

Transit Rider Research Program Tools and Methodology

The ETS Transit Rider Research Program covers a broad range of conventional transit riders (bus, LRT and On Demand Transit), paratransit riders and non-riders, providing insights on rider satisfaction levels and perceptions of various transit aspects. Survey instruments are designed to ask for information in a neutral and direct manner as to not guide respondents towards specific feedback and answers. Feedback is collected from a wide spectrum of users to ensure the results represent a comprehensive picture of the different perspectives of current riders and non-riders. Participants in research projects include a diverse representation of demographics and travel patterns, including different age groups, gender identities, income levels, employment status, student status, employment industries, ethnicities, persons with disabilities, 2SLGBTQIA+, neighbourhoods, frequency and purpose of transit usage.

The principles of inclusion and access are fundamental to the City's research practices. Administration collects the demographic data primarily to understand which demographics are being heard or unheard. This information provides feedback from a range and diversity of perspectives in order to confidently make informed decisions. Where appropriate, this information is also used to conduct intersectional analysis. Demographic questions are selected to be included in surveys with intention, based on its relevance for analysis and insights.

Outlined below are ETS' rider research projects which include online and telephone surveys as well as topical qualitative studies.

1. Conventional Transit Rider Satisfaction Survey

This tool refers to an online monthly survey with current bus and LRT riders over the age of 15 living in the Edmonton Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). The comprehensive survey was developed based on key points in the transit rider journey map, which include first stop/station experience, on-board experience, transfer experience and end-of-trip experience. The survey aims to understand travel patterns of current riders, reasons for using ETS and satisfaction with various transit aspects along the transit rider journey.

The survey uses a combination of closed and open-ended questions to gauge rider perceptions and experiences, and is designed to be completed within 10-15 minutes and provide a balance between quality and brevity to ensure respondents are engaged throughout the survey. As of 2023, ETS collects approximately 250 responses from transit riders each month from an online panel of Edmontonians (approximately 3,000 annually). Other jurisdictions which have higher service area

populations and transit ridership volumes have comparable survey sample sizes for their conventional transit rider satisfaction surveys.

Over the past few years, the survey has continually evolved and adapted to capture how new transit industry trends and socio-economic changes impact transit riders. Below are some examples of how the survey has adapted over the years to reflect research needs.

- In 2020 and 2021, the transit rider satisfaction survey was expanded to capture insights on COVID-19 perceptions and experiences of transit riders, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on transit usage.
- At the launch of the Bus Network Redesign and On Demand Transit in April 2021, the transit rider satisfaction survey expanded to understand transit rider perceptions on how the new network impacted certain transit aspects such as time to get to stop, travel times, on-time performance, frequency and other factors.
- In January 2022, the survey added questions on work from home and hybrid work policies to understand how travel patterns and transit usage have been impacted by workplace policies. Later in 2022, the survey was expanded further to focus on safety and security perceptions and awareness of transit safety measures.
- In 2023, additional demographic questions were added to the survey with an equity focus to help ETS understand the differences in experiences of intersecting identifies such as those who identified as racialized/visible minorities, Indigenous, persons with disabilities, parents with children under 18 years, 2SLGBTQIA+, and newcomers to Canada (less than one year).

2. DATS Rider Satisfaction Survey

This tool refers to an annual survey conducted with approximately 250 DATS riders and caregivers of DATS riders conducted through online, telephone and paper mail-in surveys. Respondents are recruited from the DATS registrant list. The survey uses both closed and open-ended questions to understand the DATS unique rider experience, including travel patterns and type of vehicles used, booking process, pick-up experience, on-board experience, drop-off experience and overall DATS experience.

3. Non-Rider Survey

The non-rider survey is an annual online survey conducted with 400 participants over the age of 15 living in the Edmonton CMA, who have not used transit (or have not used transit more than two times) in the past 12 months. Participants are recruited from an online panel of Edmontonians. The survey uses a combination of closed and open-ended questions, with the aim of understanding barriers to transit usage, current travel patterns and access to transportation, past experiences with ETS, measures that would increase the likelihood of using transit, safety on transit and perceptions of transit.

