



Integrated Focus Groups Summary

TTC 2024 Annual Service Plan

June 27, July 4, and July 6, 2022, 6:00 – 8:00 pm



Overview

On Tuesday, June 27, Tuesday, July 4, and Thursday, July 6, 2023, the TTC hosted focus groups with key customer audiences who continued to rely on transit during the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to do so today, including women, shift workers, youth, and low-income customers. The purpose of these focus groups was to share and discuss the TTC’s 2024 Annual Service Plan, including:

- **City-wide initiatives**, focusing on how the TTC plans and communicates about construction-related service adjustments, and
- **Area-specific initiatives**, focusing on planned key service adjustments related the construction of the Ontario Line, Yonge North Subway Extension, and in the King Street West area.

Across all three focus groups, 21 participants attended. All three groups discussed the same information in terms of city-wide initiatives, while each discussed one of the area-specific initiatives (see Appendix A, B, and C for focus group agendas). Also participating were staff from the TTC and Third Party Public, the third-party engagement team retained by the TTC to support the engagement process on the 2024 Annual Service Plan.

The TTC recruited participants for the focus groups through its Customer Panel: a group of approximately 1,000 customers that are representative of Toronto’s diversity. The recruitment process involved identifying prospective participants by postal code (to ensure they were familiar with the area-specific initiatives and routes the TTC is consulting on) and by demographic details (to ensure they belonged to at least one of the key customer audiences). As thank you for the participants’ time and participation — and consistent with similar Customer Panel engagements — TTC offered participants a \$150 honorarium.

Third Party Public facilitated the focus groups and prepared this integrated summary. This integrated summary includes overall observations of the three focus groups, as well as a detailed summary of feedback from each focus group. The intent of this summary is to capture the range of feedback shared at the focus groups, not to assess the merit or accuracy of these perspectives. It is also not intended to serve as verbatim transcript.

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Overall observations

The following points summarize the facilitation team's observations about which topics emerged consistently across all three focus groups as well as the range of perspectives participants shared within those topics. These observations are drawn from the three individual focus group summaries which are subject to participant review prior to being finalized. The points below should be read in conjunction with the individual focus group summaries that follow and are not intended to imply consensus between participants, either within or across any given focus group(s).

Participants generally agree with TTC's approach to adjusting service during construction. They generally understand the constraints to service yet are still concerned for the additional traffic impacts service changes will bring.

Whatever route diversion is chosen, it is important to think of the minority voices with accessibility issues as well. Walking to a parallel street or taking an alternative subway station may not work for all riders if accessibility is not considered.

Participants advise that the TTC improve its communication methods, while continuing the variety of ways it communicates with customers. While participants said that the existing variety of ways the TTC reaches out to customers should be continued (including mailed notices in the affected area's catchment, up-to-date and well-maintained posters at stops and electronic signage, using social media such as TikTok and Instagram to reach younger audiences, and via proactive operator announcements), the TTC can do more to improve the way it communicates with customers, particularly about construction-related information (e.g., improving communication through mobile apps and SMS).

Participants said that they mostly get their TTC information through Google Maps, because it provides the most reliable up-to-date information as well as combines all methods of transportation to make trip planning easier. Other methods used include, subway announcements, TTC's Twitter channels, the TTC website, physical signage and third-party phone apps.

Participants identified key features they would like transit planning apps to have, including real-time information of the location of vehicles and next vehicle arrival, notification of delays and providing alternative routes to take when there is a delay, and customizable alerts based on routes customers take.

Participants appreciate TTC's commitment to sharing and receiving feedback through these focus groups, surveys and in-community pop-ups.

Generally, participants understand the proposed changes across all three areas, including the approach and rationale for adjusting service. More specific feedback for each area includes:

- General support for the **Ontario Line** service adjustments with advice that the TTC keep in mind that the Pape corridor is important to the local community.
- General support for the **Yonge North Subway Extension** service adjustments, and agreement with the TTC's proposed approach and rationale for adjusting service such as detouring Express services along Bayview Avenue and Bathurst Street.
- General understanding for the construction in the **King West Area**, with concerns that the area is already experiencing heavy traffic flow and that these additional disruptions will worsen the situation.

