

## Farebox Replacement Project Update

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## Report Summary

This report provides an update regarding the Transit Farebox Replacement project and implementation of associated transit app and smart card technology.

## Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Climate Action Plans

This report describes work recommended to implement the Transit Action Plan and continue efforts to expand ridership through innovative and responsive system improvements, which is an initiative specifically identified in Council's Strategic Plan as one of the actions to support the Asset Management and Service Excellence objective and specifically goal 1.5 "Demonstrate Innovation and Cost Effective Service Delivery".

Within the Low-Carbon Transportation Strategy Sector of the Community Energy & Emissions Plan, this report aligns with Goal 7, to enhance transit services to enhance transit mode share to 25% by 2050.

## Financial Implications

This project will be funded from the approved Transit Technology Project with a capital budget of \$4,987,500.

## Background

The Transit Action Plan (TAP) was presented to Council on February 12, 2019; in addition to immediate route structure changes implemented in August 2019, resolution CC2019-45 directed staff to conduct the planning required to undertake the supporting infrastructure improvements and service level changes presented in the Future Expansion Options. Within the list of opportunities for transit system improvements is the introduction of smart card technology for fare payment.

The total project budget of \$4,987,500 for the Transit Technology Project, which includes the Farebox upgrade, is funded 73 per cent from the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) and 11 per cent from Provincial Gas Tax. The City of Greater Sudbury is responsible for 16 per cent of project costs.

On July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024, through resolution CES2024-21, the City of Greater Sudbury approved a non-competitive purchase agreement to procure new transit fareboxes and necessary components and technology.

Over three phases, the Transit Farebox and associated App and reloadable Smart Card technology project aims to modernize fare collection, enhance rider convenience through app-based and contactless payments, while supporting improved operational efficiency and system data. The project is in direct alignment with the City of Greater Sudbury Corporate I.T. Strategic Plan, in a number of areas, particularly the vision that aspires for “great service experiences powered by technology and data, available anywhere, anytime.”

### **Phase 1 – Installation of New Fareboxes**

In January 2025, the first phase of the farebox replacement project was initiated with the installation of new fareboxes across the conventional bus fleet. This upgrade replaced outdated fare collection equipment and created opportunities for additional payment options. Initial deployment of new technology in Phase 2 will see the option for QR code scanning and mobile phone tap-and-pay functionality, while maintaining compatibility with existing magnetic ride cards until phase 3, when the full changeover to reloadable smart card fare media technology is complete. As a result, the continuity of fare media and payment processes meant that new fareboxes had minimal impact on customers.

New fareboxes feature an updated design that improves usability and includes app and smart card fare payment functionality. Recognizing the importance of barrier free access to transit and enhancing accessibility in transit infrastructure and services, staff engaged with the Accessibility Advisory Panel and representatives from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) to review the farebox design. Through these consultations, feedback was gathered to ensure the new equipment met accessibility standards and addressed the needs of riders with visual and physical impairments. Supporting materials and guidance were also provided to assist riders in navigating the updated fareboxes.

### **Phase 2- Transit App Implementation**

As part of the IT Work Plan, testing of a new app, to be referred to as the “GOVA Pass App,” began in July, with a focus on its features and ensuring integration with the farebox system. Feedback from user groups, including front line staff, supervisors, and members of the CNIB played a key role in refining the app. The app was also presented to the Accessibility Advisory Panel at their meeting on September 12<sup>th</sup>. The feedback received from the user groups as well as the Panel assisted in identifying service needs and ensuring accessibility for GOVA Transit riders.

The GOVA Pass app is more than just an electronic payment tool. While it allows riders the option to purchase transit passes and ride cards and scan fares using a secure QR code, riders will also be able to plan trips, view real-time arrivals, and receive service alerts. Adult fare passengers will have the ability to create an account within the app, while concession fare riders will continue to visit the Downtown Transit Hub Kiosk to set up their account and verify eligibility. Bus passes and ride cards available for purchase in the app are tailored to the passenger’s individual account providing users the ability to access fare media that corresponds to their rider category, with the intent of reducing instances of fraudulent purchase and use of passes. Within the app, users will have access to built-in fraud prevention and balance protection, transit photo ID display for concession riders, and a record of active passes and past purchases.

To support account setup and future smart card sales and reloads, new Administrative Point of Sale (APOS) units will be installed at the Downtown Transit Hub this fall. Slight mill work modifications will be required in the Transit Terminal Kiosk to support the new system hardware.

During this phase, existing magnetic bus passes and ride cards will continue to be accepted on board GOVA Transit buses for fare payment, however, to begin the transition to the GOVA Pass smart cards, the sale of magnetic cards will begin to be scaled back and eventually cease.

