

Transit Safety and Security

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Transit Safety Plan, as outlined in the February 22/24, 2022, Office of the City Manager report OCM01037, be approved.
2. That the Community Standards and Neighbourhoods Branch 2022 operating expenditure budget be increased by \$3.9 million, on a one-time basis, to fund the Transit Safety Plan, with funding as follows:
 - \$1.1 million - from COVID-19 funds with the appropriated Financial Stabilization Reserve;
 - \$1.7 million - from Edmonton Police Services funds held corporately within Financial Strategies and;
 - \$1.1 million - from the Financial Stabilization Reserve.

Report Purpose

Council decision required

Council is being asked to approve the Transit Safety and Security Plan, enhanced safety measures and protocols, as outlined in this report and corresponding budget.

Executive Summary

- Transit systems are intended to be busy and vibrant, transporting large volumes of riders between their homes, work, schools, events and other activities.
- With a decrease in ridership due to COVID-19, the sense of safety and community in the transit system has temporarily changed.
- With an increase in mental health challenges, the drug poisoning epidemic and displacement from other spaces, the transit system is perceived by marginalized Edmontonians as a safe place to congregate and shelter. However, when social disorder arises from congregating and sheltering in LRT facilities, transit riders and others using the downtown pedway system may experience feelings of unease.

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- As the City of Edmonton continues to welcome back riders to the transit system, Edmonton's marginalized population must be provided with consistent, coordinated and culturally-appropriate social and safety supports as part of the transition.
- The City of Edmonton, the Edmonton Police Service and Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society will establish a tripartite leadership committee. The tripartite leadership committee will focus on coordinated strategies and responses as well as immediate support for Edmontonians using the transit system for shelter. As these strategies, responses and support mechanisms are operationalized, enforcement may occur when social disorder, problematic and illegal behaviour arises from congregating and sheltering in Edmonton Transit Service (ETS) facilities.
- Administration, the Edmonton Police Service and Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society will implement a joint safety operations team under a unified (shared) command system that includes Transit Peace Officers, Police Officers, Community Standards Peace Officers, outreach workers and Fire Rescue Services.
- To enable the joint safety operations team, protocols related to governance, deployment, standard operating procedures and facilities will be initiated. As the work proceeds, ongoing assessments of additional safety enhancements will be evaluated for implementation.
- If Council approves the Transit Safety Plan outlined in the body of the report, the City of Edmonton will enter into a three year Memorandum of Understanding with the Edmonton Police Service, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society and other stakeholders as needed.

REPORT

The effects of the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic are far reaching and are felt in many major municipalities. Public spaces, in particular in downtown areas, have seen shifts in their use - both in volume and activity. COVID-19 and related public health orders, including stay at home measures, have led to a decline in public transit demand for transit agencies across North America. With the significant decrease in ridership resulting in a decline in typical daily activity that allows for inherent natural surveillance, transit centres have transformed into impromptu gathering spaces for those experiencing multiple challenges. Increases in homelessness and drug use, complicated by mental health challenges have created conditions that sometimes see social disorder and crime playing out in these locations. As a result, transit riders and those using the LRT system may feel uneasy and, at times unsafe, in taking public transit.

Administration is committed to ensuring that the transit system is a safe, reliable and convenient mode of transportation, supporting equity, economic, health, social and climate-related outcomes. As public health orders are lifted, Administration and the Edmonton Police Service are recommending an approach that considers the needs of increased ridership and provides care to individuals who are currently using transit and transit facilities for unintended purposes.

The Transit Safety Plan outlined within this report will build upon the previous work laid out in City Operations report CO00526 -Transit Centre Security Measures presented to the Urban Planning Committee on May 11, 2021, and foundational investments made in 2018. These investments included:

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- \$12.8 million to install bus shields on the conventional bus fleet for Operator safety;
- \$10.2 million to increase the number of Transit Peace Officers and ETS Control Centre staff to align with growth in the transit system and provide 24/7 coverage, as well as add Security Guards at 21 of the 43 transit facilities and LRT stations; and,
- \$877,000 invested in building a continuous training program for Transit Operators.

Attachment 1 provides additional information on the Transit Safety and Security Model and the inputs, outputs, key measures and outcomes to achieve the City's goal of providing riders with a safe public transit experience.

Background

Since 2016, the City of Edmonton has been a member city of the United Nations Women's Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Initiative and in February 2020, the local Community Collaboration Committee released a report with recommended prevention and intervention strategies (Attachment 2) focused on:

- Inclusion of Indigenous Perspectives in Developing Interventions
- Policy Amendment
- Education and Awareness
- Ensure Safety of Public Infrastructure
- Training for First Responder/Justice Roles
- Reporting Sexual Violence
- Relationship Building

City Policy C620, approved by Council in 2019, Supporting Vulnerable People During Extreme Weather Conditions, formalized the City of Edmonton's role in leading a systematic response to extreme weather conditions to safeguard the health and lives of Edmontonians who are marginalized.