Focus Group Summary: Yonge North Subway Extension Construction

On Tuesday, June 27, 7 participants attended the Yonge North Subway Extension focus group. These participants said they used a range of different routes in the North York area, including Line 1, 36 Finch West, 39 Finch East, 25 Don Mills, 53/60 Steeles, and other bus routes. Their feedback is organized by the main topics of discussion below.

How TTC approaches construction

Support for how the TTC plans service around construction disruptions. Participants generally agreed with the factors the TTC considers in planning service adjustments related to construction.

Strive to coordinate construction as much as possible. The TTC should coordinate with others (like Metrolinx) to avoid having related construction projects leading to long disruptions. For example, the area around Keele Street and Finch Avenue West has experienced thirteen years (and counting) of disruptions due to construction related to the Line 1 extension and Line 6. The TTC should also coordinate with the City, since the City imposed no-left and no-right turn restrictions after construction began that made getting around the area harder. TTC should also consider the knock-on effects of construction impacts on riders: if customers' trips take longer due to construction-related service adjustments, they may lose time their two-hour transfer window. *Additional participant suggestion after the draft summary was shared:* Consider adding an extra 30 minutes in the transfer window for trips taken on the 36 Finch West bus.

The TTC said that it coordinated with Metrolinx to provide space for the Line 6 LRT during the Line 1 extension construction.

How TTC communicates about construction

Participants use a range of tools to get updates on service disruptions, including: the TTC's website and social media accounts (especially Twitter), the media (CP24, BlogTO), and signage in stations (especially for weekend service shutdowns). Some follow the TTC on Instagram, though they said that account posts about events and not so much construction. A few said they use third-party smartphone apps.

Interest in seeing the TTC explore other ways of communicating about construction, including TikTok, electronic signs outside of transit stations, and more reliable real-time information and notifications. Participants said TTC should strive to get information out in the places people already are rather than requiring them to visit the TTC's website.

A good amount of the discussion focused on participants' interest in seeing the TTC develop its own smartphone app where all transit information can be found. They said that the TTC should see a smartphone app as an important communication channel that it owns rather than as something to outsource. Third party companies may consider the TTC a priority customer or may make decisions that aren't in the TTC's or its customers best interests. A TTC-made app would also have more credibility and authority than second-hand sources. Information and features participants said they'd like to see included in a TTC-made smartphone app included: fare payment, schedules, time- and place-based notifications about service changes or safety issues, ability to purchase fares for kids, and accurate, real-time next vehicle information.

Other feedback about how the TTC communicates about construction-related service adjustments:

- Information shared before construction should match what happens once it starts. If changes are needed, they should be communicated clearly, too.
- Data about vehicle locations needs to be more accurate.
- Consider telling customers how long the construction disruption will last, including anticipated completion dates. *TTC said it has considered providing end dates but, due to the uncertainty around construction, has opted not to provide an end date that is not realistic and may further confuse customers.*

Feedback about Yonge North Subway Extension service adjustments

General support for the Yonge North Subway Extension service adjustments. Participants generally agreed with the TTC's proposed approach and rationale for adjusting service during the Yonge North Subway extension construction, particularly detouring Express services along Bayview Avenue and Bathurst Street. They agreed that these services should continue as Express services and not stop at any more stops along the adjusted routes. A few said that the 53 Steeles East and 60 Steeles West already run slowly today and were concerned about the additional time the construction would add to its route. They also offered some suggested adjustments for TTC to consider, including:

- Consider using alternative north-south routes for the Express Service, such as Willowdale Avenue or Maxome Avenue, to avoid traffic on Bayview Avenue or Bathurst Street. *TTC said that it has considered these routes but so far has not proposed running service on these routes to avoid impacting those communities and may not be able to accommodate high-frequency routes or have stops that can accommodate articulated buses.*
- Consider running the Steeles East Express service to Don Mills Subway Station on Line 4.

