



# **Employee Focus Groups Summary**

## **Customer Experience Action Plan**

Thursday, August 10, 2023, 10:00 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Wednesday, August 16, 2023, 10:00 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Thursday, August 17, 2023, 10:00 a.m. – 12 p.m.

TTC Head Office, 1900 Yonge Street

### **Overview**

On Thursday, August 10, Wednesday, August 16, and Thursday, August 17, 2023, the TTC hosted focus groups to engage employees in the second of three planned rounds of consultation about its 5-Year Service Plan and Customer Experience Action Plan. All three focus groups covered the same information and discussion topics (see Appendices A, B, and C for the agendas). The purpose of these focus groups was to share and discuss draft focus areas in the TTC's Customer Experience Action Plan.

Two of the focus groups were open to all TTC employees, while one of the focus groups, held on Thursday, August 10 focused specifically on engaging women employees. A total of 19 employees attended the three focus groups. Also participating were staff from the TTC and Third Party Public, an engagement team retained by the TTC to support the engagement process on the Customer Experience Action Plan.

Third Party Public prepared this meeting summary, which covers all three sessions. The intent of this summary is to capture the range of feedback shared at the meetings; it is not intended to serve as verbatim transcript. Third Party Public shared a draft of this meeting summary with participants for review before finalizing it.

This summary includes four sections:

- Key themes in feedback shared at all meetings
- Detailed summary of the women employee focus group meeting
- Detailed summary of the first combined employee focus group
- Detailed summary of the second combined employee focus group

## Key themes in the feedback shared at all three focus groups

The following are some of the key themes that emerged in the feedback received from participants across the three employee focus groups.

**Employees need prompt internal communication and transparency to be able to provide better customer service.** Participants said they needed prompt, clear, and complete communication from Transit Control in cases of disruptions, delays, or service changes. More specifically, they said they need to know the reason for delays and disruptions (so they can communicate that to customers when asked) and that they need to know this information before it's communicated to customers in other ways (e-alerts, display screens, etc.). They said having this information early will help staff better inform and assist customers. Participants also said a lack of/limited information from internal systems often leads to them being on the frontline of customer frustrations, risking their safety.

**Safety remains a major concern for both customers and employees.** Participants generally agreed that safety was a topmost concern for customers and for employees, and some suggested addressing this through increased presence of police, special constables, nurses, and Streets-to-Homes workers. Some other suggestions to address safety included having clear consequences for disrupting safety and providing customers with accessible ways to report safety incidents without technology.

**Customers and employees are both concerned about lack of fare enforcement.** Participants in all three focus groups expressed concerns about a lack of fare enforcement. Some said customers are often discouraged from paying their fares when they see fellow passengers not paying their fare. They said more fare enforcement is needed, and some also added that it should not be the operators' job to enforce fare.

**Employees should be provided more training when they are hired.** Participants in all the three focus groups suggested more training for new hires to ensure they can do the different parts of their job well. Some suggestions included increased customer service training, de-escalation training, training new hires about different areas of the city and different routes, and shadowing co-workers (including those from different departments). It's also important to better set expectations so that new hires, especially women, know what they are getting into.

**There is a need to upgrade a range of technologies to ensure better customer service.** Participants saw the need to upgrade a range of technologies, including the PRESTO machines and gates to address delays, the Public Address system for better audio quality in announcements, and information screens for more reliable real-time information. They also said that some customer service employees should be provided access to devices like iPads or tablets with access to the TTC's intranet, trip planning, language translation, etc., to be able to assist customers better.

## Detailed summary of the Employee Focus Group 1 (Women)

Seven women TTC employees attended the first focus group on August 10, 2023. The participants represented a range of roles at the TTC, including a bus operator, a streetcar operator, subway operators, divisional trainers, and a station manager.

### Feedback about key customer pain points, questions, complaints, and hot-topics

**Safety is a major concern for customers and employees.** Participants said safety is a big concern for customers and for employees and expressed concerns about unhoused people loitering on vehicles and at stations. They said operators often do not have the time to help people and look up shelters for them. Some suggestions on how to address overall safety on the TTC included:

- Having an increased presence of staff across the system who can provide mental health supports and Streets-to-Homes representatives along with police.
- Having stricter and longer-term consequences for creating safety related disruptions on the transit system, including for going on track level. Some also suggested that people who are repeatedly erratic should not be allowed back on the transit system.
- More visible presence of enforcement officers, including more people in uniforms. Some said special constables made them feel safer, especially when working at night.

