



YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSIT IN EDMONTON: AN ANALYTICAL REPORT OF ONGOING TRANSIT ISSUES FROM THE YOUTH LENS

RECOMMENDATION

That the October 11, 2023, City of Edmonton Youth Council report EXT02022, be received for Information.

Note: City of Edmonton Youth Council Urban Planning Initiative Co-leads: Alain Humura and Tiffany Phan will be attending to present this report.

Executive Summary

When youth were surveyed regarding Edmonton's transit system, three clear categories of concerns and interests arose. These were:

1. routes and timing
2. payment procedure and affordability
3. comfort and security

For routes and timing, youth viewed the LRT, on-demand busing, transit frequency and school specials as beneficial. Youth wanted timing accuracy and improved transit frequency in all areas of the city—not just the inner city. For payment procedure and affordability, many youth perceived arc cards as a success and decreasing fare prices was often suggested. The majority of youth (68.55%) wanted to see safety improved in the category of comfort and security. Important issues were transit uncleanliness, feeling unsafe at nighttime, a lack of security and encountering drug users or houseless people. These safety concerns were mostly localized to transit centres and LRT stations.

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REPORT

Introduction

Importance and Impacts

This report analyzes the relationship youth have with transit. It focuses on experiences they have had with the recent changes in:

1. routes and timing
2. payment procedure and affordability
3. comfort and security

This report is important because it addresses youth concerns and recommendations. According to the City Plan-Mass Transit Backgrounder presented in 2019, Youth ages 18-24 and those under 18 hold the first and second largest shares of transit usage respectively. This statistical intel demonstrates the importance of bolstering youths' relationship with transit. This is especially critical as youth transit usage declines when youth turn 25.

Working with the youth perspective and developing a good relationship with youth increases the likelihood that they will integrate active modes of transportation into their daily lives. Positive experiences with transit translate to positive relations, which results in a transit system that youth can trust and rely on. Having favourable experiences with transit improves the relationship between youth and public transportation. The report's recommendations strengthen this relationship. Youth are going to be the ones inheriting the city, along with its transportation systems. Therefore, if the transit system is convenient and safe for youth, they will be more likely to use transit.

Not only is having a focus on youth equitable but it is in alignment with the city's policy goals of a healthy city, regional prosperity and climate resilience. Economically and socially heeding this input is important in the development of the city's 15-minute communities.

Data Collection

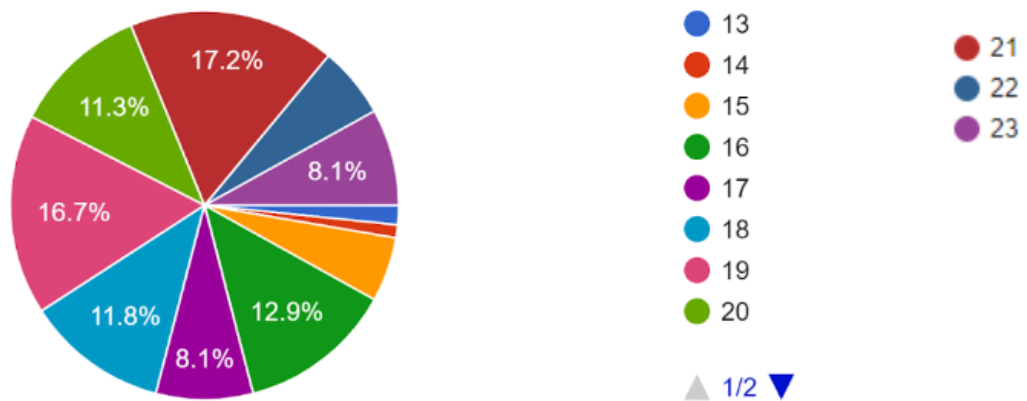
From March to June 2022, we sent out a survey to youth across the city and received 193 responses. The survey questions encompassed various aspects of transit usage, safety, incentives, and ideas for improvement. Checkbox questions were useful in exploring common incentives and disincentives to transit use. Scale prompts allowed youth to answer questions quantitatively such as frequency of transit use and to gauge satisfaction levels. The use of several open-ended questions allowed youth to qualitatively express their thoughts regarding Edmonton's transit system in their own words, and the combination of question formats ensured a thorough representation of the participant's opinions.

