

ADMINISTRATION RESPONSE YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSIT IN EDMONTON

An Analytical Report of Ongoing Transit Issues from the Youth Lens

Recommendation			
That the October 11, 2023, City Operations report CO02029, be received for information.			
Requested Action		Information only	
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle		ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals	
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.		Healthy City	
City Plan Values	ACCESS		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	A community of communities	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Mobility Network
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Policy C539A - Transit Service Standards Procedures • City Policy C451H - Edmonton Transit Service Fare Policy • City Policy C554A - Park and Ride • Regional Arc Fare Payment System • Enhanced Transit Safety Plan 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CO00091 U-Pass Options, Community and Public Service Committee, November 13, 2020 • CO01192 Ride Transit and Leisure Access Programs, Executive Committee, October 26, 2022 • CO00576 Transit Fare Fines - Repayment Options, Executive Committee, October 26, 2022 • CO01450 Transit Network Equity Analysis, Urban Planning Committee, November 22, 2022 • CO01725 Administration Response - ETSAB Report: Youth and Their Perception of Safety on ETS, Urban Planning Committee, March 21, 2023 • CO01834 Implementation of the Edmonton Transit System Safety Plan, City Council, July 4, 2023 • CO1337 Edmonton Transit Services in Newer Developing/Developed 		

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- Communities, Urban Planning Committee, August 29, 2023
- CO01551 Bus Service for Youth After School Hours - Approach and Work Plan, Urban Planning Committee, August 29, 2023

Executive Summary

- The City of Edmonton Youth Council (CEYC) prepared a report “Youth Perspectives on Transit in Edmonton: An Analytical Report of Ongoing Transit Issues From the Youth Lens” that provides recommendations to improve the transit experience for youth riders.
- Administration is committed to delivering a convenient, reliable, safe and inclusive transit service for all riders. Youth ridership is a focus for ETS and opportunities to improve transit access and the rider experience are regularly assessed.
- In 2023 and beyond, new and enhanced initiatives will be implemented to support youth riders, including increased off-peak service frequency; further outreach and education; enhanced bike connectivity; youth fare reduction in 2025; Arc roll-out to youth; travel training; and continued implementation of measures in the Enhanced Transit Safety Plan.
- Administration will also be exploring opportunities for further engagement with youth in Edmonton, including CEYC, to implement tangible actions that support youth ridership.

REPORT

Youth (24 years of age and under per City Policy C451H - Edmonton Transit Service Fare Policy) are a significant portion of Edmonton transit riders, contributing 47 per cent of fare revenue in 2022. The City of Edmonton Youth Council (CEYC) prepared EXT02022 - Youth Perspectives on Transit in Edmonton: An Analytical Report of Ongoing Transit Issues From the Youth Lens, which outlines the transit experiences of youth riders. It is based on research conducted from March to June 2022. The report provides recommendations to improve various aspects of the transit experience for youth riders, including adjustments to routes and timing, payment methods and affordability, and comfort and security.

The City recognizes that helping 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, since 1996, the number of younger people driving personal vehicles has gradually decreased and youth are more likely to continue using alternative modes of transportation well into adulthood. As such, investment and efforts to improve the experiences of youth riders are worthy of consideration as they can help grow transit ridership. For youth riders, in addition to the direct benefit of improved mobility, there are also many co-benefits, such as better health outcomes, access to education and supporting equitable access to the city. Many youth riders from equity-deserving communities and families depend on transit to ensure their children can access education, recreation and employment opportunities. In the March 21, 2023 City Operations report CO01725 Administration Response - ETSAB: Youth and Their Perception of

¹ United States Public Interest Research Group. [Millennials in Motion](#), 2014

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Safety on ETS to Urban Planning Committee, Administration introduced the ETS Youth Strategy Pillars which guide actions and work to support youth ridership (Attachment 1).

Administration continues to support a number of long-standing and ongoing programs to support youth riders, as outlined in Attachment 2. In addition to these existing measures, in 2023 and beyond, Administration will implement new initiatives to enhance access to transit for youth riders and the overall rider experience, as outlined below.

1. Routes and Timing

ETS regularly assesses opportunities to improve transit connectivity based on ridership patterns and feedback from transit riders. Service adjustments and expansions align with criteria assessment procedures in City Policy C539A - Transit Service Standards Procedures. New initiatives to further support service and mobility for youth riders are outlined below.

Increased Service

Through Budget 2023-2026, Council funded an additional 500 weekly off-peak service hours (26,000 hours per year) and a 25 per cent increase in On Demand Transit service. The increase in service hours was implemented in the September 2023 service adjustment, resulting in higher off-peak frequency, extended bus routes and On Demand Transit in new neighbourhoods, directly benefiting riders - including youth riders - by improving equitable access to transit service. The August 29, 2023 City Operations report CO1337, Edmonton Transit Services in Newer Developing/Developed Communities also outlined additional opportunities to expand service throughout Edmonton. Two of these opportunities - redeploing the Valley Line Southeast precursor service hours and a satellite transit garage - will be brought forward to Council as part of the Fall 2023 Supplemental Budget Adjustment.