The GOVA Pass app is scheduled to launch in late fall 2025. In preparation for its release, a public education and outreach campaign will inform riders of the app’s features and encourage its use. This campaign will utilize multiple channels—including digital platforms, onboard messaging, printed materials, and in-person support—to ensure broad awareness and accessibility.

Consistent with best practices of other municipal transit systems, the app will operate independently for a period prior to the introduction of smart card technology. To be communicated across a variety of platforms, this phased approach allows riders time to become familiar with the app's functionality, and the use of new technology which will assist in supporting the transition to smart cards during the next phase of the project.

### **Phase 3- Smart Card Implementation**

GOVA Pass reloadable smart cards will be introduced in Phase 3, which is scheduled to begin in late Q4 of 2025. This phase will see the full transition from magnetic ride cards to smart card technology.

To facilitate the initial roll out and account set up for the GOVA Pass, smart cards will initially be available for purchase at the Downtown Transit Hub Kiosk, at a cost of \$5.25. Like current processes and those that will be in place for the mobile app, riders eligible for concession fares will continue to establish their accounts in person at the Downtown Transit Hub Kiosk, where eligibility for reduced fare rates will be verified. Existing concession fare riders may present their current Transit Photo ID to confirm their eligibility and obtain their new card. Riders paying full fare (adult) will be able to create accounts directly through the GOVA Pass website and can attend the kiosk to pick up their card.

Following the initial roll out of the GOVA Pass smart cards, with a requirement for new point of sale equipment, it is anticipated that additional vendor locations will be set up at Citizen Service Centre's for the sale of adult ride cards and technical support to reload cards.

To ensure continuity of service and minimize disruption for riders, within a communicated transition period, previously purchased magnetic ride cards and bus passes will continue to be accepted on board for fare payment. Recognizing that some passengers may still have magnetic ride cards and bus passes in their possession at the end of the transition period, processes are currently being established to honour previous purchases and will be addressed in the accompanying communications plan. This phased approach allows riders time to adjust to the new system while maintaining access to familiar fare media.

Phase 3 is scheduled to conclude by the end of Q2 2026, at which time magnetic bus passes and ride cards will no longer be accepted as valid forms of payment. Riders who prefer to pay cash fares will not see a change to their preferred method, as cash fares will continue to be accepted on board GOVA Transit conventional buses.

### **Customer Engagement**

Ensuring clear and timely communication regarding fare payment changes is central to the communications plan for this project. Various communication channels will be utilized to inform riders of the changes, including onboard TFT screens, the GOVA Transit website, social media platforms, TV screens at the Downtown Transit Hub, and printed materials. Further, during phases 2 and 3, Transit ambassadors will provide in-person assistance at select locations. Staff will continue to work in collaboration with the Accessibility Advisory Panel and the CNIB to ensure accessibility and clarity for all users.

To further support riders, front-line staff and operators will be trained and provided with information on the GOVA Pass app and smart card system, enabling them to assist passengers directly. In addition, supporting partners such as 311 and Municipal By-law Enforcement Officers will be well briefed to respond to public inquiries and provide guidance. Public communication and staff support will continue throughout the transition period, with a focus on helping riders navigate new technologies and fare processes confidently and independently.

### **Next steps**

The project plans that the phasing out of magnetic ride cards and full transition to the GOVA Pass mobile

app and smart card on the conventional system will be complete by the end of Q2 2026. As the project continues to progress, consideration is being given to how smart card technology could be leveraged to retain and expand ridership across the transit system and enhance the accessibility and efficiency of the service. Opportunities are being explored to expand the use of the GOVA Pass throughout the entire GOVA family of services including GOVA Plus and GOVA Zone which would allow for a cohesive fare payment system across the service.

As the project continues to progress and these new opportunities are explored, biannual updates will continue to be provided to members of Council.

## **Resources Cited**

Greater Sudbury Transit Action Plan- Better Routes. Better Schedules. Better Service  
February 12, 2019

<https://pub-greatersudbury.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?documentid=395>

Report- Transit Fare Box Non-Competitive Purchase, July 08, 2024 : <https://pub-greatersudbury.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=d7cfdeac-5375-49cc-b23b-b73da6f94bca&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English>

City of Greater Sudbury Corporate Information Technology Plan

[greatersudbury.ca/city-hall/reports-studies-policies-and-plans/report-pdfs/corporate-information-technology-strategic-plan/](https://greatersudbury.ca/city-hall/reports-studies-policies-and-plans/report-pdfs/corporate-information-technology-strategic-plan/)