

ADMINISTRATION RESPONSE - ETSAB REPORT: YOUTH AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF SAFETY ON ETS

RECOMMENDATION

That the March 21, 2023 City Operations report CO01725, be received for information.

Requested Council Action	Information only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Urban Places		
City Plan Values	ACCESS		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	Inclusive and compassionate	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Community safety and well-being
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Policy C539A - Transit Service Standards Procedures • Transit Safety Plan • Community Safety and Well-Being Strategy 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CR_7026, Current Policies - Transportation Services Users - Increased Safety Measures, Community and Public Services Committee, November 13, 2020 • CR_7969, Transit Safety and Security Update, Community and Public Services Committee, November 13, 2020 • CO00526, Transit Centre Security Measures, Urban Planning Committee, May 11, 2021 • CO00547, CO00547 Administration Response: Inclusive Transit Report, Urban Planning Committee, June 15, 2021 • OCM01037, Transit Safety and Security, City Council, February 22/24, 2022 • OCM00991, Community Safety and Well-being Strategy, Community and Public Services Committee, May 16, 2022 • CO01229, Transit Safety and Security Interim Update, City Council, May 24, 2022 		

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Executive Summary

- This report responds to recommendations made by the Edmonton Transit Service Advisory Board's (ETSAB) report EXT01719 and welcomes the insights shared by ETSAB.
- Administration is committed to delivering a convenient, reliable, safe and inclusive transit service. The Transit Safety Plan, approved by Council in February 2022, takes a holistic approach to addressing transit safety and security. The approach focuses on coordinating efforts between Administration, Edmonton Police Service and Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society to provide both security, as well as connections to social support for marginalized Edmontonians seeking shelter in transit spaces.
- In 2023, several new initiatives will be implemented to support safety for youth riders, including expanded travel training programs, increased youth rider communication through transit safety tools, launching a bystander awareness campaign and technology improvements to expand mobile access to Transit Watch. Administration will continue to engage and maintain relationships with postsecondary institutions and school boards in Edmonton throughout the development of new initiatives.

REPORT

Operating a safe, equitable and inclusive transit service requires understanding the unique perspectives of all demographic groups who use transit. Youth are a significant portion of Edmonton transit riders, contributing 47 per cent of fare revenue in 2022. In alignment with City Policy C451H - Edmonton Transit Service Fare Policy, ETS youth riders are riders 24 years of age and under.

Investments to help youth riders feel supported and safe can establish transit as a lifelong preferred travel mode. A 2014 study¹ by the United States Public Interest Research Group reported that since 1996 the number of younger people driving has gradually decreased and that youth are more likely to continue using alternative modes of transportation well into adulthood. This trend indicates that efforts to improve the experiences of youth riders is a worthwhile investment to grow transit ridership.

In addition to the direct benefit of improved mobility, there are many co-benefits of youth transit use, such as better health outcomes, access to education and supporting equitable access to the city. Another study in 2014 stated that access to safe, affordable and convenient transportation shapes the “geography of opportunity” for many children and youth² - meaning that access to public transit increases the options for which schools youth attend, extracurricular activities they join and work opportunities they take advantage of. Finally, many youth riders from equity-deserving communities and families depend on

¹ United States Public Interest Research Group. *Millennials in Motion*, 2014 <https://publicinterestnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Millennials-in-Motion-USPIRG.pdf>

² Vincent, Jeffrey M et. al. *Beyond the Yellow Bus: Promising Practices for Maximizing Access to Opportunity through Innovations in Student Transportation*, 2014 <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED558542.pdf>

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transit to ensure their children can access education, recreation and employment opportunities.

Administration is committed to transit rider safety. Youth and their guardians deserve to feel safe in transit spaces, which are intended to be busy and vibrant, transporting large volumes of riders between home, work, school and other essential activities. Increasing youth ridership is a focus area for Administration in 2023 and this work will be guided by the five pillars detailed in attachment 1:

1. Outreach
2. Safety & Security
3. Faring
4. Service planning
5. Partnerships

The ETSAB report EXT0119 ETSAB: Youth and Their Perception of Safety provides an opportunity to further evaluate and adjust the safety and security pillar. Over the past five years, Administration has implemented several initiatives to address youth safety and security and support youth ridership growth, shown in Attachment 2. New initiatives are also planned for 2023.

New Initiatives

Reflecting on the recommendations outlined in EXT01719, Administration is pursuing several opportunities to improve safety for youth riders in 2023:

1. Mobile Access to Transit Watch

Since 2008, the Transit Watch program has offered a way for transit riders to report security concerns directly to ETS Control Centre staff through a dedicated telephone number. A text message option was added in November 2020 to provide a more discreet way of reporting safety and security concerns based on recommendations from the Safe City Report developed by the Edmonton Safe City Community Collaboration Committee and presented to the November 13, 2020, Community and Public Services Committee in CR_7026.

There are several opportunities to improve access to the Transit Watch reporting tool. Access to phone and text reporting relies on cellular coverage. Cellular coverage and Open City WiFi are currently available in LRT stations but not while travelling underground between stations. Administration is exploring an underground cellular coverage solution with a public communications network.

There are also opportunities to generally increase rider awareness of all transit security features, including Transit Watch. In 2023, transit safety tools will be distributed through outreach programs in partnership with school boards and post-secondary institutions. Administration will also implement a Transit Watch Quick Response (QR) code. This will enable riders to scan a QR code with their smartphone to send a text message to the ETS

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Control Centre. Options for new mobility applications to enhance rider safety are also being explored.

2. Bystander Awareness Campaign

All transit riders play a role in helping to keep each other safe. Through education and awareness raising efforts highlighting the role of bystanders, riders may feel empowered to intervene in situations where they can safely have a positive impact, particularly for marginalized people such as youth and people who are most often targeted by violence and harassment, such as women, Indigenous and racialized people.