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NOTE: Because we acquired our data in varying forms (i.e. both short answer form: multiple choice, checkbox, scale prompts, and long answer form: open prompts for the written response, we had varying statistics on particular issues between the long answer and the short answer. These differences are because of obvious jumps in format. Having a statistic on an issue such as safety is more likely to have a higher percentage of completion and active participation in the short answer version rather than the long answer. The variance doesn't indicate any disparity but reflects format differences. As such we will make sure to distinguish between long answer and short answer responses.

The goal of our data collection was to integrate varying perspectives and backgrounds from the city. Even though there was a skew in terms of respondents who lived in the South of Edmonton, we were able to access voices from all regions. Being cognisant of the skew influenced the way we analyzed our data. We were careful to represent differences in experiences within our recommendations, however, by and large, we found that there were no significant splits within the core issues. We were proud to have a wide range of ages, racial backgrounds and varying frequencies in the usage of transit. This mixture of experiences ensured that we were considering and reflecting the diversity that exists among Edmontonian youth. The graphs below note the specific relevant quantities.

Age
186 responses



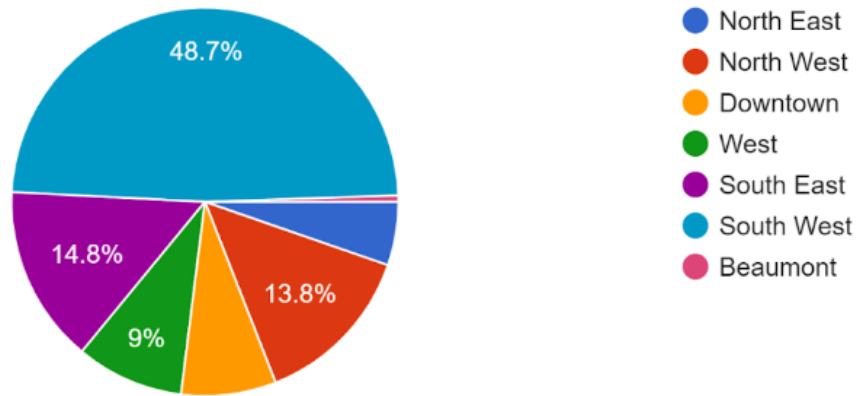
Age	Percentage Represented	Age	Percentage Represented
13	1.6%	19	16.7%

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14	1.1%	20	11.3%
15	5.4%	21	17.2%
16	12.9%	22	5.9%
17	8.1%	23	8.1%
18	11.8%		

Which region in Edmonton do you reside in?

189 responses

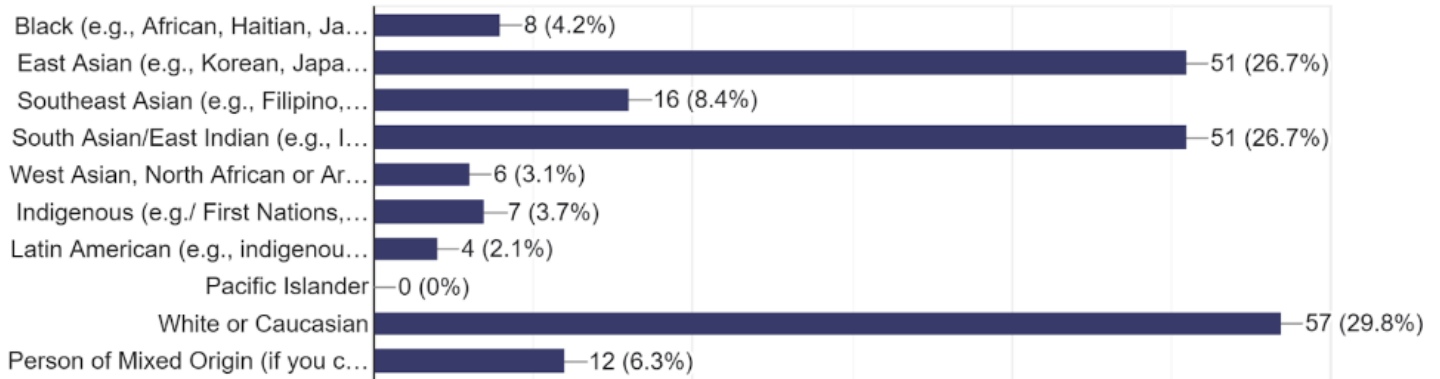


Region of Residence	Percentage of Respondents
North East	5.3%
North West	13.8%
Downtown	7.9%
West	9%
South East	14.8%
South West	48.7%
Beaumont	0.5%

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Please choose what best indicates your racial or ethnocultural identity.

