting from the price decreases.

1. **Scenario 1 (S1):** A doubling of long-term pass sales is used as the upper bound for expected sales of six and 12-month pass products, spurred by the significant reduction in price. (Reduction in revenue ≈\$113,900)

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2. **Scenario 2 (S2):** Assumes that half of current 30-day pass holders shift to six and 12-month products (with one quarter moving to each). It also assumes that these users would otherwise have purchased four 30-day passes in place of a six-month pass, and six 30-day passes in place of a 12-month pass. Finally, a 20 per cent increase in six and 12-month passes was added. (Reduction in revenue ≈\$45,300)

Staff expect the reality to end up somewhere between these two modelled outcomes.

Table 3: 2025 and projected pass sales numbers under two different models.

Pass Sales	Adult			Concession			Spirit		
	2025	S1	S2	2025	S1	S2	2025	S1	S2
30 Day	1024	0	512				115	0	57
6 Month	698	1396	914	29	58	35	161	322	210
12 Month	54	108	116	5	11	6	18	37	34

The methodology developing these sales projections deviate from the methodologies used by BC Transit because our proposed price changes are significantly larger than what is usually proposed in a BC Transit fare review. The analysis also used our relatively small sample size of pass sales, making accurate predictions challenging.

Timeline for Implementation

BC Transit recommends a 16-week timeline to implement a fare rate change to allow for adequate communication and administrative changes. Historically, the RMOW has tied a fare rate change to a transit service increase or a Day Lot parking fee change. In this case, staff recommends targeting the typical start date of the Free Weekend Program for the introduction of the new pass pricing.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

At the [December 16, 2025](#) meeting of Council as part of the [2026 Budget Guidelines Report No. 25-099](#), Council endorsed the proposed 2026 Operating and Project budgets including direction to:

- o *Remove budget for free weekends and holidays transit in the amount of \$98,000; and*
- o *Add budget to fund the reduction of the price of local transit pass products in the amount of \$98,000.*

At the July 22, 2025 meeting of Council, Council considered [Administrative Report No. 25-061](#) and passed the following recommendation:

That Council direct staff to review the feasibility of the free summer weekends and statutory holidays initiative and present a report to Council at a future Regular Council Meeting detailing savings and impacts resulting from eliminating this initiative starting in 2026.

At the June 24, 2025 meeting of Council, Council considered [Administrative Report No. 25-053](#) and passed the following recommendations:

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That Council direct staff to work with BC Transit staff to implement fare change Option 2, with the addition of removing the 30-Day Concession pass, presented in the Whistler Transit System Fare Review Report attached as Appendix A to this Administrative Report 25-053.

2023-2026 Strategic Plan

The 2023-2026 Strategic Plan outlines the high-level direction of the RMOW to help shape community progress during this term of Council. The Strategic Plan contains four priority areas and associated initiatives to support them. This section identifies how this report links to the Strategic Plan.

Strategic Priorities

Housing

Expedite the delivery of and longer-term planning for employee housing

Climate Action

Mobilize municipal resources toward the implementation of the Big Moves Climate Action Plan

Community Engagement

Strive to connect locals to each other and to the RMOW

Smart Tourism

Preserve and protect Whistler's unique culture, natural assets and infrastructure

Not Applicable

Aligns with core municipal work that falls outside the strategic priorities but improves, maintains, updates and/or protects existing and essential community infrastructure or programs

The RMOW and BC Transit are continuing to work collaboratively to optimize the WTS. The Free Weekend Program and long-term pass pricing strategies are part of this collaboration.

Community Vision and Official Community Plan

The Official Community Plan (OCP) is the RMOW's most important guiding document that sets the community vision and long-term community direction. This section identifies how this report applies to the OCP.

There are many goals, objectives, and policies in Whistler's OCP that guide the development of the WTS. Two overarching statements in the OCP that guides transit's role in the transportation system are:

- Objective 10.2.2: Prioritize infrastructure development and policies that support seamless, **convenient** and **affordable access** to preferred modes of transportation for intra-community travel.
- Objective 11.4.2: Make public transit **affordable**, **convenient**, safe and **enjoyable** throughout the year.

This proposal also supports climate action objectives in the OCP:

- Objective 10.1.1: Leverage community-level GHG reduction targets to track and motivate action.
- Objective 10.2.3: Increase integration of lower-impact technologies for community mobility.