Finally, participants said it will be important for the TTC to coordinate with the City to provide alternative access routes for cars so that traffic can be minimized in the construction zone and reduce impacts for transit customers.

The map explaining the changes is clear, participants said, though they suggested clarifying that the 97 Yonge will maintain the same routing and travel on Hilda Avenue.

Other feedback

Participants appreciated the opportunity to give feedback, thanking the TTC for the time to explain and discuss its proposed service adjustments.

Focus Group Summary: Ontario Line Construction

On Tuesday, July 4, 6 participants attended the Ontario Line Construction focus group. These participants said they used a range of different routes and stops around Pape Station, including 31 Greenwood, 8 Broadview, 72 Pape, 25 Don Mills, and a variety of bus routes. Their feedback is organized by the main topics of discussion below.

How TTC approaches construction

General support for how the TTC plans service around construction disruptions. Participants generally agreed with the factors the TTC considers in planning service adjustments related to construction.

How TTC communicates about construction

Participants emphasized that it's important to offer route alternatives when communicating about an adjustment. Alerting people ahead of time with alternate options, either on transit apps, Google Maps, or by operators telling customers the alternate route during construction disruption can help people plan their trip better. It is important that operators have the education/knowledge on what changes are happening so that they can proactively provide customers with information.

Participants use a range of tools to get updates on service disruptions, including: the TTC's Twitter accounts, third party smart phone apps, in-station announcements, and texts at stops.

Participants suggested the TTC communicate service adjustments by putting mailed notices in people's mailboxes when service adjustments are affecting that catchment area. They also suggested that the TTC use the LED screens and displays on busses and subways to share information. Others said they'd like monthly e-mail blasts pushed to presto users with important updates. One participant also said that the TTC should use Google Maps to indicate road closures.

Feedback about Ontario Line Construction

General support for the Ontario Line service adjustments. Participants generally agreed with the TTC's proposed approach and rationale for adjusting service during the Ontario Line construction. One participant said diverting to Donlands Station may be the better option because the traffic isn't too heavy along that corridor. If the DVP is closed, it may affect Broadview and Coxwell corridors. Coxwell may also be a good option, but the issue is that there is a lot of distance to cover between Coxwell and Pape Station. Other participants would like the TTC to keep in mind that Pape is a very local corridor with local grocers that are important for the community.

Other feedback

Think about crowding as an issue when there are service disruptions and customers must take shuttle busses instead of subways. Busses carry fewer passengers than subways, which leads to overcrowding on shuttle busses. It would be great to have more shuttle busses present to account for the high number of people. *The TTC said it has constraints during live disruptions as the team must look at pulling busses from other routes across the city to operate as shuttle busses. Depending on the time of day, busses must compete with car traffic which in turn takes longer to transport the same volume of people that a subway does. TTC does have on demand busses ready, but the problem is that a subway takes approximately 1,000 people and one bus carries 50-77 people. Since subways can run as frequently every 3 minutes, it becomes hard to replicate that service with shuttle busses.*

Participants were supportive of the pop-ups being held by the TTC and suggested the TTC use the East York Community Centre for a pop-up, as it is a major destination with a lot of activities. Another participant suggested attending farmers markets in the area for pop-ups. They also suggested the TTC look at how

Brampton engaged with transit riders when changes were implemented as an example: they used iPads at local bus stops to get feedback directly from the users whose routes would be impacted.

Participants appreciated the opportunity to give feedback, thanking the TTC for the time to explain and discuss its proposed service adjustments.

Participant questions

Participants had several questions for the TTC including:

- What is the anticipated completion date for the current construction at Greenwood Station? *Construction is planned to finish in mid 2024.*
- When is the Ontario Line being constructed? *Construction is planned to begin winter of 2024.*
- Are there fewer streetcar diversion options in the east end compared to Downtown? *Yes, east end have fewer streets with streetcar tracks to support diversions. Downtown has multiple streets and options for diversions.*
- What percentage of busses are in reserve for when the TTC needs shuttle busses? *The TTC uses the industry standard which is 20% of busses being in reserve.*
- Are there any plans to extend streetcar service on Kingston Road? *There are no plans for extending tracks on Kingston Road.*

Focus Group Summary: King Street West Construction

On Thursday, July 6, 8 participants attended the King Street West Construction focus group. These participants said they used a range of different stops, stations and routes in the King Street West area, including: Dufferin Station, Lansdowne Station, 29/929 Dufferin, 504 King, and routes along the Queen and College Street corridors. Their feedback is organized by the main topics of discussion below.