Further to the above increases, in September 2023 Administration added four new School Special routes, expanded existing School Special service for four schools and added express service connecting the University of Alberta to southwest Edmonton. These additions, alongside regular adjustments to School Special routes, provide transit service options that are specifically tailored to meet the needs of youth riders. Further information on School Specials service planning is detailed in Attachment 2.

On Demand Transit Education and Outreach

CEYC highlights the importance of increasing awareness of On Demand Transit by conducting education and outreach. Existing youth outreach and education programs include training and education on how to use On Demand Transit. In collaboration with Edmonton Public Schools and Edmonton Catholic Schools, Administration will review opportunities to enhance the promotion of these outreach and education programs.

Bike Connectivity

The Bike Plan provides a foundation for a bike network that supports active transportation. One major program area in the Bike Plan is "Integration with Transit," which provides actions to

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support bike connections to transit. Since 2020, Administration implemented the following related programs and initiatives:

- Allowing bikes on the LRT at all times.
- Installing bike racks on all ETS buses.
- Launching the Century Park Transit Centre secure bike storage pilot.

Statistics Canada² mode share data from 2021 showed that youth ages 15-24 are more likely to bike when commuting compared to older age groups. Through Budget 2023-2026, Council approved capital funding for the implementation of the Bike Plan which will support further bike integration with transit for all riders, including youth. Administration will explore further opportunities to enhance the integration of bicycling with transit by reviewing access for different styles of bikes, such as childrens' bikes, cargo bikes, bike trailers and fat tire bikes. This includes exploring how to expand secure storage at stations based on feedback received from the bike community, transit riders and through the Century Park Transit Centre secure bike storage pilot.

2. Payment Procedure and Affordability

Increasing access to affordable transit fare and convenient payment systems for youth allows them to gain higher mobility independence and participate in more activities, such as volunteering, work and recreation. ETS offers youth several discounted fare options, including:

- Discounted youth (ages 17 and under) and young adult (ages 18-24) monthly transit passes through the City of Edmonton.
- Discounted youth monthly transit passes through the Edmonton Public and Edmonton Catholic school boards.
- Ability to use the Universal Transit Pass Program (U-Pass) at participating post-secondary institutions in Edmonton.
- Discounted monthly transit passes through Ride Transit, a fare reduction program funded by the City of Edmonton and the Government of Alberta.
- Children 12 and under can ride transit free of charge when accompanied by a fare-paying rider. In October 2023, Administration will be discussing the fare paying rider requirement in City Operations report CO01580 Fare Policy Amendment - Children under 12.
- Youth who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness are eligible for transit tickets or a monthly transit pass through social agency partners in Edmonton at no cost to the rider.

The following initiatives will further increase access to youth fare in the next few years:

Youth Fare Reduction

Approved by Council in 2019, City Policy C451H - Edmonton Transit Service Fare Policy provides direction on setting transit fares that are equitable, fair, affordable and encourage a travel mode shift towards public transit. The policy is a leading example, in Canada, of a needs-based model which focuses on providing discounts to those who need it most. Upon Council approval, the

² Statistics Canada. [Main mode of commuting by commuting duration, time leaving for work, age and gender, 2022](#)

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policy established a target youth fare rate of 65 per cent of the standard adult fare and Administration acknowledged that achieving this fare rate target would take multiple budget cycles. During the 2023-2026 budget deliberations, Council approved a fare revenue service package which includes a reduction in the youth monthly fare from the current rate of 73 per cent of the standard adult fare to 65 per cent of the standard fare in 2025.

Arc Roll-Out to Youth

Edmonton Public and Catholic school boards purchase monthly youth passes from ETS and manage distribution to students directly through their schools. During the 2023-2024 school year, Edmonton Public Schools will sell passes for \$55 and Edmonton Catholic Schools will sell passes for between \$32 and \$57, depending on the grade. The school boards may further discount the youth passes for eligible students. Sales of youth passes to the school boards represents approximately 13 per cent of all transit fare sales.

As part of the implementation of the regional Arc system, Administration has been working closely with the Edmonton Public School Board and Edmonton Catholic School Division to plan for transitioning students to Arc. Administration intends to roll out the Arc fare payment system to youth riders this fall.

The rollout of Arc to youth provides a more convenient way for them to pay transit fares by offering more options for cashless fare payment. It also reduces the volume of paper-based fare media bought through online, vending machines and retail fare sales channels. An open payment system will be introduced in a later phase of Arc implementation. This will allow riders to tap on Arc validators using their contactless bank cards and near field communication (NFC) enabled mobile wallets. Arc will also allow ETS to better understand the travel patterns of youth riders, providing opportunities for better service planning for youth.