191 responses



How often do you use transit in Edmonton?

191 responses



Frequency of Transit Usage	Percentage of Respondents
Every day	44%
A couple times a week	29.8%
Once every week	4.7%
Once every few weeks	6.8%
Once a month	3.7%
Once every few months	6.3%
Once a year	1.6%

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Once every few years	0%
Almost never	2.6%
Never	0.5%

Objectives and Goals

We hope to make transit convenient and affordable so that:

- Transit is more accessible for low-income youth dependent on transit and youth with limited access to transit due to age or disability. More broadly increasing their access to the city, and ease and convenience of travel on transit.
- Youth have a better ability to engage in education, extracurriculars and recreation throughout the city.
- Youth aren't constrained to car-centric infrastructure that perpetuates the negative effects of driving. But are incentivized to use transit and other modes of transportation such as biking that are climate conscious.

The modal shift of youth from cars to public transit will benefit the city by:

- Getting the city closer to its climate targets.
- Creating a more connected and lively city, especially downtown.
- Improving the safety of transportation.
- Helping youth save money.
- Improving local economies.

Result Analysis & Recommendations

Routes and Timings

Bus Frequency, Routes, Timeliness, Park n' Ride, School Specials, LRT, Wait Times, Planning

Concerns

Insufficient access to transit because of:

- Lower frequency transit in neighbourhoods during non-peak hours.
- Transit stops aren't walkable or far from their starting distance.
- Above-capacity transit especially for school specials.
- Changes to the bus routes: fewer bus routes, and less access to different buses.
- Extremely long bus rides. (The hope is to find ways to structurally decrease the time spent on buses).
- Insufficient access to the train system or transit stations.

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- Unreliable access to transit information (i.e. apps project a certain time for a bus/train and it arrives later or earlier)

Data

Completed Via Short Answer:

What would incentivize you to use transit?

Issue	Percentage
More Accessible Bus Routes	76.4%
Making Biking to Transit More Accessible	9.9%
Park and Ride	19.4%

What are some of the things that disincentivize you from using transit?

Issue	Percentage
Lack of Access to Public Transportation	20.5%
Takes Too Long	71.1%
Service Network Changes/Changes in Bus Routes	30%

Completed Via Long Answer:

What ETS is doing well?

<u>Issue</u>	Percentage of Respondents who Mentioned the Issue
Route Diversity/Access to Locations (inclusive of School Specials)	52.1%
Bus Frequency	8.26%
School Specials	20.7%

What should the transit sector prioritize?

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Issue	Percentage of Respondents who Mentioned the Issue
Route Diversity/Access to Locations	34.0%
Bus Frequency	16.0%

Proposed Solutions

Related to Transit Involving Schools

- New school special routes for schools that don't have them and expanded school special capacity for schools that do.
 - This was one of the most important improvements to youth and certain areas that are underserved for school specials should have new routes planned.
 - School specials allow students to have a direct route to educational facilities without worrying about transferring or a lack of buses that head in that direction.
- Bus routes that connect universities to areas which don't yet have a convenient, one-bus connection. This is missing particularly in the general southwest region of the city, both north and south of the river.
 - These would ideally have increased frequency at the times when most people are commuting to school, from around 7:00-9:30. The current 51 route is a good example of this. Frequencies and timing for each area are contingent on local factors such as the number of students, peak hours, distance, etc.

Related to Bus Frequency

- Increasing the frequency of transit for non-peak hours, especially in neighbourhoods where there is an insufficient amount of existing buses. We should also increase the frequency later into the night.
 - This would make the bus routes more accessible to all users, especially those who have fewer bus routes in their community and those who rely on transit as their primary means of transportation.
 - They would also feel safer taking transit at night if they don't have to wait long amounts of time outside in the dark.

Related to Route Diversity

- Integrate bus routes to increase the nodes (stops that have access to multiple bus route options i.e stops that have 3 buses that go through them) within districts to allow buses to connect to important destinations within the region.

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Intentions:

- Increasing connectivity to one's district and making it easier and quicker to travel within districts.
- Having at least two or three bus options at a bus stop.
- Having nodes that promote intersectionality within neighbourhoods with one district.
- Having nodes with access to different districts to deprioritize travel to transit stops.

