

City of Mississauga Corporate Report



<p>Date: June 1, 2020</p> <p>To: Mayor and Members of Council</p>	<p>Originator's files:</p>
<p>From: Geoff Wright, P.Eng, MBA, Commissioner of Transportation and Works</p>	<p>Meeting date: June 10, 2020</p>

Subject

MiWay – Resumption of Fare Collection and Mandatory Face Masks

Recommendation

1. That the report dated June 1, 2020 from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works entitled MiWay – Resumption of Fare Collection and Mandatory Face Masks, be received for information.
2. That effective June 24, 2020, MiWay will reopen the City Centre Transit Terminal fare booth in advance of the resumption of fare collection.
3. That effective July 2, 2020, MiWay will resume fare collection by re-introducing front door boarding, mandating the use of non-medical masks or face coverings by passengers and employees and subsequently, increase the loading limit on buses.

Report Highlights

- On March 21, 2020, in response to COVID-19, MiWay implemented rear-door only boarding and temporarily provided free transit. Without the need for fare payments, MiWay closed the fare booth at the City Centre Transit Terminal on March 23, 2020.
- Since early April, physical distancing on MiWay buses has been encouraged by using caution tape to cordon off bus seats and implementing restrictions on the numbers of customers allowed to board a bus.
- With the onset of COVID-19, transit ridership decreased by 75%. The recovery of transit ridership to the pre COVID-19 level is expected to be gradual and protracted due to changes in travel demand and continued physical distancing recommendations.
- MiWay has been rolling out communication to encourage customers to wear non-medical masks or face coverings on transit and their use will be mandatory effective July 2, 2020.

- MiWay is preparing for the resumption of fare collection on July 2, 2020 by re-introducing front door boarding following the completion of a bio barrier installation at the driver compartment on all MiWay buses.
- At a minimum, the estimated fare revenue loss in 2020 due to COVID-19 is approximately \$52 million.

Background

In response to COVID-19, MiWay implemented rear-door only boarding on March 21, 2020 in order to minimize customer and operator interactions as a safety precaution in support of physical distancing. The operator's area was isolated from customers via a removable yellow chain. Passengers with disabilities who cannot board by the rear door continued to have access to the front door and the use of the wheel chair ramp. Upon request the driver would lower the bus, deploy the ramp and remove the chain to enable front door boarding. Upon arrival at destination the process is reversed.

As fare collection equipment is installed at the front of the bus, fare collection became impractical and free transit became necessary. Subsequently, MiWay closed the fare booth at City Centre Transit Terminal on March 23, 2020 as no further purchases of fare media would be required. Transit continues to be free and transfers are not required.

MiWay riders have responded to the direction of the Federal and Provincial governments as well as the Region of Peel and the City of Mississauga by staying home and undertaking essential trips only. This change in travel demand has significantly impacted MiWay ridership, with an approximate 75% ridership decline in addition to revenue shortfall as no fare has been collected since March 21, 2020.

Since early April, physical distancing on MiWay buses has been encouraged by using caution tape to cordon off bus seats and implementing restrictions on the number of customers allowed to board a bus. These measures have reduced peak period carrying capacities to 20-25% of pre COVID-19 levels. This has led to a dramatic increase in closed door incidents (bus full) during peak periods, particularly in the afternoon. The frequency of these incidents has continued to increase as the restrictions on non-essential businesses have been lifted. As MiWay has a limited number of buses and operators, MiWay will not be able to carry more passengers during peak periods unless passenger carrying capacity is increased.

MiWay staff is currently installing signage on-board buses to allow an increase in seating capacity to 50%. This will result in improved passenger carrying capacity by two-thirds of today's limits (i.e. an additional 8-11 passengers per bus) but cannot be implemented unless there is a relaxation of physical distancing requirements supported by the concurrent use of non-medical masks or face coverings.