LRT stations were acknowledged to not be a suitable shelter space as they lacked basic amenities such as washrooms, were often inadequately heated to alleviate extreme cold, and did not allow those using the space to safely connect with important social supports. With dedicated extreme weather protocols, the City collaborates with Homeward Trust and more than 25 partner agencies to keep marginalized Edmontonians safe and warm; this includes transportation support (including a 2022 pilot of an ETS "warming bus") throughout the winter months to connect marginalized Edmontonians to shelter services.

To identify further next steps focused specifically on the issue of safety in the transit system, Administration will reconvene the Community Collaboration Committee and engage with key stakeholders and City advisory boards. Administration is also in the final stages of completing a Gender Based Analysis (GBA+) review of transit safety and security. The analysis, with input from diverse community stakeholders, will be presented to Council in Q3 2022.

Social Supports

In October 2021, the City, in partnership with Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, began piloting the Community Outreach Transit Team (COTT). COTT helps Edmontonians who require

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specialized support on transit and is based on a similar program used in the City of Calgary. Guided by the values of dignity and respect, COTT assists individuals and helps them access support and services, such as housing, mental health care, substance use resources, and financial assistance. The team is currently made up of two Transit Peace Officers and two Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society outreach workers, who work in partnership to provide support from 8:00 a.m to 10:00 p.m.

If the Transit Safety Plan is approved by Council, Administration would provide additional resources such as an outreach coordinator and to increase COTT to a total of three peace officers and three outreach workers. Administration will continue to review the COTT implementation to assess opportunities for further evolution. Based on the needs identified in the first four months of COTT operations, scaling up the model to fully address coordinated interventions will be explored for sustainability and impact.

COTT team training will include education on systemic issues through a trauma-informed, intersectional and anti-racist approach. For individuals requiring services beyond the scope of the COTT support such as health care, addictions treatment, psychiatric services and other specialized care, Administration will work with Alberta Health Services to explore how these services can be accessed.

To maximize the potential of transit facilities and create a sense of community and vibrancy, Administration will also continue work on developing plans for space activation in transit centres and LRT stations.

Transit Safety Plan - Enhanced Safety Measures and Protocols

To coordinate and deliver safety and social support for those who are experiencing homelessness, a tripartite leadership committee composed of City Administration, Edmonton Police Service and the Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society will be initiated. Together, the tripartite leadership committee will develop and implement immediate additional enhancements to safety for all Edmontonians in the transit system.

The tripartite leadership committee will focus on:

1. Coordinating crime prevention strategies and targeted responses to criminal activity; and
2. Ensuring that people experiencing homelessness who use the LRT system for shelter are provided with the supports they need now, as the City and its partners work towards addiction, intervention and housing solutions.
3. The approach for transit safety and security includes Police officer, Transit Peace Officer and Security Guard roles.

As the Transit Safety Plan is operationalized, the foot patrol teams of Transit Peace Officers will have assignments to specific transit centres and LRT stations. Police Officer and Transit Peace Officer resources, working in collaboration with Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, will be deployed in a unified and consistent manner based on collective data analysis with both the City of Edmonton and the Edmonton Police Service as contributors. Building on past short-term shared deployments, joint planning will be used to ensure effective and efficient crime prevention and crime responses are aligned between the teams. The planning will consider the use of joint

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deployment, a continuum of enforcement resources and evolving public safety techniques. The joint deployment planning will also account for the historical context of enforcement of marginalized populations and the need to build trustful relationships.

To enable joint safety operations, the following protocols will be initiated:

| Protocol | Details |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Governance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A tripartite leadership committee will be initiated, composed of the Edmonton Police Service, the City of Edmonton and the Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society. ● A new unified command team will report directly to the tripartite leadership committee to ensure enforcement and social support are properly integrated. ● A joint analytics and evaluation working group will be created to develop collective outcomes, goals and evaluation measures. |
| Joint deployment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Organized under a unified command structure, teams will be comprised of Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society outreach workers, Police Officers, Transit Peace Officers, Community Standards Peace Officers and Fire Rescue Services. Consideration will also be given to Security Guards who are stationed in LRT stations. ● Teams will share communications channels (providing enhanced awareness), critical incident debriefs and additional tools to assist with opioid overdoses. ● To ensure consistent data use for decision making and deployment processes, the City of Edmonton and the Edmonton Police Service will share data, including calls for service, crime and disorder incidents, and other relevant information, including access to ETS CCTV systems. ● Further to the June 30, 2021 Community and Public Services Committee report CS00477, a joint dispatch model will be explored to support this model. |
| Standard Operating Procedures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Standard Operating Procedures will be developed with a focus on deployment in light of public awareness expectations and relevant legislation for the lawful placement of the combined enforcement officers. ● Current policies, procedures, standards, guidelines, training requirements and records will be inventoried and reviewed, with an intent to standardize system documents, identify gaps and address informal practices. |
| Facilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To focus security oversight, and reduce drug poisoning risks, select washrooms within the LRT system will be temporarily closed. In order to provide access to washrooms, COTT will redirect people to nearby facilities. |

If Council approves the Transit Safety Plan, Administration will enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with Edmonton Police Service, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society and other

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stakeholders as needed (e.g. Alberta Health Services) to pilot the Transit Safety Plan for up to three years.