Implementation:

- In districts with only a few buses that connect to transit centres, create routes that cycle through and connect the neighbourhoods and circumvent the need to go through major centres.
- This would be more applicable in suburban areas with fewer bus connections.
- There could be "nodes"/stops where more than one bus connects and transfers can happen. At these nodes, existing lines that connect to transit centres and the broader city would connect to new buses that stay within the region.

Related to Broader Routes and Timing Issues

- Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lanes on important youth routes (i.e. school specials or buses that travel to the universities in the city).
 - This would be an effective way to ensure that buses are on time. It would also improve speed, making transit more convenient, especially at times with high traffic.
- Changes to light signals that prioritize transit over cars (Transit signal priority of queue jump lanes).
- Have more education around how On Demand buses work, and implement more of their tracking systems as well so people can see if there's a better bus route to take.
 - This could be done through an advertising campaign that works with schools and youth organizations.
 - 56.8% of youth said they don't use the On-Demand service often because they don't know how to book trips.
- Institute a "Bikes to Transit" system which allows youth to use bikes to make transit trips quicker and more convenient.

Intentions:

- This would make transit more accessible, especially to youth without access to an automobile.
- 9.9% of youth said that this would incentivize them to use public transit more.
- The goal would be to have a system that is analogous to park and ride but for bikes in terms of infrastructure and the safety of bikes.

Implementation:

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- This would be accomplished by adding bike racks to important transit stops.
- The capacity of bike racks on buses would be expanded.
- An advertising campaign to educate youth about integrating cycling and transit would be undergone.
- Build bike cages or bike storage rooms at transit stops, especially larger transit centres and LRT stations. This would ensure that riders' bikes are safer for extended periods of time.
- Keep “Park and Ride” systems in place for youth to use.
 - This would encourage youth who are unable to walk or bike to transit to use it instead of driving.
 - Although this doesn’t completely replace cars, it does decrease traffic and pollution by lessening the number of cars in the centre of the city.

Related to Timeliness

- Improve route timing accuracy so people know when their buses will be late
 - Getting more people on the transit app, providing more of its services for free for certain demographics such as youth.

Payment Procedure and Affordability

Arc Cards, Payment, Changes to Fares, Fare Gates

Concerns:

- Fare prices are too high and should be decreased.
- Paying with cash is inconvenient.
- Youths’ lack of access to youth-specific ARC cards
- Lack of fare gates can allow drug users/dangerous people to easily enter LRT stations

Data

Completed Via Short Answer:

What are some of the things that disincentivize you from using Transit?

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents who Mentioned the Issue</u>
Fare Prices	39%

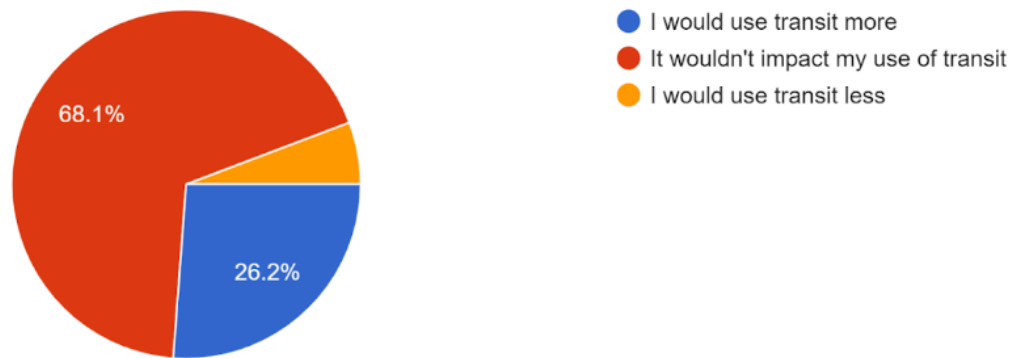
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<u>Issue</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents who Mentioned the Issue</u>
Fare Decrease	46.1%

How would ETS' transition from cash fares to smart fares affect your ridership?

191 responses



Completed Via Long Answer:

What is ETS currently doing well?

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents who Mentioned the Issue</u>
Arc Cards	38.0%

What should the transit sector prioritize?