How TTC approaches construction

General support for how the TTC plans service around construction disruptions. Participants generally agreed with the factors the TTC considers in planning service adjustments related to construction.

Participants are concerned about the “majority rules” approach used in TTC surveys, such as people saying they’d rather take a parallel street to spend less time on a bus. That won’t necessarily work for people with accessibility issues, or those with small kids who can’t easily access parallel streets. Please ensure the TTC takes the minority voices into consideration as well. *TTC said it collects demographic information and considers equity-deserving groups responses. TTC will try to maintain service where possible to prioritize those groups.*

How TTC communicates about construction

Participants emphasized that it’s important to communicate major service adjustments far in advance, so people are not blindsided by changes, especially those with accessibility needs. Many are not tech savvy so communication must be done in different ways. Whether communication is via physical signage or electronic, TTC should ensure there is proper maintenance for all methods. Additionally, when trips are going to take longer because of construction impacts, TTC should help riders plan for their two-hour transfer period by communicating advance notice of the disruption. A suggested good example of signage was the large posters installed when there is a marathon in an area.

Participants use a range of tools to get updates on service disruptions, including: Google Maps (because it combines all modes of transportation), third-party apps, physical signs at bus stops, and the TTC website.

Participants suggest the TTC communicate live service adjustments by having operators proactively announce to riders where the adjustment is and what the alternative is. It can be done by operators asking riders for their attention before announcing the change while on a bus or subway, and by operators warning riders as they start their journey. This is especially important when electronic systems on the busses and subways are not working. One participant also suggested the TTC continue using social media — especially Instagram stories — to communicate disruptions to riders. Additionally, consider mailing out notices to the people in the catchment area in advance.

Feedback about King West area construction

General understanding for the construction in the King West area. Participants said they understood the construction impacts that will happen and were a little concerned with the traffic in the area. Some said the current traffic situation is already bad and are concerned with how they’re going to navigate the situation in the future. One participant said they’d prefer to see busses to help with the disruptions as opposed to streetcars, saying the road is very narrow.

Participants also had questions about the proposed changes including:

- How long will these changes take? *The two construction phases will take approximately 10 months combined.*
- How much time will customers need to add to their trip because of impacts? *We won’t know this information at this stage. The 29 and 929 will retain its level of service frequency since they run on a very frequently used corridor. Run times will need to be adjusted to account for traffic and might need to be tweaked based on observed conditions.*

- Will future replacement buses be green electric vehicles? *We don't always have electric busses at all garages. Additionally, we are still testing electric models, which poses constraints on which busses will be used.*
- Will the 29 Dufferin be impacted the entire time? *No, the 29 Dufferin and 929 Dufferin Express will only be affected during Phase 2 for approximately 2-3 months.*
- Would it be more convenient to take the GO Transit in that area? *This depends on your route. When construction happens there will be signage in place to make sure riders are aware of their connection options.*

Other feedback

Participants appreciated the opportunity to give feedback, thanking the TTC for the time to explain and discuss its proposed service adjustments. One rider said they appreciate the information staff at TTC stations as they have all been helpful.

Appendix A. Agendas

Focus Group 1 - Yonge North Subway Extension Construction

TTC Customer Panel Focus Group: Yonge North Subway Extension Construction

TTC 2024 Annual Service Plan

Tuesday, June 27, 2023, 6:00 – 8:00 pm

Meeting held online



Meeting purpose

To share and discuss the TTC's Draft 2024 Annual Service Plan, including our approach to adjusting service due to construction, how we communicate about construction, and proposed service adjustments related to the construction of the Yonge North Subway Extension.

