SUBJECT: Mohawk College Students Association - University Transit Pass (PW07011) - (City Wide)

RECOMMENDATION:

(a) That the General Manager, Public Works, be authorized and directed to negotiate and implement an agreement with Mohawk Students Association (MSA) and Mohawk College for a Universal Transit Pass program commencing on September 1, 2007, for those Mohawk students attending the Institute of Applied Health Sciences at McMaster University only, based on the general terms and conditions of the existing University Transit Pass in place at McMaster University, and in a form acceptable to the City Solicitor;

(b) That the General Manager, Public Works, be directed to provide an Information Update to Council regarding the terms and conditions of the agreement, upon its execution;

(c) That, in the event that the outcome of an Agreement with Mohawk Students Association results in ridership growth that exceed available capacity, the General Manager, Public Works, be directed to provide a further report to Council, in conjunction with 2008 Budget deliberations.

Scott Stewart
General Manager
Public Works
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
Mohawk Students’ Association (MSA) represents approximately 1,200 members attending full-time courses at the Institute of Applied Health Sciences at McMaster University. Public Works staff was approached by MSA in November 2006 with a request to consider and make recommendation to Council on the implementation of a universal transit pass program agreement for these students based on the terms and conditions of the University Transit Pass program in existence at McMaster University for undergraduate students. That program requires the payment of a mandatory fee by all students, and in turn allows the unlimited use of transit services during the academic year. The MSA wishes to take the terms of such an agreement forward to its membership for consideration under referendum in February 2007, in conjunction with the student election process, with an expectation of a program implementation on September 1, 2007. During the course of discussions between the MSA and Public Works staff, it was made clear that there is no desire on the part of the MSA to undertake a similar agreement for the main body of students attending Mohawk College.

As discussed with the MSA, there is potential service capacity and cost implication to the City of implementing a pass program involving some 1,200 further students attending classes at McMaster University. Currently, peak period demand for service to and from McMaster University and its surrounding neighbourhoods is generally at or exceeding available system capacity. In addition, implementation of the recommended program will occur more or less concurrently with other initiatives directed by Council, including implementation of an Employer Commuter pass program with Hamilton Health Sciences, and service level enhancements previously directed by Council that will have service capacity improvement implications.

Staff is not able to reliably forecast the further requirements on service capacity arising from this agreement. The MSA was not able to provide any existing survey or other information which would provide the basis for estimating the current transit system use of the target student group, or the potential change in use resulting from a mandatory fee and pass program. However, the MSA student group is small enough in number that any initial impact will likely not have an adverse impact on service; based on experience with the McMaster student groups, growth in the take-up on transit use after introduction of the fee program will be gradual over the first year. In order to better inform Council of the impacts of the program, staff will undertake surveying of the target MSA group before and after implementation, and will report on the results of the survey work in conjunction with 2008 Budget deliberations.

The offering of a program with the MSA is consistent with the approach approved by Council in 2004, resulting from the study of the University Transit Pass program, and is a first step in developing a pass program with the general student population of Mohawk College.

BACKGROUND:
The information/recommendations contained within this report have City wide implications and relate to matters/facilities/programming/property within the entire City.
The City has had various agreements for University Transit Pass fee programs since 1995, and currently has agreements in place with some 21,000 students at McMaster University and Redeemer University College.

Council undertook a major review of the University Transit Pass programs in 2004, and existing agreements are based on recommendations approved by Council. The University Transit Pass programs generate fees in the order of $1,600,000 annually, and are seen to be a key contributor to reducing traffic and parking requirements in and around the area of McMaster University. Staff will be reviewing the rate structure for the University Transit Pass programs as part of preparations for the 2008 budget deliberations and required renewals of program agreements with participating McMaster, Redeemer and Mohawk student groups for the 2008 academic year.

City staff has had recurring discussions with the Mohawk Students’ Association over the past five years related to the engagement of Mohawk College students, at various locations throughout the City, in a Universal Transit Pass program. The student group at the Institute of Applied Health Sciences at McMaster University had rejected participation in such a program in a previous referendum, but the MSA is now confident that there is a renewed interest which will result in a favourable referendum result in 2007. The engagement of this group is seen by staff as a first step in addressing a program which will encompass the larger student population of Mohawk College.

**ANALYSIS/RATIONALE:**

Staff is presently unable to foresee the further requirements on service levels with any degree of certainty. There is a low probability of any immediate adverse impact in the 2007 budget year, and survey work to be undertaken in 2007 will allow for a better understanding of any longer term service implications.

The existing University Transit Pass fee structure with McMaster Students Union, which will serve as the basis for agreement with the MSA, calls for a per student fee of $71.50 for the 8 month academic year. The gross revenues from the 1,200 students will be about $86,000.

**ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION:**

There are no alternatives for consideration, as the MSA is expressly interested in a program modelled on terms and conditions of the existing University Transit Pass program.

**FINANCIAL/STAFFING/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:**

There are no staffing or legal implications to the recommendations. As noted in the Analysis/Rationale section of this report, there are no foreseeable immediate service cost impacts; however, in view of the escalation of Transit service costs beyond the general rate of inflation, and the associated impact of that escalation on levy and/or other subsidy requirements, staff will review the rate structure for the University Transit Pass programs as part of preparations for the 2008 budget deliberations and required renewals of program agreements with participating McMaster, Redeemer and Mohawk student groups for the 2008 academic year.
POLICIES AFFECTING PROPOSAL:
There are no policies affecting the proposal.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION:
Consultation has been undertaken with the Mohawk Students Association.

CITY STRATEGIC COMMITMENT:
By evaluating the “Triple Bottom Line”, (community, environment, economic implications) we can make choices that create value across all three bottom lines, moving us closer to our vision for a sustainable community, and Provincial interests.

Community Well-Being is enhanced. ☑ Yes ☐ No
The recommendations promote a community partnership that enhances the use of public transit in the community.

Environmental Well-Being is enhanced. ☑ Yes ☐ No
The recommendations promote a sustainable transportation network by providing a cost effective alternative to the use of the automobile.

Economic Well-Being is enhanced. ☑ Yes ☐ No
The recommendations enhance the position of the community as a leader in the development of cooperative programs which support educational institutions in delivering services.

Does the option you are recommending create value across all three bottom lines? ☑ Yes ☐ No

Do the options you are recommending make Hamilton a City of choice for high performance public servants? ☐ Yes ☑ No