
Comments on Report TR-02-24: *Burlington Study to Explore Fare-Free Transit Summary Report*

**SUBMISSION TO THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE,
BURLINGTON CTY COUNCIL
DECEMBER 2, 2024**



BURLINGTON FOR ACCESSIBLE, SUSTAINABLE TRANSIT

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COMMENTS ON REPORT TR-02-24: BURLINGTON STUDY TO EXPLORE FARE-FREE TRANSIT SUMMARY REPORT

Submission to the Committee of the Whole,

Burlington City Council

December 2, 2024

I am here as Chair of Burlington for Accessible, Sustainable, Transit (BFAST) to provide some comments on the Fare-Free Transit Report.

For BFAST, this is a welcome change from so many of our earlier delegations when we were often opposing service cuts or other measure that were not good for transit. We appreciate that the current council has been more supportive of transit.

We are pleased to offer our views on proposed measures contained in the Summary Report from Left Turn, Right Turn (LTRT).

Both recommended alternatives involve a significant growth in transit service in Burlington with free transit alternative requiring significant additional funding to expand and make up for the lost fare revenue. The Summary Report also predicts an immediate large increase in ridership for the paid-fare model although the long term increase is predicted to be similar. The free-transit scenario has a better outcome on increased ridership and the paid-fare option will be less expensive for the City.

While we strongly support free transit for all, the LTRT Summary Report provides a strong rationale for a phased approach. We agree with their conclusion that adopting free transit without the necessary supports in place could lead to a deterioration in service quality and undesired outcomes.

The accompanying staff report from Burlington Transit, however, does suggest measures, like fare caps, which would increase ridership while not creating outsized fiscal consequences for the City. In the near term, these can be important ways to increase ridership and reduce the amount of vehicular traffic on our roads.

We believe it is important, however, that the City adopts a goal of making transit more accessible, and part of that will be a continuing focus on making transit more affordable and, finally, free for all.

Another part of making transit more accessible is adding service to currently underserved areas. Neither the Summary Report nor the Burlington Transit staff memo make reference to areas of the city that are badly underserved. Many residents of south Burlington, for example, must walk a mile or more to reach transit service. The Burlington Food Bank is an example of an increasingly important community service with a huge need for a transit connection. Transit in North Burlington is the source of a large number of complaints and needs to be significantly upgraded. We did not see these important considerations addressed in either the staff memo or the LTRT Summary Report.

Another key metric that is missing from the Summary Report is the large economic benefit of free transit to the community as a whole. A procedure for determining these community economic benefits has been developed by the American Public Transportation Association and has been applied to benefit cost studies across the US as well as Hamilton's climate change study.

The recent US election has enormous implications for the continuing effort to fight climate decay. Rising inflation as a result of trade wars will prove to be a tough barrier to the adoption of personal electric vehicles, demand for which is already stagnating in North America. Better transit will be of huge importance in the future, and free transit will be an important tool in reducing emissions, keeping tax increases in check and helping citizens avoid the increasingly exorbitant costs of car ownership.

All of these factors call for a long-term and significant commitment from the City. There is no doubt that there will be a difficult path to achieving our modal-split goals, but we believe that events will soon show that these goals, ambitious as they may be, have been set too low. We hope that City Council will recognize and accept the challenges in the interests of everyone in Burlington.

That concludes my presentation and I would be pleased to answer any questions.

Submitted with respect,

Doug Brown, Chair,
Burlington for Accessible, Sustainable Transit (BFAST)