



# **Youth and Their Perception of Safety on ETS**



## **Issue:**

**What is travelling on ETS like for children and young people? How can we make it safer and build trust with parents and guardians?**

- We focused on an underrepresented group – children and youth on transit.
- We defined this group of people between the ages of 11 and 20.



## Research:

- “... active travel to public transit is a significant source of physical activity for some children ...”
- “the younger people start using transit, the more likely they are to use transit as adults.”
- Young people are also likely to choose future cities of residence based on the quality of public transit and are more likely to move to cities with a robust transit service.



## **Methods:**

- Two informal surveys, targeting young people between the ages of 11 and 21 and asking parents, adults and caregivers their opinion on children and young people on transit.
- Focus group of trustees from Edmonton Public Schools.
- Canvassed young people and their caregivers on social media, in order to better understand the issues that they face, particularly in terms of safety on ETS.



## **Key Questions:**

- How safe did children and young people feel on transit?
- What the major safety barriers were for students to take transit as part of their school commute?
- What were the broad safety concerns of parents and guardians for their children on transit?



## **Findings:**

- **Children and young people felt substantially unsafe while riding transit, especially if they were riding alone.**
  - **Safety is not measurable but a perception.**
  - **However, this perception of safety was significantly lacking when it came to transit and transit-based spaces.**



## **Findings:**

- Parents/guardians were more blunt. While convenient, transit was perceived as very unsafe for young people and children.
- Parents/guardians do not feel that ETS is doing a good job of keeping them safe.
- There is a real collapse of trust that existed between parents/guardians and the ETS.



“I’m nervous. I take transit and have seen a rise in homeless men using the bus station as a shelter.”

“... I refuse to send my child on ETS from all the horror stories from other parents and kids. Instead, we made up a car pool and a parent for every child shares driving duties.”

“Out of the last 5 times I’ve been on the LRT I was in an altercation of some sort 3 times. My youngest won’t go to Millwoods Transit Centre because he doesn’t want to get stabbed.”





## **Findings:**

- Women and people from minority communities reported feeling particularly vulnerable and unsafe and would prefer their children took alternative means of transport.
- Transit was seen as a last resort, rather than a viable option for everyday commutes and life.
- Very few young people felt completely safe on transit.
- Uncertainty as to who to approach was a big concern.
- Larger community routes were seen as safer, but the lack of visible security was a major concern.



“I am 4'11 and a visible minority. I had 3 men follow me from the station and threaten to rape me and my child. One alluded to having a knife. It wasn't until 2 nearby construction workers heard the men so they walked me and my kid until I could get to a bus safely. I have a 15 year old who currently has to take the bus because I don't drive. I worry about him because some of the passengers are very aggressive and drivers seem hesitant to throw them out ... honestly, if I had other options I would take it.”

“It's been awhile since I rode, but my friends used to joke that I had a "bus story" every time I saw them. As a petite, young looking female, I felt uncomfortable more often than not.”



## **Recommendations:**

- Who do you call? The driver? However, there were significant concerns about the accessibility of drivers and their inability to get involved in matters of safety.
- Fear of homeless people and transient populations is also down to a lack of understanding of systemic social problems, and education, as well as collaborative solutions are key.



## **Recommendations:**

- Better planning from ETS
- More school specials, as young people, especially high school students felt safer. Junior high is when students start taking transit, so, perhaps a service to those schools might also be considered.
- Safer connection points, or better still, more direct routes to school.
- Safer bus stops and transit centres. Lighting at bus stops to be improved, especially during winter months when students take buses in the dark.



## **Recommendations:**

- A safety course from the ETS for younger riders, similar to the First Riders Program.
- A partnership program between the ETS and schools whereby parents accompany their children on rides to schools on different occasion
- Do we need supervisory staff on some services, especially ones that are frequented by young people?
- Robust anti-bullying messaging on buses.
- Significant improvements to the Transit Watch service.



## **Recommendations:**

- Toolkits, information, education and awareness for younger riders.
- Ottawa's OC Transit developed the Transecure Program - a mobile community watch program where all employees are trained to respond to safety and security situations.
- Another transit system (BART) developed a poster for buses and trains that illustrated that you can approach anyone about safety and security and there will be an appropriate follow up.
- Research into safety best practices. Partnerships with universities and colleges to conduct more research into youth safety on transit.



## **Recommendations:**

- At key transit locations/ busy community buses it might be possible to have a transit mentor, identified with a vest or button who can ensure safe passage during key times like end and beginning of school.
- More collaboration between ETS and schools: creating programs on transit ridership and safety; field trips on safely riding transit.
- Edmonton Social Planning Council's program "Shift to Action": a comic to encourage bystander intervention at an appropriate level.
- Step-by-step instructions on transit safety and what to do in case of safety issues.



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**Above all, we like to believe that we are all in this together, and we are building a community of people who are present and look out for everyone. But building such a community is a task that needs to be taken on by more of us, and there needs to be an awareness about social responsibility, especially towards the youngest members of our society.**





**Thank you for your attention!**  
**Questions?**