

# Options to Implement Communications Improvements

## Response to Edmonton Transit System Advisory Board Recommendations

### Recommendation:

That the September 3, 2019, City Operations report CR\_7331, be received for information.

### Previous Council/Committee Action

At the June 11, 2019, Urban Planning Committee meeting the following motion was passed:

That Administration provide a report on options to implement the communications improvements as outlined in the June 11, 2019, Edmonton Transit System Advisory Board report CR\_7309.

### Executive Summary

The City of Edmonton is committed to providing safe, reliable and convenient public transit options to customers. The Edmonton Transit System Advisory Board (ETSAB) recommended improvements to ETS communications to Urban Planning Committee on June 11, 2019. This report provides Administration's responses to ETSAB's recommendations. Some recommended actions are already in place or are under development.

### Report

The Edmonton Transit System Advisory Board provides advice and recommendations from a stakeholder perspective on issues related to public transit. ETSAB report CR\_7309 presented recommendations for enhancing Transit Communications to Urban Planning Committee on June 11, 2019. The report included "A Scan of Three Cities" outlining how other municipalities communicate transit information to their customers.

### Background

ETS customers rely on communication about the transit system to make informed decisions related to routes, timing, potential delays, connections and fare products. Advances in technology allow for an enhanced suite of communication options that

can provide real-time information about public transit as well as more effective means to communicate information.

To further enhance customer service, Administration is developing Facility Design Guidelines that will support customer usability and wayfinding in physical spaces, such as transit stations, LRT stations and transit stops. Customer Journey Mapping work is also underway to better understand challenges experienced in a customer's journey before, during and after a transit trip. Key learnings will be used to improve the transit service and ultimately increase ridership.

### **Edmonton Transit System Advisory Board Recommendations**

**ETSAB Recommendation 1: The addition of more automatically generated transfer announcements on buses and LRT trains (e.g. for transfers from Capital to Metro Line & vice versa), including those that include popular landmarks or tourist destinations (Rogers Place, City Hall, etc).**

Currently, buses use audible and visual transfer announcements when they stop near downtown LRT stations.

As northbound LRT trains approach Churchill station, on-train audible transfer announcements are made based on the destination. LRT passengers are made aware of how to transfer to a Metro Line train, or stay on a Capital Line train.

Additional work is underway to define what landmarks and destinations to include in the audio and visual messages on buses and LRT. Over half (60%) of LRT vehicles' audio and visual messages can be changed with existing in-house resources. The visual displays on newer LRT vehicles are able to accommodate messages that are up to 48 characters, including spaces and special characters. The remaining 40% of LRT vehicles require external contractors to implement changes to audio and visual messages.

Administration will continue to review options for improving the approach to announcements throughout the system.

**ETSAB Recommendation 2: Adding colourful symbolic or iconic imagery to @takeETSalert tweets that visualize the nature of tweets (such as a yellow train or bus for delays, for example), or that give additional information (such as a map visualizing a detour).**

For major, planned service disruptions, Administration currently incorporates bright yellow and blue word-based visuals into tweets and Facebook posts (e.g. LRT CLOSURE, JUNE 8 & 9, CLAREVIEW TO CHURCHILL. PLEASE USE REPLACEMENT BUSES).

Administration is working on new, standardized messaging for unplanned service disruptions. These are currently all word-based messages that denote the nature of the delay. For example, tweets regarding general LRT delays may read as follows: “ATTENTION LRT CUSTOMERS: Trains are delayed X minutes between X and X stations”; or “Route 112: Buses are detouring a section of 101 Street in downtown”. These standardized messages will be in place by the end of 2019.

Administration includes images such as maps or diagrams to enhance the message. Examples of communication currently used in Edmonton and Calgary are provided in Attachment 1.

Administration is committed to using graphics in tweets to enrich messages, but recognizes this can limit the amount of useful information a customer receives on their desktop and mobile phone screen.

A standardized communication approach is essential and any images used by ETS will be accompanied with a written message for additional clarity and to assist those unable to distinguish colours or symbols. Administration will continue to scan Twitter and social media for innovative and effective practices.