**Customers are concerned about cleanliness.** Participants provided many suggestions on how to address this, including:

- Consider having cleaning crews at all stations for mid-day cleaning of vehicles. This was done early in the pandemic and had a positive impact of cleanliness.
- Consider changing the material for seating to plastic, which is easier to clean and more practical.
- No food and drinks should be allowed on the vehicles, and there should be inspectors who check this.
- Let operators deny entry on streetcars and buses to unhygienic passengers who might create cleanliness issues or impact other passengers' comfort.

**Customers are concerned about lack of fare enforcement.** Participants said customers are discouraged to pay fares if their fellow passengers are not paying fares. They said there should be stricter fare enforcement, with more visible presence of fare enforcement officers.

**Customers need more washrooms.** Participants said customers needed more washrooms and shared a range of opinions on whether the TTC should address this issue or not, with some sharing concerns about cleanliness, maintenance, and people doing illegal activities (e.g., using drugs) in washrooms.

**Customers need more information and education on how to transfer between transit agencies and between different modes of transit.** Customers often find it confusing to make transfers between different transit agencies and in transferring from subways to streetcars and buses. Participants said there is a need for clearer signage, specifically at entrances and exits to stations where transfers take place. They also said TTC employees should be provided more training on how to help customers navigate these transfers.

**Customers often don't have access to technology or phones needed to access real-time information.** Participants suggested providing more internet access, more charging points, and making universal chargers available. They appreciated the chargers which are currently available in electric buses. Some also said they've heard customer concerns about the security of the Wi-Fi network on buses (where it is being piloted) and at subway stations.

**Need for clearer audio on the Public Address system.** Participants said the audio on announcements often breaks up and is unclear.

**Language barriers between employees and customers hinders customer service.** Participants suggested having internet-enabled kiosks at subway stations where people can speak in different languages and have their queries translated to English. They said this kiosk could be integrated with the PRESTO machines.

**QR codes to report safety are currently not accessible for customers using wheelchairs**, they should be moved to a height which is accessible for all.

**Screens with real-time information should have reliable information**, they should be updated and reflect all delays, where necessary.

**Planning and scheduling for weekends needs to be updated to reflect the current ridership needs.** Participants said weekend planning and scheduling was outdated and did not consider that businesses are open on Sundays and families are out and about. They said planning needs to accommodate weekday schedules on weekends as well.

**Coordinate with schools when route planning** and accommodate the different start and end times for different schools to ensure that buses aren't under- or over-crowded.

### Feedback about what employees need to deliver a great customer experience

**Better communication with employees, particularly operators, will lead to better communication with and service to customers.** In cases of service disruptions or delays, operators should be provided prompt and complete information from Transit Control about the cause of disruption, timeline of delay, and next steps. Having this information will ensure they can pass it on to customers, answer customer questions satisfactorily, and make informed decisions on how to proceed. In the absence of this information, employees are not able to guide customers and often have to face customers' lack of trust and frustrations. Participants suggested displaying information about detours or any service changes on vehicle screens, as well as to the VISION system, to inform both customers and operators of service changes.

**Need for more customer service training.** Some said even though new employees are hired with customer service experience, there is a need to provide further customer service training to new hires, either through divisional trainer programs or separate customer service programs.

**Operators should not have to enforce fares.** Participants said operators should not be responsible for enforcing fares, as this could pose a risk to their safety. Instead, they suggested having an increased presence of fare enforcement officers.

**Need for more washrooms, especially for women employees.** Participants said there is a need to create more washrooms for women employees, especially as the TTC hires more women in its workforce.

**The Planning department should be kept closely in loop with the operators**, some suggested having 'take your co-worker to work' day for planning staff.

**Consider training new hires about different areas of the city and different routes.**

### Other feedback and suggestions

- Keep the participants from this focus group in loop about next round of the engagement process.
- Provide more lighting at station entrances.
- Consider having cameras on streetcar doors to take pictures of the license plates of cars that pass the streetcar when it is stopped for customers, this can increase safety for customers and generate money for TTC if a fine was introduced.

