

Sent via Email

December 9, 2024

Regional Chair Karen Redman
Waterloo Regional Council
150 Frederick Street
Kitchener, ON N2G 4J3
KRedman@regionofwaterloo.ca

Dear Chair Redman and Members of Waterloo Regional Council,

On behalf of the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA), we are writing to express our strong opposition to the proposed reductions to Grand River Transit (GRT) services as part of Council's 2025 budget considerations. These cuts will have a profound impact on the over 35,000 undergraduate students we represent at the University of Waterloo, the majority of whom rely on GRT for their daily commutes and activities around the region.

WUSA initially commended the original GRT plan, which emphasized service expansion, Cambridge campus integration, and equitable employment for transit workers. This plan aligned with the region's sustainability and accessibility goals while addressing key student concerns. Unfortunately, the proposed changes undermine these aspirations, jeopardizing the progress that has been made.

Key Concerns:

- 1. Undermining Climate and Sustainability Goals:**
The proposed cuts contradict the region's climate commitments, pushing more residents toward car usage. This will increase road congestion, parking demand, and greenhouse gas emissions.
- 2. Impact on Students:**
Over 90% of University of Waterloo students rely on active or public transit for commuting. Reducing services—particularly critical routes such as 29 and 30—will severely disrupt student mobility and daily activities, creating ripple effects for the region's transportation system.
- 3. Erosion of U-Pass Agreement Commitments:**
The U-Pass program—specifically the recent extension through 2027 that was agreed to in principle by our board in part to accommodate regional staff working on the updated GRT Business Plan—which saw a 5% year-over-year fee increase justified by promised service improvements, is being undermined by these proposed reductions. This not only breaks the trust of students but also sets a concerning precedent for future agreements.

4. Diminished Transit Experience:

Persistent concerns like insufficient trash cans at transit stations continue to detract from the transit experience. Such small yet significant oversights discourage ridership and reduce the overall appeal of public transit.

5. Broader Benefits of Transit Investment:

Beyond student use, public transit benefits the entire region by reducing road pollution, collisions, and police overtime, and by improving community health and safety. Cutting transit services risks reversing these gains, to the detriment of all residents.

We urge Council to reject the proposed cuts and instead prioritize investments that enhance public transit, reflecting shared goals of sustainability, accessibility, and community well-being. Maintaining critical routes and upholding the commitments in the U-Pass agreement are vital to sustaining trust and ensuring that public transit continues to serve as a cornerstone of regional growth and prosperity.

WUSA stands ready to collaborate with the region on finding solutions that ensure GRT remains a reliable and sustainable transportation option for students and the broader community.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Pfeifle



President

Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association, University of Waterloo

Arya Razmjoo



Vice President

Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association, University of Waterloo

cc: Members of Regional Council