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Abandon Pay-Per-Use?

Little is truly free

In your city you may walk on the sidewalk/footpath at any time of the day or night without incurring a direct charge. The sidewalk is maintained by the city from monies collected through rates and taxes. Walking is free in the sense that whenever you walk on the sidewalk, you don't need to dig out some small change from your pocket.

In your city, you may drive on the streets and roads at any time of the day or night without incurring a direct charge. You may enter a public library and sit and read a newspaper or a book. You may ask a police officer for directions. You may sit on a park bench and admire the trees and lawns. The parks are free.

You can Drive, Read, Ask, Walk and Sit without paying each time you use those services

Why Pay-Per-Use for Public Transit?

(This is not the Big Question. The Big Question is presented further down)

In my city each time we board a bus or a train, we pay a fare. I could purchase an all-day pass or a weekly or monthly pass. In some cities the fare entitles me to switch to a different route free of charge within a two-hour period, but the principle remains the same – if I want to make use of Public Transit, I need to dig out some small change.

In a similar sense, in your city – you need to dig out some small change each time you make use of Public Transit, ..

And when you visit my city or I visit your city, we each must dig into our pocket when we use Public Transit.

Why then do we Pay-Per-Use for Public Transit?

Why isn't Public Transit paid for in the way that other services are supported – funded by a combination of rates and taxes – for the common use by all?

How is Public Transit Different?

In what way does Public Transit differ from Public Libraries or Public Roads or Pathways.

Surely Public Transit is just another service provided for the public.

How Could we Change Public Transit?

Suppose that in your city, Public Transit is 70% funded by rates and taxes and 30% funded by Pay-Per-Use.

To change Public Transit away from Pay-Per-Use your transit authority would need to approach one or more of the municipal, state or national authorities and ask for a bigger portion of the rates and taxes. The municipal, state or national authorities would approve, and then the rates and taxes would rise to bring in the increase in funds necessary – but residents, while paying more in rates and taxes would pay less (nothing, actually) for Public Transit.

I cannot see how Public Transit differs in essence from other services except that for reasons of tradition, Public Transit is Pay-Per-Use.

What would be the impact of free Public Transit?

Let's get the accountants out of the way: The accountants would gather data and predict by how much costs would be reduced by eliminating Pay-Per-Use. This would yield an initial monetary figure to cope with the shortfall in fares collected from Pay-Per-Use. After the first year, better data would be available and better figures could be developed.

I anticipate a period of five-years during which the accountants would hone their figures, after which Public Transit would be financed as other services are financed.

A supposedly reasonable budget would be set and the Public Transit authority would be expected to live within that budget, just as the Libraries and Police Services and the Parks Department do now.

What Could Change in Public Transit?

(1) Well for starters, if you aren't collecting fares, you don't need fare-collectors. Those men and women who freeze in the subway kiosks in wintertime, dreaming of summer, and who sweat out the summer dreaming of winter could be removed from the kiosks and become much more productive as **Information Officers** or **Mobility Assistants** in each subway station.

(2) If you aren't collecting fares, then you **don't need a team of people** charged with ferrying the coin boxes to a central site, and you don't need a team of people counting coins and banknotes. And you don't need a team of people factoring these figures into your budget.

(3) You could remove the turnstiles, making the transit system **Barrier-Free** for people with wheelchairs, baby carriages or luggage.

(4) If you don't have turnstiles, you can redeploy the team of mechanics responsible for maintaining and repairing turnstiles. Perhaps they could be trained to **fix the air-conditioning** on subway cars.

(5) If you aren't selling tokens and tickets, then **you don't need the expense of minting tokens and printing tickets**, and you don't need the expense of distributing stocks of tokens and tickets.

(6) Or **worrying about forgeries**.

(7) If you remove Pay-Per-Use then you **remove all fare-disputes**. You will have to consult the surface-vehicle drivers in your own city to see how they feel about that.

(8) If you remove Pay-Per-Use then **you don't need to issue paper transfers**, and that means less printing, and you don't need a distribution team to mount today's batch of transfers on the surface vehicles.

(9) And if you aren't issuing paper transfers then **the driver doesn't have to take a hand off the wheel** and deal with passengers.

(10) If you remove Pay-Per-Use then you eliminate the bottlenecks of people boarding and asking the driver "HOW much?!!" and then fumbling in a purse, pocket or wallet ("Who knew I'd have to PAY?") and that means **faster boarding** and that means **less bunching of surface vehicles**.

(11) If you remove Pay-Per-Use then every tourist who steps off an airplane receives the **keys to the city**. Your city could have a welcome mat **unlike any other city in the world**. Your city would become famous just for that, and people might vacation here just to see what it is like to be given the keys to the city.

(12) If you remove Pay-Per-Use then more tourists will be encouraged to explore the city, perhaps traveling to the outer areas which they would not normally see. And buying lunch while they are out there. Your city could become the **best-explored**, **best-loved**, and **best-known** city in the world.

There is more, but you have got the idea.