Other Policy Considerations

Making long-term transit passes more affordable directly supports the first two overarching actions of the [Big Moves Climate Action Implementation Plan](#):

- Big Move One: Move beyond the car

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- Big Move Two: Decarbonize passenger and commercial transport

Strengthening transit incentives and spurring mode shift is especially important given that personal transportation is Whistler's largest source of emissions—accounting for more than 50 per cent—largely due to the high rate of personal vehicle use. Achieving the community's goal of reducing emissions by 50 per cent from 2007 levels by 2030 will require a significant shift in transportation modes, with increased transit use playing a central role.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of this report is to redirect the subsidy related to the Free Weekend Program to support lower fees for local long-term transit pass products. A reduction in revenue of approximately \$98,000 is expected to be reallocated from the discontinuation of the Free Weekend Program and supported by enhanced sales of six and 12-month passes (the total reduction in revenue is expected to be less than \$98,000 in the first year).

To assess the financial impact of reduced long-term pass pricing, staff evaluated projected annual revenue changes of implementing reduced six and 12-month pass prices, as outlined in Table 2, compared to a baseline scenario where current pass price remain consistent with 2025 pricing. The impact on revenue was evaluated in three parts:

- Existing long-term pass users who will pay a reduced price moving forward,
- 30-day pass holders who are expected to shift to longer-term products given the increased savings, and
- New transit riders attracted to transit by new reduced long-term fares estimated at 20 per cent. The lost revenue associated with the new user group is calculated as their generated revenue under proposed pricing minus what their generated revenue would have been under 2025 pricing.

Based on this analysis, staff estimate the most likely revenue reductions to be approximately \$45,300 split between existing users (expected revenue reduction of around \$31,065), users shifting from 30-day passes (expected revenue reduction of around \$4,801), and the portion of increased users who choose six and 12-month passes over shorter term options (expected revenue reduction of around \$9,456). A much higher revenue reduction of up to \$113,900 is possible under an extreme scenario where long-term pass sales double, but staff consider this an unlikely upper bound. As such, this approach presents a reasonable way to reallocate the Council-directed \$98,000 that was previously allocated to the Free Weekend Program.

The subsidy required to support the reduced long-term pass prices will continue be funded by Community Transportation Initiative Funds, which are generated from Whistler Village Day Lot parking revenue.

LÍ'WAT NATION & SQUAMISH NATION CONSIDERATIONS

The RMOW is committed to working with the LÍ'wat People, known in their language as *L'il'wat7úl* and the Squamish People, known in their language as the *Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw* to: create an enduring relationship; establish collaborative processes for planning on unceded territories, as currently managed by the provincial government; achieve mutual objectives, and enable participation in Whistler's resort economy.

There are no specific considerations to include in this report.

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

Inform Consult Involve Collaborate Empower

BC Transit led community engagement for the Whistler Transit System Fare Review which was supported by RMOW staff and our engagement channels, including social media and the inaugural Add Your Voice event held at the Whistler Conference Centre on April 23, 2025.

Results from the engagement revealed that there was an interest in further incentivizing the use of transit through reduced long-term pass prices. There were many written responses about adding more funding to transit from parking revenue and other sources.

Proposed changes to pass prices on the Spirit Pass products (specifically, the 30-day pass), were reviewed with the Whistler Chamber of Commerce, as they manage Spirit Pass sales. Their staff were supportive of the proposed change and agreed that it would likely strengthen their program and further incentivize members to purchase longer term pass products.

SUMMARY

This report outlines an approach to better align Whistler's transit investments with long-term ridership goals by reallocating budget from the Free Weekend Program toward more affordable six and 12-month transit passes. The proposed pricing structure introduces consistent discounts of 25 per cent for six month passes and 40 per cent for 12-month passes, compared to purchasing the equivalent duration in 30-day passes.

Redirecting the \$98,000 previously used to fund the Free Summer Weekend Program is expected to make year-round transit more attractive for residents, strengthen revenue collection from visitors, and support progress toward the Big Move One target of increasing preferred mode travel by 2030.

Staff recommend implementing the new pricing in June 2026, and monitoring sales, ridership, and revenue over the following year.

SIGN-OFFS

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