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents who Mentioned the Issue</u>
Lowering Fare Prices	22.0%

Proposed Solutions

Related to Arc Cards

- Improved arc card readers (increased speed and reliability)
 - Concerns about tapping on and off for arc cards

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- Improve the speed and ability for it to register payment.
- Roll out arc cards more quickly and inform the public of their purpose and benefits of use
 - Have options for arc card access both during the school year and an opt-in for the summer for students in elementary, junior high school and high school.
- Having more “toolkits, information, education and awareness for younger riders” regarding ARC cards and preferred forms of payments. (Supported by ETSAB 2023 Youth concerns report)
- Having “more collaboration between ETS and schools” encourages ARC card use. Having an efficient rollout of arc cards to schools will be crucial to increasing ridership. (Supported by ETSAB 2023 Youth concerns report.)
 - Introductory video for an education campaign to teach students in Junior High and High School how to use them

Related to Changes in Fares

- Reduced fare prices or reasonable fare increases
 - This looks like:
 - Increasing the supply or access to transit slips, passes, or arc cards for economically disadvantaged communities.
 - Fully subsidize transit (i.e. making transit free) for youth who are economically disadvantaged (i.e. those who fall under current standards of low-income brackets sufficient for transit support.) Youth age would range from 13-23.
 - Decreasing the monthly youth maximum for arc cards to a price lower than the normal youth bus pass.
 - This achieves both the intention of decreasing the price of youth passes and incentivizing the transition to arc cards. The current bus pass is priced at 73 dollars, decreasing the arc card maximum to 65 dollars achieves the calls for price decreases and motivates users to switch to arc cards.
 - 39% of people mentioned that the fare prices disincentivized them from using transit, and a fare increase would incentivize 46.1% to use transit more.

Related to Payment Integrity

- Enforce proof of payment through gates or other methods for the LRT
 - Being required to pay money to enter LRT terminals would deter people from loitering.

Comfort and Security

Safety, Cleanliness, Security, COVID, Unkind Drivers, Kind Drivers

Concerns:

- A lack of protective mechanisms (e.g./ security guards, cameras), extremely disincentivizing youth from using transit.

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- Drug users and homeless people can make youth feel unsafe.
- Some older men stare at or harass younger women, threatening their safety.
- Buses and the LRT lack broader comfort and security
 - Lack of lighting
 - Lack of help phone services

Data

Completed Via Short Answer:

What are some of the things that disincentivize you from using transit? / What prevents you from using transit?

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents who Mentioned the Issue</u>
Safety Concerns	69.5%

What would incentivize you to use transit?

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents who Mentioned the Issue</u>
Improving Safety and Security	76.4%
Hospitality (Water Bottle Fountains)	21.5%

What services would make you feel more safe taking public transit?

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents who Mentioned the Issue</u>
Help Phone Service	41.1%
More Female Drivers	21.1%
More Security Guards/Peace Officers at Stations	82.8%
Street Lights Along Sidewalks	58.3%

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Completed Via Long Answer:

What makes you feel unsafe on transit if you do feel unsafe?

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents who Mentioned the Issue</u>
Drug Use & Houselessness in Transit Centres	61.3%
Lack of Security/Law Enforcement	38.21%
Cleanliness	13.21%

What should the transit sector prioritize?

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents Who Mentioned the Issue</u>
General Safety	60.7%
Accessibility	6.00%
Cleanliness	4.00%

Proposed Solutions

Drug Use in Transit Centres

- Bring back safe consumption sites, which could reduce usage in other transit areas. This will decrease drug-related behaviours on public transit, which was the biggest safety concern involving other individuals.

Security/Law Enforcement

- Increase cameras around bus stations
- Easier access to emergency services - panic buttons etc. Also, greater education about 311 and transit watch services are placed in buses and at stations.
- Increase the presence of security (not fully armed like police) in the stations. 82.8% of respondents believe that having more security guards/peace officers would make them feel more safe taking public transit.

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- Have more peace officers stationed at transit centers to improve security and perceptions of safety.

Homelessness in Transit Centres

- Addressing homelessness on transit by providing support to individuals who rely on transit stations as shelter, so as to reduce negative interactions and public perceptions of transit safety among youth.

Broader Comfort and Security Related Matter

- Approximately 21.5% of respondents mentioned that increasing hospitality would incentivize them to use transit.
 - This includes things such as:
 - Increasing lighting around the bus and LRT stations (58.3%)
 - More help phone services (41.1%)
 - More female drivers (21.1%)