- Consider lighting up the poles on bus stations so that customers and operators can both see where the stop is, and so it's easier for operators to see waiting customers.
- Consider making more Ride Guide maps available on all buses, streetcars, and subway trains.
- Consider creating maps that list out major attractions in the city, like the CN Tower, and having them available on the streetcars.
- Consider having information about the next arrival times of subway trains available at fare-level through screens.

## Detailed summary of the Employee Focus Group 2 (Mixed Demographics)

Seven TTC employees from mixed demographics attended the second focus group on August 16, 2023. The participants represented a range of roles at the TTC, including as bus operators, streetcar operators, collectors, and station supervisors. The participants shared a range of concerns they commonly hear from customers, and provided suggestions on how the TTC can work on addressing those.

### Feedback about key customer pain points, questions, complaints, and hot-topics

**Concerns about lack of fare enforcement.** Staff said it is not true that ridership is down, but that customers are not willing to pay the correct fare. They said that with the removal of tokens, and the fare box being open (and change going straight down), staff can't control the gates to see what people are putting in. However, the introduction of credit and debit card tapping does seem to be working. Additionally, customers are frustrated with rising fare prices and staff feel like this is punishing the honest people that are paying. One staff member said Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Station is a location where the TTC is losing thousands in fare revenue.

**Safety remains a top priority and concern for both customers and staff.** Collectors are outside of their booth to provide better customer service, but remain afraid that they will be assaulted, either physically or verbally. Customers and staff see the rise in assaults and mental health crises more than before, which makes staff's jobs more challenging. One staff member said that there isn't much difference than before, but that it is media sensationalizing the incidents.

**When trains are delayed, rapid shuttle bus service is essential to maintaining customers' calm.**

Participants felt the first 40 minutes following a disruption is the most stressful for both customers and staff as customers become frustrated with waiting for shuttle buses and overcrowding. Having a rapid action plan can help to maintain calm, and this can be done by bringing back standby buses. Pulling buses from routes that are very far away doesn't help, as drivers must cut through traffic to reach the affected zone.

**Signage and wayfinding are needed and essential to delivering good service for both customers and staff.** For example, during construction some bus drivers said it took a year for signage poles to come back to the stops. Signage is important for all route disruptions, not only during construction periods.

### Feedback about what employees need to deliver a great customer experience

**Information and communication are key.** Staff themselves are not receiving all the information about subway closures or disruptions which in turn makes staff look incompetent to customers. Staff are unable to give customers the correct information and are unable to help with different route options when staff themselves don't know that a station is closed. Staff should have too much information rather than none. Additionally, better communication between bus drivers and streetcar operators is also needed, especially during closures, to understand where customers should be picked up or dropped off.

**Operators are stressed with ensuring they make their run times, and that it affects the service they provide to customers.** Participants felt some schedules are not attainable, and staff find they are fighting the schedule the moment they leave the station. In turn it leads to staff being stressed, rushing customers, not being able to answer questions, and not being able to use the washroom. Adding recovery time into the run time and factoring in road rules such as changes in KM/Hour were suggested as potential solutions. Staff felt supervisors also need help. Some are monitoring five or more difficult routes which makes them stressed, in turn affecting bus operators and customers.

**Run service as needed.** TTC needs to have real people on the streets to understand how service is needed and not just provide service based off a schedule. People are using transit much earlier than before, and service should reflect that – such as starting train service at 5:00 am.

**Night service routes need better integration with each other to provide good service to customers.**

Some customers are starting their journey at 4:00 am and are having to wait for long periods between connections because buses are late or don't wait for customers coming off another bus. If operators can talk to each other about their run times, they can provide better service to customers waiting.

**Give operators the tools needed to help customers.** Some staff are being suspended for pulling out their phone to help give customers directions. If phones aren't an option, then give operators tablets or introduce digital information kiosks to help customers.

**When hiring new TTC operators, it is important to not only rely on customer service as a requirement.**

Staff should be hired with driving experience. Additionally, shadowing training needs to be brought back so that new staff realize the amount of work and sacrifice needed to handle the pressure and to set expectations (for example, that most front-line employees will need to work nights and weekends for the first several years before being able to have enough seniority to take these times off). On types of training, some staff said they were supportive of the de-escalation training they received, and more staff should also get it.