**ETSAB Recommendation 3: Adding map imagery to route detours on the ETS website, in addition to the current text-only detour descriptions.**

In April 2019, Administration began using visuals to describe detours and routing on takeETS.com and in social media posts (e.g. 100 Street bus detours due to Valley Line LRT construction). On the webpage, citizens are able to find links to route maps which show the detour routing in red as well as the regular route. Administration also displays maps on bus stop signs for complex closures and detours.

**ETSAB Recommendation 4: Investigating e-paper/e-ink technology, and the possible installation of real-time boards using this technology, at busy bus stops and/or transit centres.**

Administration is exploring real-time information boards for transit centres, and is testing this technology for feasibility and usability.

There are additional options to provide real-time information at remote bus stops without traditional power and data connections. Administration is examining the feasibility of operating a solar-powered bus stop display with a cellular connection that can provide route numbers and real-time information. Feasibility of bus stop display infrastructure will continue to be examined and assessed. However, the trend within the transit industry is to move away from hard-wired connections of power and connectivity as infrastructure is expensive and quickly becomes outdated.

**ETSAB Recommendation 5: Investigate options for a silent customer contact/alarm option, such as via text message, or two-way communication on Twitter.**

Administration is evaluating the use of short message service (SMS) or text communications on the existing Transit Watch phone line. Work is underway to procure the technology and identify the change and impact in security protocol to manage text alerts. This would allow customers to text their security-related concerns discreetly and directly to the Transit Control Centre 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In April 2019, Calgary Transit released a similar system for their customers.

Administration does not recommend using Twitter to report security concerns as ETS' Twitter account is not monitored 24/7.

Currently, 311 and the Edmonton Police Service are not set up to accept silent customer contact or alarm via social media such as Twitter due to staff and resource capacity.

The SafeCityYEG web-based mapping tool provides citizens an opportunity to share their perceptions of safety at public locations, such as transit locations. The SafeCityYEG tool can be used to report non-emergency safety concerns and communicate perceptions of safety to Administration for follow-up and assessment.

**ETSAB Recommendation 6: Investigate whether select advertising screens/boards could be used to display system-relevant messages interspersed with advertisements in the case of an emergency or service disruption.**

Administration uses advertising screens on transit property to display system-relevant messages. There are three levels of alerts and an accessibility alert that ETS can use to communicate with customers via onsite screens.

- The accessibility alert is a blue bar (with a wheelchair icon) along the bottom of the screen.
- Level one alert is a yellow bar along the bottom of the screen (which is used for upcoming or planned service disruptions).
- Level two alert is a large yellow square with red text on the right side of the screen (which is used for major unplanned and planned service disruptions).
- Level three is a full-screen takeover message with a bright yellow background with red text. Level three is highly noticeable for customers..

Administration is examining options to integrate consistent messaging on all customer touchpoints (e.g. one process to trigger messaging on advertising screens as well as other customer-facing interfaces such as Google Maps).

**ETSAB Recommendation 7: As as a further option for passengers who may not have access to a mobile phone or that may be visually challenged, ETSAB recommends highlighting existing Information buttons at LRT stations and transit centres that connect to 311, or a dedicated transit contact person, for trip planning and real-time information purposes.**

Administration is developing corporate wayfinding and facility design guidelines that follow accessibility standards. As part of this, Administration is exploring new signage that would help highlight blue information buttons (blue push buttons) that are located on the metallic ETS System Map Boards that connect to 311.

### Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome(s): Movement of People and Goods			
Outcome(s)	Measure(s)	Result(s)	Target(s)
Edmontonians use public transit and active modes of transportation	Customer satisfaction with ETS Communications	69% indicated satisfaction with ETS communications (2018)	TBD, 2020

### Attachments

1. Sample ETS Communications

### Others Reviewing this Report

- C. Owen, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement
- R. Smyth, Deputy City Manager, Citizen Services
- S. McCabe, Deputy City Manager, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development
- B. Andriachuk, City Solicitor