Comments

As the city gradually re-opens under the direction of the Province and the Region, all teams at MiWay continue working to respond to the changes and to navigate the challenging work environment. MiWay's focus is to develop local solutions for the city that align with neighbouring transit systems and other Canadian transit agencies.

One of the first steps of MiWay's recovery plan is the return of front door boarding and the resumption of fare collection. The majority of transit agencies in the GTA and neighbouring regions, including Brampton Transit and York Region Transit, are resuming front door boarding and fare collection on July 2, 2020.

In addition to the resumption of fare collection, the following measures are required to restore transit services in support of the re-opening of the economy:

- Completion of bio barrier installation at the driver compartment on all MiWay buses;
- Return to front door boarding;
- Re-opening the City Centre Transit Terminal fare booth;
- Mandatory use of non-medical masks or face coverings; and
- Increasing passenger loading limits through the relaxation of physical distancing on public transit.

Bio Barrier Installation on MiWay Fleet

In order to resume fare collection, MiWay will need to end rear door boarding and return to front door boarding while reducing the risk of spreading COVID-19 by protecting customers and operators. In response to this challenge, MiWay's Maintenance team developed an in-house solution of customizable barriers providing biohazard protection (i.e. bio barrier) at the front of the bus. The bio barrier provides a physical separation between the operator and the customer while accommodating both the fare box and the PRESTO device.



Full production and installation of the bio barriers started the last week of April 2020. Installation on the MiWay fleet is expected to be completed by the middle of June 2020. Currently, 65% of the fleet is equipped with bio barriers.

Front Door Boarding

The return to front door boarding will simplify the experience for all customers as our accessible stops are designed for the front door of the bus as only the front of the bus can be kneeled and deploy the wheelchair ramp. The concrete stop pad allows for unhindered movement of mobility devices and connection to the sidewalk. The positioning of the bus needs to be carefully decided by operators as not all stops have concrete stop pads extended to accommodate the rear door for boarding or alighting.

Fare Booth Re-Opening

Resumption of fare collection is planned for July 2, 2020 following Canada Day, in company with neighbouring transit agencies. To support this change, and to address the customer need to purchase fare media and preplan their trips with proper fares, MiWay will re-open the fare booth at the City Centre Transit Terminal, in phases, starting June 24, 2020.

In the initial phase, the fare booth will be open between 11:15 AM and 7 PM on weekdays (Monday to Friday) only. A second phase, if required, will be premised on a review of customer demand and activity at the fare booth. Potential changes in the second phase could include an extension to the number of operating days and hours.

To minimize the risk of COVID-19 spread, MiWay will roll out a communication plan to strongly encourage contactless payment of fares with the use of PRESTO cards.

Non-Medical Masks or Face Coverings

Most recently Brampton Transit has announced that they will make the wearing of non-medical masks mandatory for riders and employees effective July 2 along with resumption of fare collection. On June 3, the Federal Minister of Transport issued revised guidance on the use of masks and face coverings to protect workers and passengers in urban transit operations and consistent provincial guidance and/or regulation is expected from the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario (MTO) with respect to public transit as this is under provincial responsibility. Chief Medical Officers of Health are recommending the use of non-medical masks or face coverings where physical distancing cannot be maintained such as public transit. Even with the isolation of bus seats it is not always possible to maintain physical distancing on buses as customers must use aisles and doors to enter/exit the bus. As physical distancing cannot be guaranteed the mandatory use of non-medical masks or face coverings is indicated.

In anticipation of provincial guidance, recognizing the decision of Brampton Transit and acknowledging the need to relax physical distancing requirements to meet customer demand, MiWay will make the use of non-medical masks or face coverings mandatory for riders and employees effective July 2, 2020. While non-medical masks or face coverings will be mandatory, children under the age of two, people with disabilities or other medical conditions that prevent them from wearing any mask will not be required to wear one. These valid exceptions will make enforcement complicated and problematic. Accordingly, this change must

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be supported with robust communication to educate customers which will include the limited distribution of single use non-medical masks during a short transition period.