The following questions will be explored as this work proceeds:

1. *How can security guards most effectively support the LRT system?* Currently, security guards are deployed using analytics and are often the first line of response for medical and safety issues.
2. *What does Transit Peace Officer support look like as the LRT network is expanded?* Administration will need to determine an ideal resource complement to provide service and supports to transit patrons and vulnerable Edmontonians.
3. *In what circumstances should the City consider reduced access to transit facilities?* Administration is evaluating operational policies and best practices to understand if/when facility bans would be fair and appropriate. Administration is also considering if some areas of LRT facilities should be access restricted through physical means (ie. using a barrier system to restrict access to “paid” areas).
4. *Are there additional options to enhance safety for the public, transit employees, support providers and enforcement teams?* A strong collaborative relationship between enforcement officers and outreach workers is necessary to build trust with the marginalized populations.

Budget/Financial Implications

The three year pilot program (2023-2025) requires \$3.9 million in funding from 2022 to 2025 (annual costs of \$1.27 million, for 3 years, with a one time \$60,000 vehicle purchase) as outlined below:

| Item | Cost | Funding Source |
|--|--|---|
| Allocate a project director to oversee the operations | \$185,000/year for 3 years = \$555K | Edmonton Police Services funds held corporately within Financial Strategies |
| Additional resources for COTT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • three peace officers • three outreach workers One outreach coordinator | \$830,000/year for 3 years = \$2.49M | Funded equally from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edmonton Police Services funds held corporately within Financial Strategies • COVID-19 funds with the appropriated Financial Stabilization Reserve • Financial Stabilization Reserve |
| Additional vehicle for the COTT team | \$60,000 (One time) | |
| Two Transit Peace Officer foot patrol sergeant positions | \$250,000/year for 3 years = \$750K | |

In summary, the proposed funding for the entire plan would come from the following sources:

- \$1.1 million - COVID-19 funds with the appropriated Financial Stabilization Reserve.
- \$1.7 million - Edmonton Police Services funds held corporately within Financial Strategies.
- \$1.1 million - Financial Stabilization Reserve.

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Legal Implications

Administration has the ability to direct Peace Officers through policies, procedures, standards and guidelines following Council's governance direction. The documents related to Peace Officer operational expectations could be made public for the benefit of transparency. Additionally, Council could direct Administration to consider amendments to the Conduct of Transit Passengers Bylaw. With direction from City Council, an amended Bylaw could be brought forward which could address potential issues with respect to direction and responsibilities of Peace Officers and how to address concerns involving marginalized populations.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

Transit Riders

Transit riders have shared their feedback through many channels including formal research, input to 311, social media and correspondence to their Councillors. Many patrons have expressed concerns about an increase in drug use and social disorder in public spaces. Some transit riders feel uneasy, and at times, unsafe, in this environment but also demonstrate concern for their community members who are impacted by homelessness, mental health challenges and the drug poisoning crisis.

Formal research advises Administration that:

- Since 2015, perceptions of feeling safe overall in public transit have fallen slightly from a high of 83 per cent to 78 per cent in 2021.
- In 2021, perceptions of feeling unsafe at a transit stop or station have varied. In the last three months of the year, perceptions of feeling unsafe improved month-over-month from twelve percent of riders feeling unsafe to five per cent.

Marginalized Edmontonians

Advocates for, and agencies providing services to, marginalized Edmontonians have emphasized the need for systemic solutions that treat all people with respect, compassion and dignity — marginalized Edmontonians access transit facilities due to necessity, not by choice. Administration and the Edmonton Police Service agree that wraparound supports, which include harm reduction services, culturally appropriate shelter services, permanent supportive housing and comprehensive healthcare are all components required for a sustainable solution.

Business Community

The business community has noted that with the lower pedestrian-traffic as a result of the pandemic, downtown residents and businesses have reported an increase in crime and a decrease in perceived safety. The Downtown Recovery Task Force has outlined the need for a coordinated response to enhancing safety and security and has recommended action be prioritized in three areas:

- Develop and action an inter-governmental advocacy strategy to secure resources for marginalized Edmontonians and community safety initiatives.
- Fund additional 24/7 supports and programming for homeless and at-risk people Downtown.

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- Increase the number and frequency of Edmonton Police Service and Peace Officer foot patrols in the Commercial and Cultural Core of Downtown, to address drug-related crime and heighten public perceptions of security.

Considering All Perspectives

Throughout the three year pilot period, Administration will gather feedback from diverse Edmontonians and organizations that may be able to speak to transit safety and security at personal and systems levels. The actions resulting from this listening will include evaluating the role of outreach workers in the social support sector and analyzing the efficacy of the foot patrol model, with respect to crime and violence prevention.

GBA+

Attachment 3 outlines GBA+ findings and recommendations for this report.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Transit Safety & Security Logic Model
2. Edmonton: Safe City- The Community Response to Preventing and Addressing Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in Public Spaces
3. GBA+ Reporting