**Other feedback and suggestions**

**Consider creating engagement pop-ups where customers and TTC staff can come together to discuss.**

Often some questions or concerns can be answered by having the right people there and can help customers and TTC staff understand each other's perspectives. Additionally, it is important to engage customers in their community, at their stations and stops.



## Detailed summary of the Employee Focus Group 3 (Mixed Demographic)

Six TTC employees from mixed demographics attended the third focus group on August 17, 2023. The participants represented a range of roles at the TTC, including as bus operators, streetcar operators, collectors, and station supervisors.

### Feedback about key customer pain points, questions, complaints, and hot-topics

**Safety is the topmost concern for customers as well as employees.** Participants said safety is the topmost concern for both customers and employees. They suggested increased enforcement to ensure that customers who are being aggressive towards others on a regular basis can be managed.

Participants also said customers often do not have access to phones or are not as well versed with technology to report safety issues online. They said there should be more signage and alternative ways to report safety issues, along with education on the alternatives.

**Customers are concerned about the lack of fare enforcement.** Participants shared that customers were often discouraged to pay fares due to their fellow passengers not paying fares. They suggested stricter fare enforcement as a solution.

**Need for more staff to monitor cleanliness.** Participants said cleanliness was a common concern, especially during rush hours. They said there is a need for more staff to monitor cleanliness concerns like spills and leaks, and to report maintenance issues. Currently, customers have been going to areas that might be dangerous (because of pooled water, for example) with no staff on hand to monitor. Participants also suggested ensuring waiting areas are clean and stations are power washed.

**Overcrowding is a concern, and likely to get worse when schools reopen.** Participants said with reduced service for subways and buses, overcrowding is becoming a major concern, especially during rush hours. They said other reasons for overcrowding were customers occupying multiple seats or those travelling with big bikes taking up more space.

**The topmost concern about streetcars is slow speeds and excessive run times.** Participants said streetcars are often running at slow speeds, and customers want streetcars to be a faster connection to the subway. Some expressed concern about streetcar operators having to face customer anger due to the slow speeds.

**Lack of clear communication to customers** about service disruptions and when they'll be resolved is another common customer concern. Participants said the lack of this information can lead to customers becoming agitated.

**Broken PRESTO machines and fare gates are a common concern,** and customers can often get their money stuck in PRESTO machines or take 2-3 minute to get through gates due to delays in gate operation. There was a suggestion to include a point of sale (POS) system for loading cards.

### Feedback about what employees need to deliver a great customer experience

Participants said a good customer service experience for employees will lead to good customer service for customers too. They said there should be mechanisms to provide good customer service to employees, and suggested the following:

**Need for more coordination in communication and information given to employees.** Participants said there is a need for prompt communication and providing clear information to employees by management, which they can then provide to customers. Lack of clear communication can put employee safety in jeopardy,



since they are the first to face aggressive customers.

Some expressed concern about the one-way communication in buses and said operators should be able to communicate back to supervisors. Some also said bus operators should be informed about the schedule for buses behind them, so they can direct people to other buses in case of overcrowding.

**Use technology to provide support to employees and enhance customer experience.** Providing employees with devices like tablets, iPads, or monitors that are intranet-enabled can help them better assist customers, especially those don't have access to phones or are not as well versed with technology.

**Train employees for a range of safety-related scenarios.** Employees are often the first to respond to emergencies and safety concerns and should be provided more training on what to do in different scenarios.

**Need for more, visible enforcement.** Some participants said there was a need for more visible fare enforcement and enforcement by police. They also suggested including police stations at subway hubs like Kipling, Don Mills, and Bloor-Yonge which can be occupied by security officers and enforcement teams. Some also suggested having special constables at the end of the service day.

**Collectors should have the ability to reload and sell PRESTO cards, tickets, and passes and set concession fare types.** Passengers not being able to get these at the station can be a problem, especially for seniors and students, who then have to be directed to Shoppers Drug Mart to set a concession fare type. Some said without this ability, the job of collectors seems limited.

**Operators should be able to communicate with customers in buses and streetcars.** This is needed to provide good customer service and can currently be difficult due to the shields and closed streetcar doors. For buses, there were suggestions to use glass shields that reach fare boxes or providing operators with mics. For streetcar operators, there were suggestions to use intercoms, like those used in collector booths, as a way to communicate without having to open the door.