Passenger Loading Limits

Since early April MiWay isolated bus seats with caution tape and imposed limits on the number of customers allowed to board a bus. This was done before the use of non-medical masks or face coverings were recommended by public health officials. These restrictions limit the carrying capacity of MiWay buses to 20-25% of pre COVID-19 levels depending on the bus type. As the restrictions on non-essential businesses ease and the economy restarts more and more riders are returning to MiWay. The incidents of closed doors have been increasing to an unmanageable level. MiWay cannot carry any more passengers during peak periods unless the restrictions on physical distancing on public transit are relaxed.

The mandatory use of non-medical masks or face coverings support a change in loading limits and customers will have to take personal responsibility for protecting themselves and others by wearing non-medical masks or face coverings on public transit and practicing physical distancing where possible.

MiWay will move to a 50% seated load standard on July 2 (similar to Brampton Transit today). Following a transition period after the imposition of mandatory non-medical masks or face coverings and in anticipation of compliance, MiWay plans to lift this limit on August 4, 2020 as we prepare for September service changes with the potential increase in ridership demands. This decision will be contingent on compliance and subject to guidance/regulation from the Province and/or Chief Medical Officers of Health.

Financial Impact

MiWay suspended fare collection with the move to rear door boarding on March 21, 2020 and no fares have been collected since that time. Based on MiWay's 2020 fare revenue budget forecast model, the estimated average monthly revenue is approximately \$7.5 million. Assuming the resumption of fare collection on July 2, 2020, the 15 week period of free transit would result in an approximate revenue loss of \$26 million.

In addition, with the onset of COVID-19, transit ridership decreased by 75%. The recovery of transit ridership and fare revenue to the pre COVID-19 level is expected to be gradual and protracted due to continued changes in travel demand and continued physical distancing recommendations. Therefore, it is projected that only 25% of the 2020 budgeted fare revenue will be collected in the first month of fare resumption, July 2020, with an additional, gradual increase in fare revenue projection each month thereafter, for the remainder of the 2020 year. The best case scenario is a return to 50% of transit ridership and fare revenue by year-end, subject to relaxed physical distancing measures on public transit. At a minimum, this would result in an approximate revenue loss of an additional \$26 million in fares.

In summary, the estimated fare revenue loss due to COVID-19 in 2020, at a minimum, would be approximately \$52 million. The transit industry and overall economic recovery projection from COVID-19 is expected to take more than 2 to 3 years, and as a result, the revenue shortfall will continue after the resumption of fare collection, and during this recovery period which goes beyond 2020.

Conclusion

In response to COVID-19, MiWay implemented rear-door only boarding on March 21, 2020 in order to minimize customer and operator interactions and temporarily provide free transit. Without the need for fare payments, MiWay closed the fare booth at the City Centre Transit Terminal on March 23, 2020.

As the city gradually re-opens to support business and economic recovery, one of the first steps of the City's recovery plan is to resume fare collection in transit. Together with neighbouring transit systems, MiWay is taking key steps to prepare for the resumption of fare collection on July 2, 2020.

The MiWay Maintenance team is currently completing installation of bio barriers on the fleet, with completion expected by the middle of June 2020. MiWay's Marketing team has been rolling out communication to encourage customers to wear non-medical masks or face coverings and their use will become mandatory effective July 2, 2020. As the economy restarts and passenger demand has increased to un-manageable levels, it is necessary to relax physical distancing requirements on MiWay buses in order to carry the passenger volumes. Lastly, to facilitate the restart of fare collection, the City Centre Transit Terminal fare booth will re-open on June 24, 2020 providing customers with the opportunity to pre-purchase fare media.

With free transit service provided for 15 weeks, a gradual recovery of transit ridership, and with revenue returning to 50% of the pre COVID-19 level (based on the best case scenario), it is estimated that the minimum fare revenue loss due to COVID-19 in the 2020 year would be approximately \$52 million.



Geoff Wright, P.Eng, MBA, Commissioner of Transportation and Works

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