3. Comfort and Security

Ensuring all riders, including youth riders, are able to access a safe, reliable and inclusive transit service is critical for growing ridership. In 2022, a survey conducted with 400 former ETS riders found that 15 per cent of survey respondents cited personal safety concerns as one of the primary reasons for discontinued transit use. The March 21, 2023 City Operations report CO01725, Administration Response - ETSAB Report: Youth and Their Perception of Safety on ETS, outlined several new initiatives in 2023 to improve safety for youth riders. Additionally, the July 4, 2023 City Operations report CO01834, Implementation of the Edmonton Transit System Safety Plan to City Council, discussed additional opportunities to enhance security and perception of safety on transit. Further information on three of these opportunities will be shared in the October 24, 2023 City Operations report CO01974 Opportunities to Enhance Transit Safety and Security.

4. Youth Outreach and Education

Each year, ETS conducts youth outreach and education to support youth riders by increasing awareness of trip planning, fare programs and safety on transit. Some of the new youth outreach initiatives in 2023-2024 are outlined below:

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New Youth Travel Training Programs

In May and June 2023, Administration piloted a new initiative with Grade 6 classes to provide them with their first transit experience before entering junior high school. This included a short presentation in the classroom by an ETS staff member, followed by a ride-along in a chartered bus to a nearby transit centre. During the ride-along, students learned how to wait for, board and exit a bus, proper etiquette in transit spaces and how to locate and use emergency help phones and approach safe individuals if they need assistance. Feedback received from teachers, parents and bus operators participating in the program was very positive. Administration is looking to expand this program to more Grade 6 classes across the city during the 2023-2024 school year.

Next Stop: Storytime

In summer 2023, Administration partnered with Edmonton Public Library (EPL) on a new initiative to take EPL's storytime program on the road. As part of the program, an ETS bus picks up families from an EPL branch and takes them to a nearby park for the storytime program. Following a short presentation from ETS staff on the bus, EPL staff then lead a sing-along on the way to the park. At the end of the storytime, the children are given an opportunity to sit in the driver's seat for a photo. These sessions were very successful - each session had full registration and feedback from families was very positive. As a result, EPL is sharing their findings from this initiative with other libraries across Canada.

Next Steps

Gaining further understanding on how youth experience transit along each aspect of the transit rider journey is crucial for retaining and attracting youth riders. ETS has developed a comprehensive Rider Research Program which covers a broad range of perspectives from frequent riders, commuters, occasional riders, lapsed riders and those who have never used transit. The program captures insights on each of the steps in the transit rider journey, from getting to the first bus stop/LRT station to exiting transit in alignment with the Transit Service Journey Map developed in 2019 (Attachment 3). While the program is able to capture perspectives from a diverse range of transit riders across all age groups, the program relies on recruiting participants from online market research panels where youth riders are often under-represented.

Therefore, in addition to the initiatives outlined above to support youth riders, Administration is exploring opportunities to expand youth rider research and engagement through focus groups and other research activities, including collaboration with youth organizations such as CEYC and Edmonton school boards.

Community Insight

In addition to collecting feedback from youth through 311, rider feedback forms, school boards and parents, Administration regularly engages youth riders through various rider research tools and youth-focused events. Research tools include monthly transit rider satisfaction surveys, non-rider surveys, Edmonton Insight Community surveys and other qualitative studies such as app-based mobile ethnography tools. The purpose of this research is to understand trip

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characteristics and travel patterns, perceptions of transit, reasons for transit use and satisfaction with various aspects along the transit journey. ETS also 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+

Studies³ show that historically, youth have been one of the most active user groups of public transit, accounting for one-third of ridership nationwide. Youth are more likely to rely on transit as their primary means of transportation compared to other age groups. Understanding youth perspectives, travel patterns, and the impact of transit on youth is critical for ensuring equitable and inclusive measures are implemented when it comes to transit service planning and programs. From January to July 2023, feedback from more than 290 youth ages 15 to 24 was collected from the monthly transit rider satisfaction surveys. Some of the key insights from the survey are outlined in the table below:

Survey question	Percentage of respondents ages 15-24	Percentage of respondents ages 25 and over
Transit usage		
ETS is my primary means of transportation	29%	23%
Frequently take transit (more than 6 one-way trips per month) for a variety of trip purposes	55%	37%
Demographics		
Persons with disabilities	13%	12%
Racialized/visible minority	25%	20%
Indigenous	11%	9%
LGBTQ2SA+	16%	5%
Woman	59%	50%
Household income less than \$30,000 annually	26%	17%

Data from the monthly transit rider satisfaction surveys shows that youth riders are more likely to come from marginalized communities than riders over the age of 24. Reducing barriers for youth to access transit to travel to school, work, recreation and other services and activities is an important step in building a more inclusive and accessible city for future generations. Administration continuously works to improve transit access to youth through outreach, safety and security, service planning, faring and partnerships, as outlined in the report above.

³Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, [Youth and Public Transit: A Knowledge Synthesis of Recent Publications](#), 2021

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Attachments

1. ETS Youth Strategy Pillars
2. Youth Programs and Service Planning
3. Transit Service Journey Map