4. Topical Qualitative Studies

ETS conducts qualitative studies using mobile ethnography tools and focus groups. Mobile ethnography is a tool where participants use their smartphones to provide in-the-moment feedback and information (ethnographic data) about their lives. This type of research uses a mobile app-based platform that allows participants to download a mobile app and complete a series of tasks or questions through the mobile app while travelling on transit. Participants take pictures, videos and mobile screen recordings to capture information.

The purpose of qualitative studies is to provide a deeper understanding and bridge the data gap on specific topics and trends found in the monthly or annual surveys conducted by ETS. Each study recruits approximately 20-30 participants. While mobile ethnography studies provide in the moment feedback on each of participants' journey points while taking transit, other qualitative methodologies like focus groups and online discussion forums help to understand ideas and opinions in a group setting. Examples of qualitative studies undertaken by ETS over the years are outlined below:

- Mobile ethnography study at the launch of the Bus Network Redesign and On Demand Transit with transit riders using the new bus network and On Demand Transit service to understand the in-the-moment experiences, barriers and perceptions along the transit journey.
- Mobile ethnography study on comfort throughout the transit journey to understand how in-the-moment factors such as atmosphere, seating, transit mode used, infrastructure conditions, service reliability, weather and other variables impact perceptions of comfort.

- Online journaling and discussion forum study to understand how awareness of safety and security measures impact perceptions of safety in real-time at each stage of the transit journey.
- Mobile ethnography study with non-riders taking transit for the first time in a while to understand in-the-moment experiences and satisfaction with ETS along their transit journey.

5. Ride Transit Survey

An annual online survey is conducted with Ride Transit low-income pass program participants to understand how the program has impacted transit usage, ability to participate in civic life, perceptions of affordability and transportation spending patterns. The survey provides insights on whether the program is meeting the intended outcomes. Respondents are recruited from the Ride Transit Program participant list using random selection.

6. Insight Community Surveys

Online surveys with Edmonton Insight Community panel members are conducted throughout the year. Edmonton Insight Community includes around 3,000 transit riders who use public transit as their primary or secondary mode of transportation. These online surveys with transit riders allow ETS to explore additional transit related topics. Some examples of past surveys conducted through the Edmonton Insight Community include the bystander awareness and Rediscover ETS campaign evaluations and a perception survey on bus shelters usage and features.

7. Other Safety and Security Related Pilot Projects

Since summer 2023, Administration has been piloting other research tools such as QR code surveys in LRT stations and transit centres as well as onsite interviews with people who use transit spaces. These projects will provide a deeper understanding of perception of safety and the impact of various safety and security measures that have been implemented over the years. Progress updates on QR code survey and intercept survey have been communicated through the transit safety bi-monthly verbal updates to Council.

Transit Safety QR Code Survey

On July 17, 2023, Administration launched a four-month pilot for a new transit safety QR code survey at four LRT stations (Churchill, Belvedere, Century Park and Stadium). Riders and people using transit spaces as pedways are notified of the short survey through posters in these four locations. The objective of this

methodology is to capture daily, location-based in-the-moment feedback from riders that will allow ETS to analyze the immediate impacts of newly implemented safety and security measures at transit centres and LRT stations. Insights from this pilot project are expected by the end of 2023.

Auricle Project

In 2023, Administration partnered with a third-party research vendor on a project called Auricle to engage transit riders and those who seek shelter in transit spaces onsite in transit spaces. The aim is to uncover the stories and narratives that matter to people using transit spaces. Auricle is a second-round prototype, developed through a partnership between the City of Edmonton's RECOVER team, social design organization InWithForward, and Edmonton Transit Safety. Auricle is testing (1) a new kind of local data about wellbeing, (2) a new role for every day Edmontonians to listen across lines of difference, (3) new strategies for community engagement that enable flourishing. Through this prototype, the research will provide a better understanding of how to expand knowledge, decolonize data collection and analysis, and better understand city levers and resources for wellbeing.

Story collection took place in three transit stations (Jasper Place, Churchill, and Clareview) between September 1 - November 8, 2023 and engaged a diverse range of people who spend time in transit spaces. From November 27-29, 2023 pop-up events were held at each of the stations that encouraged people to encounter the stories, engage fellow Edmontonians, and learn how transit shapes wellbeing.