**Need for more staff at Transit Control, and to respond to closures.** Participants said Transit Control being understaffed is one of the reasons for the lack of communication with operators. Some also said there should be a dedicated external team to help offload trains and to respond to closures. This will ensure operators for shuttle buses don't have to undertake long journeys in case of closure, and will positively impact customer experience. They also said staff should be able to get rest and alternative shifts.

**There is a need to speed up the ramp-deployment and retraction process in vehicles.**

**Operators should be able to reach management directly** to share concerns and information.

## Other feedback and suggestions

Other suggestions participants provided to enhance customer experience included:

- Re-evaluate how many buses are needed to replace a streetcar when it goes out of service. Extra buses might impede stations for other vehicles. Operators can help the planning department to assess this number. There should also be buses on standby in case of overcrowding.
- Consider having weekend passes or week-long passes, like on GO Transit.
- Include visual cues to make service announcements accessible to more people (for example, flashing lights or information on digital sign on vehicles).
- Ensure service-related signage is clear, and signage about temporary disruptions or route changes is removed promptly once the issue is resolved. There was also a suggestion to have a database of all temporary signage.
- Find ways to reduce unnecessary delays, including re-evaluating the time-limit for the duration of delay after which trains start turning back.

- There should be a proper headway between buses and trains, especially during rush hours. The headway currently is too far apart.
- Need for a TTC app which is simple to use and includes all trip planning information in one place.
- Re-assess route planning for some night routes, including the Yonge night bus, which is well used by people going to work and currently operates once every 15 minutes.
- There was a range of opinions on the new option to pay for rides with credit or debit cards – some thought it would bring more convenience to people, while others were concerned about it not being a good option for families travelling together.

## **Employee Focus Group: Women**

TTC Customer Experience Action Plan

Thursday, August 10, 2023, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

TTC Head Office – 1900 Yonge Street



### **Meeting purpose**

To share and discuss draft focus areas in the TTC's Customer Experience Action Plan.

### **Proposed agenda**

#### **10:00 Welcome, introductions, agenda review**

*TTC and Third Party Public*

#### **10:10 Customer Experience Action Plan overview**

*TTC*

*Questions of clarification*

#### **10:30 Discussion: Customer Experience Action Plan**

1. What are you hearing from customers about their experience on the TTC? Are there common questions, complaints, or hot topics?
2. What do you think our customers see as key pain points in their experience of the TTC?
3. What do you as TTC employees need to be able to deliver a great customer experience (and do you have that today)? What would you like to be able to do for customers but can't?
4. What ideas do you have to improve customer experience?

#### **11:55 Other feedback, wrap up, and next steps**

#### **12:00 Adjourn**

## **Employee Focus Group**

TTC Customer Experience Action Plan

Wednesday, August 16, 2023, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

TTC Head Office – 1900 Yonge Street



### **Meeting purpose**

To share and discuss draft focus areas in the TTC's Customer Experience Action Plan.

### **Proposed agenda**

#### **10:00 Welcome, introductions, agenda review**

*TTC and Third Party Public*

#### **10:10 Customer Experience Action Plan overview**

*TTC*

*Questions of clarification*

#### **10:30 Discussion: Customer Experience Action Plan**

1. What are you hearing from customers about their experience on the TTC? Are there common questions, complaints, or hot topics?
2. What do you think our customers see as key pain points in their experience of the TTC?
3. What do you as TTC employees need to be able to deliver a great customer experience (and do you have that today)? What would you like to be able to do for customers but can't?
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#### **11:55 Other feedback, wrap up, and next steps**

#### **12:00 Adjourn**

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TTC Customer Experience Action Plan  
Thursday, August 17, 2023, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm  
TTC Head Office – 1900 Yonge Street



### **Meeting purpose**

To share and discuss draft focus areas in the TTC's Customer Experience Action Plan.

### **Proposed agenda**

#### **10:00 Welcome, introductions, agenda review**

*TTC and Third Party Public*

#### **10:10 Customer Experience Action Plan overview**

*TTC*

*Questions of clarification*

#### **10:30 Discussion: Customer Experience Action Plan**

1. What are you hearing from customers about their experience on the TTC? Are there common questions, complaints, or hot topics?
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#### **11:55 Other feedback, wrap up, and next steps**

#### **12:00 Adjourn**