

Overview of Winter 2022-2023 Commutes from ETSAB Board Members

These overviews were for the whole winter season from late 2022 to the first 3 months of 2023, larger than our collected data time frame.

G. General

For the primary transit trips I have taken this winter, I had to use bus stops that were set up and maintained around the construction zone for the LRT construction. Somehow, this construction company Marigold (likely in collaboration with the city) did a good job ensuring that the sidewalks and pathways around the construction zone to/ from the bus stops are cleared of snow and ice or have a lot of traction material to make it as safe as possible. As the city grows and multiple large-scale construction projects spanning many years affect people, the role that the construction companies play in maintaining safety, mobility, and accessibility in winter when people take transit is even more crucial.

My experience taking transit in winter is definitely influenced by the temperature, wind speed and wind chill. I'm more okay with waiting for buses with some delays if there isn't a strong harsh wind hitting me. That is where having bus shelters would have made a difference, which I didn't have.

Finally, a person's familiarity with the walking route to and from the bus stop/ transit station influences their expectations and experiences (positive or negative) when taking transit in winter. Regardless of the temperature, because I know that the pathways and bus stops I regularly take are trustworthy from past experience, I'm more likely to have a positive experience. When I go to unfamiliar areas because I've learned to have low/ negative expectations when it comes to snow clearing, I get anxious with any amount of walking I had to do getting to and from the bus stop to the door.

This is an aside - but my experience taking transit all the time, even in the winter, made me realize why people around me react with shock, worry, or pity when I tell them I took the bus to get there. There's a well-known negativity regarding the discomforts of winter so there's the perception that being a pedestrian or transit user is nothing but awful. Continuing to improve components that affect mobility and accessibility in winter will help improve this perfection and experience of people.

S. Tang

In general, my commutes to transit stops were impacted by weather (particularly due to cold temperatures and wind), unpredictable residential sidewalk clearing, and unpredictable conditions of intersections. Compared to previous years, it seems like our city had less snowfall this winter between Dec 2022-March 2023. There were still numerous temperature fluctuations but with less snow and ice to melt with increased temperatures, there was less ice and uneven pathways in the majority of my paths. I did feel impacted by weather when I made it to the stops and waited for the transit vehicles. Shelters, particularly at bigger stops, would be much appreciated to find relief from the wind that chills the skin even more.

December: commuted regularly to a residential area to care for pets, and encountered regular obstacles on my path. One of my regular transit spots was on a major roadway and a 15-20m path of sidewalk attached to some townhomes were never cleared, and I was only able to walk this path due to being able-bodied with no wheeled items to pull or push. When I submitted the 311 complaint after days of no activity to attempt to clear the sidewalk, I did see that my complaint had an update that the homeowners were issued a warning. Unfortunately I still did not see any change when passing that area a week or so later.

E. Batty

In general, my biggest concerns during winter commuting was inconsistency with where buses physically stop (creating issues getting on and off) and concerns around intersections. In both cases, they are minor issues that are exacerbated by winter conditions.

In relation to the bus stop locations, there were several instances where a bus would stop at locations that made getting off the bus difficult or dangerous. For example, stopping on a curve of a bus loop where it was a long step down onto icy road conditions (rather than stepping onto the sidewalk), or stopping near snow drifts where you could not see the edge of the sidewalk (resulting in tripping when getting off or stepping down further than expected).

On my regular work commute, I cross at an intersection that has a “beg button” for pedestrians to cross (i.e. the light does not present a pedestrian

cross signal unless the button is pushed). While this is frustrating all of the time, the annoyance is amplified by winter conditions. No one wants to stand around and wait in the cold weather longer than necessary, so I would find myself calculating how fast I needed to walk to not “miss” my chance to cross. As I was about half a block away, I would be watching the light signals to determine if I was going to show up just before or after the light signals changes – and adjust my walking speed accordingly. Unfortunately, this kind of rushing to get to the light on time can lead to slips and falls on icy sidewalks.

Overall, I think these are minor design issues that are easily discounted or ignored in good conditions, but can become bigger factors in winter conditions.

J. Jackman

I had a relatively pleasant experience with my commute in the winter months. I take the same route during the week (northside to downtown via Kingsway with some walking in between) and my weekend commute is somewhat similar (between Castledowns and downtown/Kingsway). I take the LRT on some days but those days are infrequent. The bus in my area does not have a lot of people with the exception of the morning peak times so I don't usually have to wait too long and have rarely experienced an instance where the bus never showed up.

During the winter months, there were some really frigid days! Late December and early January were our coldest winter months but generally, I found that the comfort level during my commutes was pleasant. This is important to me. I'm a 'difficult' passenger in the sense that I am always cold. Small things like bus operators leaving the bus for extended periods of time with the back door open can really make for a challenging ride for me as I tend to turn into an icicle very fast! These are small details and can probably be viewed more in terms of rider experience and I don't think this is a systemic thing - it should probably be attributed to driver awareness and viewed in terms of customer service and passenger feedback. Nevertheless, I think that these small details have the potential to create a pleasant rider experience for new passengers and the existing ridership alike. Keeping the temperature at a comfortable level is a very important part of the winter riding experience. Operators can't make everyone happy but I think that they do a great job of finding a reasonable balance. There is nothing worse than a cold bus on a sub 25-degree day in Edmonton!

Attachment 3

In conclusion, my winter commutes were quite good. I didn't experience any major delays, disruptions, or disastrous rides during the winter months. I would temper that statement with the fact that I take a few routes during the daytime hours and those routes have a lower ridership when compared with some of the city's busiest routes. Some of this low ridership can be attributed to the pandemic but overall, my north side route and my express routes to downtown are routes with fewer passengers than routes like the number 9 or number 8. My rides on the bus (and occasionally, the LRT) were comfortable and warm. I think the operators do a great job of keeping the cabin temperature at a level that is in line with the external temperature and concurrently considerate of people with circulation issues and those who may not have the right level of clothing to keep them warm. This is critically important as rider experience impacts the perception of transit, especially for new riders. My only suggestion is an unusual one. Not every stop along the street has a bus shelter. There were a very few instances downtown where I remember being outside without a glass shelter and feeling the cold wind biting on my cheeks. Sometimes the street setup and general infrastructure don't allow for a shelter in some places but where possible and practical, an ETS utopia provides some kind of wind/snow/rain shelter at each and every stop. This is a difficult request based on pragmatics and logistics and cost but sometimes, a winter commute can be challenging and uncomfortable (cold, wet, slushy, miserable, etc.) simply because of the weather conditions between commutes and while waiting at the bus stop - it's not always the bus timing or the bus ride itself. Just an extra thought.