Objections

(1) The Trade Unions Will Object

But there again, they always do.

Note that no suggestion is being made that thousands of workers will be laid-off work. Rationalization of the system away from Pay-Per-Use will require work during the transition period.

People who used to work in a zoo-like cage can now be of greater service to passengers by serving as Information Officers or Mobility Assistants, or what-have-you.

As ridership soars, the need for roving passenger assistance staff will soar.

There will be a pressing need for service staff to accompany the frail and the novice traveler.

Check out the floating population of service staff in the York Concourse at Union Station in Toronto. GO Service Staff regularly accompany the frail and elderly up the stairs to the platform; wait with them until the train pulls in, and then hand them over to the conductor of the train.

That's service.

(2) But We've Always Done it that Way

So. Sit by the peat fire and hand-knit sweaters by candle-light!

The question is not "Why can we not change?", but "What makes Public Transit so different from other public services, in terms of funding structure?".

(3) We Can't Afford it

Of course we can afford it. We already afford it. Right now Public Transit is paid partly by rates and taxes and partly from our pockets on a Pay-Per-Use basis.

Public Transit is financed by two different channels. One channel is by rates and taxes, the other channel is directly from your pocket. This method of funding is unlike all other public services and amenities, which are funded by only one channel – rates and taxes.

We pay for Public Transit right now.

The question is “Why do we Pay-Per-Use for Public Transit when we don't Pay-Per-Use for other services and amenities?”

(4) But twice as many people will start using public transit

Good.

Isn't that what we want? Fewer amateur drivers on the road means fewer collisions, and that means fewer delays, lower insurance costs (Oh yeah. That'll happen!).

Twice as many people using the system will not require twice the number of fleet vehicles, but it will require an increase in the number of fleet vehicles. This increase may well require an increase in rates and taxes, but think of the savings for those people who no longer need to run one, two, or three cars.

(5) I don't use public transit. Why should I pay for it out of my rates and taxes?

For the same reason that I pay rates and taxes and yet do not drive on the roads, or do not make use of the public library, and do not walk or sit in the public parks.

Public transit, like public sidewalks, roads, libraries and the like, are facilities provided by the municipality for general use by the general public. If members of the public do not use them, we do not use that as an argument for migrating towards a pay-per-use model.

(6) Uber, Lyft, and upcoming transport schemes will render Public Transit obsolete

That may be true, but it isn't going to happen overnight.

In the meantime Public Transit can save money – or use it to better advantage – by replacing its pay-per-use model with a fully-funded model.

The infrastructure is there and remains in place – Rail tracks, bus lanes, vehicles, operating and maintenance staff – and the only difference that you, the passenger are going to see is that you can use both hands when boarding the bus; there will be no need to extract and dig into your purse or wallet.

(7) Why not be satisfied with 90% funding, up from 70%?

Because anything less than 100% means that (a) you have to dig into your purse or wallet, even if only for a single penny, and (b) the public transit system must maintain an expensive fare-collection system.

Indeed, it could be argued that moving to a ZERO-percent funding model at least means that we are getting more value for our fare-collection costs than a seventy-percent model. We would have to have the fare-collection system in place whether we collect 100% of our costs or only 70% of our costs.

(8) What if it could be by donation?

As for donations, I think you miss the point.

To see why (...I think that) let me ask you "Would you consider making a small donation every time you used the sidewalk/street/library/police/parks etc?

I think you've never considered it!

Why? because we have all grown up knowing the fully-funded system for parks, sidewalks etc.

That you/one thinks of making a donation to public transit is (to my mind) clear evidence of just how much pay-per-use (that is, NOT fully-funded) has been hammered into our brains.

Note that the overall cost of funding transit WILL come down.

Reducing the cost of public transit, no matter how it is funded, should be seen as a Good Thing.

The Big Question

Why isn't Fully Funded Public Transit discussed as
an option in **your** city?

Further Reading

Phase-Out of TTC Tokens

On Sun., Sept. 18, 2016 The Toronto Star ran an article By BEN SPURR Transportation Reporter titled "Phase-out of TTC tokens worries advocates for the poor".

Ben summarized some of the problems for "low-income riders".

Every problem related to the Presto Card is eliminated with a switch to Fully-Funded Public Transit.

Paris Declares New War

On 21 Sep 2016 "[The Local](#)" ran an article titled "Paris declares new war on legion of train fare dodgers".

The article pointed out that "Fraud in the public transport network of Paris costs a whopping €366 million a year, or €1 million each day, according to new figures from France's Court of Auditors - the Cour des Comptes". It sounds crazy to suggest that eliminating pay-per-use can eradicate fraud and save costs, but the truth is this: If citizens pay by default through rates and taxes, then a transit system need not worry itself about fare-evasion at all.

"The campaign aims to win back an annual €20 million for the RATP and €10 million for SNCF.", which just goes to show what a feeble effort this is. By stepping up prosecutions, €30 million out of €366 million can be reclaimed. In other words, this cannot be counted as a solution.