The Safe City report³ recommended implementing a bystander awareness campaign. The campaign, which is expected to launch in late March 2023, will help provide people in transit spaces with the knowledge and tools to intervene in a manner that is safe for both the bystander and for the individual who is the target of the inappropriate or threatening act. Campaign materials will be previewed as part of the accompanying presentation to this report.

The campaign is rooted in understanding the diverse intersectional perspectives of transit riders and was developed using research conducted through a series of in-depth interviews, focus groups and an online survey with the Edmonton Insight Community that targeted transit riders. Overall, the findings provided insights on the experiences and comfort of transit riders to intervene when observing gender-based harassment.

Administration will monitor the impact of the campaign by comparing survey results pre- and post-campaign launch to assess whether riders and ETS staff are more likely to take action as a bystander as a result of the campaign. Campaign results will inform continuous improvement efforts and other related programs.

3. New Youth Outreach and Travel Training Programs

An expansion of outreach and travel training will support more demographic groups, including youth. Informed by the Edmonton Public School Board and the Edmonton Catholic School Division, enhanced engagement methods, with a focus on education, will help youth become more familiar and comfortable using public transit overall, and safety and security features particularly as they transition to junior and senior high schools.

The new programs will be co-developed between Administration and school board curriculum coordinators to ensure outreach activities complement the existing school curriculum. This includes exploring methods to promote public transit more prominently in schools, such as supporting teachers with transit-based lesson plans, an ambassador program and inviting youth to attend tours of transit facilities to learn how the transit system operates. The new programs will launch ahead of the 2023-2024 school year.

³ Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Initiative
https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/initiatives_innovation/united-nations-women-safe-citi

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4. Facility Improvements

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) security audits are ongoing to improve facilities from a security perspective. Audits for all 18 LRT stations and 10 transit centres are expected to be completed by the end of 2023. In addition, Corporate Security completed a security audit of the Downtown pedway system in January 2023. Administration is currently analyzing the recommendations from that audit and developing a plan to implement improvements starting later this year.

5. Safer Washroom and Public Washroom Strategy

Washroom attendants are being added to more washrooms in transit facilities. As part of the 2023 to 2026 budget, Council approved funding for the Public Washroom Strategy. Washroom attendants will be added in three additional transit stations to help reduce disorder in these spaces through increased oversight. Administration is also testing a technology solution as an alternative to washroom attendants to aid in the monitoring of the status of the washrooms. The technology solution will be piloted for one year and evaluated based on how it aligns with safety objectives.

6. Partnership with MacEwan University

In the winter 2022 semester, Administration collaborated with MacEwan University on an Interaction Design course in the Digital Experience Design program, which included student projects focused on transit safety. The student projects led to the implementation of the transit safety boards and postcards in June 2022 and Administration is exploring some of the students proposed technology solutions. This collaboration has continued in the winter 2023 semester, with student projects focused specifically on youth and solutions to increase youth riders.

Next Steps

Administration will continue work to provide a safer transit experience, in alignment with the Downtown Core and the Transit Safety Plan. Some key actions Administration will be undertaking include:

- Launching a QR code for Transit Watch
- Exploring options for developing mobile safety tools, such as an app
- Advancing work to implement underground cellular network connectivity
- Monitoring the success of the upcoming Bystander Awareness Campaign
- Expanding the travel training program to schools, for an anticipated fall 2023 launch
- Developing and distributing new transit safety tool resources tools

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

Administration regularly engages youth riders through various customer research tools and youth-focused events. Research tools include ongoing customer satisfaction surveys, non-rider surveys, Edmonton Insight Community surveys and other qualitative studies such as focus groups and app-based mobile ethnography tools. The purpose of this research is to understand trip characteristics and travel patterns, perceptions of transit riders, reasons for transit use and satisfaction with various aspects along the transit journey. In 2022, feedback from more than 730 youth aged 15-24 was collected from surveys. In addition to research, ETS participates in school events to support youth ridership, answer questions and learn about their unique experiences using transit. Gaining further understanding of how all demographic groups experience each aspect of the transit journey informs tangible actions the City undertakes to improve the rider experience.

GBA+

Administration completed a GBA+ analysis on transit safety and security in March 2022 which included focus groups with youth riders and non-riders (Attachment 3). The engagement aimed to understand diverse and intersectional perspectives on safety and security to inform recommendations to improve safety on ETS. Feedback and recommendations were categorized into eight themes. The findings from the youth focus groups are summarized below:

- Accessibility, Maintenance and Infrastructure - Ensure there is adequate lighting and increase the number of bus shelters.
- Enforcement - Increase visibility of security personnel and enforcement.
- Routing and Scheduling - Reduce overcrowding on buses by increasing the number of buses.
- Operator Roles - Implement operator training on how to respond to different situations to ensure riders feel safe.
- Technology - Follow up on complaints reported through Transit Watch and increase surveillance on transit vehicles.
- Discrimination - Some youth reported being discriminated against based on gender identity, race and other factors which leads to them feeling unsafe.
- Communication - Communicate updates to youth through a current mobile app (e.g., Transit App) to increase awareness of transit-related programs, changes and policies among youth.
- Pandemic - As the engagement was conducted prior to removal of public health restrictions, youth were the most outspoken about concerns around mask compliance in both operators and riders.

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Based on the feedback and recommendations shared from the engagement, Administration developed a set of action items that will be implemented as part of the three-year Transit Safety Plan.

ATTACHMENTS

1. ETS Youth Strategy Pillars
2. Current Programs and Processes
3. Transit Safety and Security Engagement Findings