Proposed agenda

6:00 Welcome, land acknowledgement, introductions, agenda review

TTC and Third Party Public

6:15 Part one: approaches to construction and communication

TTC

Questions of clarification

6:35 Discussion: construction and communication

How we approach construction

1. To what extent do you agree with the feedback we heard in our Round One survey? Why?
2. What else (if anything) do you think we should be considering when adjusting service due to construction disruption?

How we communicate about construction

3. How do you get information about construction-related route diversions that impact TTC routes you take? Which do you prefer? What have you found confusing, if anything?
4. What other suggestions do you have about how we can improve communicating service adjustments due to construction impacts to customers?

7:05 Part two: Yonge North Subway Extension construction service adjustments

TTC

Questions of clarification

7:15 Discussion: Yonge North Subway Extension construction service adjustments

1. How well do these adjustments meet your travel needs? Would you still be able to connect to key destinations?
2. Are there any things (major travel patterns, connections, or others) we should consider in planning these adjustments?
3. How clear is our map of service adjustments? How could we make it clearer, if needed?

7:45 Other feedback, wrap up, and next steps

8:00 Adjourn

Focus Group 2 – Ontario Line Construction

TTC Customer Panel Focus Group: Ontario Line Construction

TTC 2024 Annual Service Plan
Tuesday, July 4, 2023, 6:00 – 8:00 pm
Meeting held online



Meeting purpose

To share and discuss the TTC's 2024 Annual Service Plan, including our approach to adjusting service due to construction, how we communicate about construction, and proposed service adjustments related to Ontario Line construction.

Proposed agenda

6:00 Welcome, land acknowledgement, introductions, agenda review

TTC and Third Party Public

6:15 Part one: approaches to construction and communication

TTC

Questions of clarification

6:35 Discussion: construction and communication

How we approach construction

5. To what extent do you agree with the feedback we heard in our Round One survey? Why?

How we communicate about construction

6. How do you get information about construction-related route diversions that impact TTC routes you take? Which do you prefer? What have you found confusing, if anything?

7. What other suggestions do you have about how we can improve communicating service adjustments due to construction impacts to customers?

7:05 Part two: Ontario Line construction service adjustments

TTC

Questions of clarification

7:15 Discussion: Ontario Line construction service adjustments

4. How well do these adjustments meet your travel needs? Would you still be able to connect to key destinations?

5. Are there any things (major travel patterns, connections, or others) we should consider in planning these adjustments?

6. How clear is our map of service adjustments? How could we make it clearer, if needed?

7:45 Other feedback, wrap up, and next steps

8:00 Adjourn

Focus Group 3 - King Street West Construction

TTC Customer Panel Focus Group:

Appendices - 2024 Annual Service Plan Focus Groups



King West Construction

TTC 2024 Annual Service Plan

Thursday, July 6, 2023, 6:00 – 8:00 pm

Meeting held online

Meeting purpose

To share and discuss the TTC's 2024 Annual Service Plan, including our approach to adjusting service due to construction, how we communicate about construction, and proposed service adjustments related to City and TTC construction on King Street West.

Proposed agenda

6:00 Welcome, land acknowledgement, introductions, agenda review

TTC and Third Party Public

6:15 Part one: approaches to construction and communication

TTC

Questions of clarification

6:35 Discussion: construction and communication

How we approach construction

8. To what extent do you agree with the feedback we heard in our Round One survey? Why?

How we communicate about construction

9. How do you get information about construction-related route diversions that impact TTC routes you take? Which do you prefer? What have you found confusing, if anything?

10. What other suggestions do you have about how we can improve communicating service adjustments due to construction impacts to customers?

7:05 Part two: King Street West construction service adjustments

TTC

Questions of clarification

7:15 Discussion: King Street West construction service adjustments

7. How well do these adjustments meet your travel needs? Would you still be able to connect to key destinations?

8. Are there any things (major travel patterns, connections, or others) we should consider in planning these adjustments?

9. How clear is our map of service adjustments? How could we make it clearer, if needed?

7:45 Other feedback, wrap up, and next steps

8:00 Adjourn