

December 5, 2024

Kevan Marshall, Project Manager - Climate and Energy Transition
Melissa Murray, Assistant Manager Marketing, Communications and Community Engagement
Grand River Transit
250 Strasburg Road
Kitchener, Ontario N2E 3M6
by email: KMarshall@regionofwaterloo.ca and MeMurray@regionofwaterloo.ca

Re: Region of Waterloo Budget 2025 and Transit

Dear Kevan and Melissa,

The University of Waterloo (UW) is writing to oppose the Region of Waterloo's proposed service reductions and fare fee increases for Grand River Transit (GRT) as part of the Region's current budget process, which were announced via email to the University on November 29, 2024. The Region's proposed reduction in frequency of bus routes #9 and #30, fare fee increase to the TravelWise Corporate Monthly Pass, and removal of garbage cans at bus stops will directly and negatively affect the University of Waterloo community.

1. BUS ROUTES #9 AND #30

GRT route #9 is a major feeder into the University of Waterloo campus. Based on data provided to UW by GRT, route #9 is the third most frequently used transit route for UPass holders, after the two iXpress routes, with over 85,000 trips in Fall 2023 (falling only 1000 short of the first and second most frequently used routes after the iXpress routes). Notably, these numbers are for UPass holders only and do not include employees or other users and visitors of campus.

The proposed shift from 20 to 30 minute frequency during daytimes will likely be a concern for hundreds or thousands of students and other riders, presenting a number of risks:

- Over-crowding on buses
- During peak: students or other riders being stranded at bus stops on their way to campus or on their way home, if the bus is full and they are not permitted to board
- General lack of convenience, increasing wait times by 10 minutes
- Limited transfer access to make connections to other routes

Service on this route was already reduced in summer 2024 from every 15 minutes to every 20 minutes on weekdays. This reduction was accepted as a compromise because it occurred as a result of routing adjustments made by GRT that benefit the UW community.



UW's department of Sustainable Transportation and WUSA (Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association) have been involved in the GRT Business Plan engagement sessions this Fall, with many positive discussions about service improvements. This current budget discussion goes against the spirit of the Business Planning, as we should be continuing to talk about improvements over time, not reductions. During a climate crisis and financial insecurity for many residents, investments in public transit is key; budget reductions in this area sends ridership and transportation planning in the wrong direction.

The University of Waterloo is currently developing its first institutional Sustainable Transportation Plan, with completion expected in Spring 2025. An integral pillar of this Plan is "Circulation and Movement", which aims to address how campus community members move around campus. UW recently gained dedicated staff capacity for transit education and coordination (and sustainable transportation as a whole), and thus it was UW's intent to increase promotion of these routes, particularly route #30. Since summer 2024, University of Waterloo staff have had ongoing discussions with GRT staff about improvements for route #30 for a wider-range of university travels and were hoping to continue these discussions.

2. FARE FEE INCREASES

The Region has proposed a fee increase for the TravelWise Corporate Monthly Pass (of which UW employees are a part) from \$81.60/month to \$88/month. UW is aiming to increase employee use of transit for their daily commute as part of internal sustainability objectives. The fare fee increase by the Region will be objectionable for many current riders and does not incentivize potential riders to switch from single occupant vehicle to transit.

3. GARBAGE COLLECTION AT BUS STOPS

The Region has also proposed the removal of garbage cans at bus stops. While this is a lower priority concern for UW, it is still a concern. Garbage cans at stops on major routes on Columbia Street and University Avenue, for example, have been noticed as overflowing at times. Loss of waste collection at stops could harm the transit experience and discourage usage.

We thank you in advance for your attention and look forward to our continued work together.

Sincerely,



Tara De Souza
Sustainable Transportation Specialist



Mat Thijssen
Director of Sustainability

