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## Steeper transit fees eyed

Renato Gandia, Calgary Sun

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Riders and taxpayers may get nailed with fare increases and tax hikes to pay for what the city describes as an unsustainable transit system.

Any boost in the current \$2.75 regular fare hasn't been set, but council's finance committee Wednesday endorsed Calgary Transit's recommendation to reconsider a policy on the size of subsidy the department should receive.

Discounted fares, including those of seniors, are also being reviewed, which means those getting a break may also have to pay more.

A regular senior annual bus pass costs \$35 while those with low income only pay \$15 yearly.

The committee endorsed no changes to low income adult monthly pass which is currently at \$40.

Ald. Dale Hodges said he's concerned an annual pass for seniors would balloon up to \$57 after hearing from transit officials.

Transportation GM Malcolm Logan said that's not the case and such a figure was only used for an analysis bureaucrats presented to some aldermen.

"Council will have the opportunity to see and approve the actual fare changes at the 2012-2014 budget," said Logan.

"We were just looking for direction on whether they even wanted to consider certain areas of changes."

The senior's fare rate hasn't changed for about 16 years due to an "unpalatable political decision" council made, he said.

Ald. Gord Lowe, finance chairman, said council refused to address the issue of senior's fare in the past.

"It's an emotional issue. There's a school of thought that when you're 65 you have the right to certain privileges," he said.

Ald. Andre Chabot didn't support the option the committee made saying seniors should be consulted first.

"I do believe that we certainly owe something to the seniors for the amount of tax they've paid to the city over the years," he said.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart isn't opposed to making both seniors and youth pay more.

"You want to keep the prices low, you want to keep them affordable but you have this tsunami of people aging like myself that basically have free transportation service," she said.

Colley-Urquhart said the \$3 park-and-ride fee at LRT stations should be re-instated because transit lost about \$6 million in annual revenue when most of those stalls were made free of charge.

Ald. Shane Keating has a notice of motion asking bureaucrats to find out whether selling naming rights to LRT stations is a viable means for the city to generate more cash.

He said he hasn't really thought out where that cash should go, but he's open to giving the revenue to transit.

Council will resume discussing the fares and naming rights matters next Monday.

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