



## Pop-Up Public Consultations Summary TTC 5-Year Service Plan and Customer Experience Action Plan



### Overview

In August 2023, the TTC hosted six pop-up public consultations across Toronto. The pop-ups were part of the TTC's broader public engagement about its 5-Year Service Plan and Customer Experience Action Plan. The purpose of the pop-ups was to engage everyday customers in conversations about key focus areas in these plans, specifically:

- **For the 5-Year Service Plan:** how TTC could improve the Express Bus Network, integration with regional transit partners, and integration with other modes of transport
- **For the Customer Experience Action Plan:** how TTC could improve the customer experience in terms of safety, trip planning, real time information, stop and station amenities, and cleanliness.

The pop-ups took place at:

1. Humber College North Toronto Campus (August 16, 3:00 – 5:00 p.m.)
2. Don Mills Station (August 17, 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.)
3. Scarborough Centre Station (August 18, 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.)
4. Finch West Station (August 21, 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.)
5. Kipling Station (August 22, 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.)
6. Bloor-Yonge Station (August 23, 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.)

At the pop-ups, TTC staff and staff from Third Party Public (an independent public engagement team supporting the TTC's customer consultation) shared background information about the two plans with customers and asked them for their thoughts. The pop-up teams also shared information and sought feedback through interactive display panels and offered handouts to customers.

Each pop-up was different. Some were very busy, like Yonge-Bloor station, where teams tended to have shorter conversations with many customers. Others were less busy and involved longer conversations with fewer customers. The customers engaged represented a diverse range of ages, abilities, backgrounds, and levels of familiarity with TTC service, including a few who said they were on their very first TTC ride. Across all six pop-ups, the team interacted with hundreds of customers.

Third Party Public prepared this summary on behalf of the TTC. The intent of this summary is to capture the range of feedback shared at the pop-ups, not to assess the merit or accuracy of these perspectives. It includes the following sections:

- Key themes in feedback shared
- Feedback about the 5-Year Service Plan
- Feedback about the Customer Experience Action Plan

## **Key themes in the feedback shared at the pop-ups**

The following points reflect the themes that emerged across all pop-ups. The remainder of this summary provides additional details regarding these points, as well as many others, shared by participants.

**Customers appreciate the TTC and its efforts to engage customers in these plans.** In both shorter and longer interactions, many customers had positive things to say about the TTC and its efforts to consult customers. They said that, while the TTC isn't always perfect, it provides a valuable service they appreciate.

**Improving safety is a priority for many.** Many customers identified safety as a growing concern, though they offered differing perspectives on how to best address that concern. Some saw increased enforcement and presence of police or security staff as necessary to impose consequences on customers they perceived as being safety and security threats. Others suggested a more compassionate, supportive approach to consider and improve the safety and security of all customers, including those who might be unhoused or struggling with substance or addiction issues.

**Providing better, more accurate, and reliable real-time information is key to improving trip planning and transit journeys.** Many said that inaccurate real-time information data in smartphone apps and other platforms is a source of frustration, leading to mistrust of both apps and TTC service. They said the TTC should prioritize the accuracy of this information so that, even if service is unreliable or disrupted, customers can plan and adjust with good information. Many said they would like to see the TTC develop its own app.

**The Express Bus Network is appreciated and could be even better.** Customers who said they use the Express Bus network generally had positive things to say about it, though they acknowledged that sometimes Express Buses do not meet the target travel time savings. Very few were supportive of the TTC removing Express Bus service and replacing it with increased local service. There was more of a range of opinion when it came to removing some stops on Express Bus routes to improve service: some said they would support this strategy provided it led to meaningful improvements, while others were not supportive, saying removing stops would undermine travel time savings by creating longer journeys to and from transit.

**Integration with regional transit agencies will make a big difference for customers.** Customers said that integration with regional transit agencies — particularly fare integration with GO Transit — could have a big impact. Those who said they currently use multiple agencies in their trip said they would appreciate not having to pay double fare. Those who said they do not currently use multiple agencies said they would be much more likely to consider it once fare integration is introduced.

## Feedback about the 5-Year Service Plan

At the pop-ups, the TTC asked for feedback on two topics:

- How to improve the Express Bus Network to better achieve target travel time savings
- How to improve integration between TTC and regional transit partners (including fare integration with GO) and integration between TTC and other transportation modes.

This section summarizes feedback shared about these topics across all six pop-ups.

### Express Bus Network Improvements

The TTC asked customers for their thoughts on potential approaches to helping the Express Bus network better achieve target travel time savings, including removing some stops on Express Bus routes or removing Express Bus service altogether and augmenting local bus routes.

Among the customers who said they use the Express Bus Network, many had positive things to say, including that they often find Express Buses faster and, in some cases, that they would wait a few extra minutes for an Express Bus rather than take a local service on the same route. Customers also shared some criticisms of the Express Bus network, saying that they would like Express service to run more frequently and on a predictable schedule. In discussing the options TTC was considering, customers' feedback varied depending on the option.

In terms of the option of **removing some stops to enable faster Express Bus service**, customers were split. Some said they would support this option provided there were enough stops at major intersections and/or more local service added. Others were not supportive of removing stops, saying the added journey time to and from stops would negate some of the travel time savings from taking an Express Bus.

Feedback about the option of **removing Express Service altogether and augmenting local service** was more consistent. Most participants did not support this idea, saying they prefer having the option of Express service, even if it sometimes does not achieve travel time savings.

Customers also offered feedback and suggestions about Express service overall and specific express routes:

- Increase the frequency of the 927 Highway 27, especially in the morning. Some said they like and rely on this service.
- Consider removing some stops from the 937 Islington Express to improve its travel time.
- Consider adding articulated buses to the 939 Finch service, especially in the morning, and increase the frequency of this route. Consider removing the 939B service and using the 939 route for all service.
- Consider extending the 954 Lawrence East route to Eglinton Station.
- Review the balance of 985 Sheppard East service and 85 Sheppard East – sometimes there are too many Express Buses and not enough local ones. Consider removing some stops from route 985 so it only stops at high density areas.
- Make sure operators stick to the schedule and let people on the bus if there is capacity– sometimes they leave early, leaving customers frustrated and waiting.

### Regional Integration

The TTC asked customers for their thoughts on how to better integrate TTC service with regional transit partners as well as how to better integrate with other transportation modes.

Most of the feedback shared was about integration with regional transit partners. Generally, customers were strongly in favour of fare integration with GO Transit, saying it would help reduce confusion, provide more travel options, and make travel more affordable for students and families. Those that said they use multiple transit agencies in a trip said they would appreciate not having to pay multiple fares, while those that said they

do not currently use multiple agencies would be much more likely to with fare integration. Other comments about fare integration and fare payment included:

- If fare integration becomes a reality, different agencies will also need to share and integrate real-time information about their service so that customers using multiple services in a single trip have information about all parts of their trip.
- TTC should maintain control over fares (as opposed to having the Province dictate fares for Toronto).
- Explore opportunities to have an inter-agency Metropass.

Some customers suggested integration with other transit agencies could be improved with better wayfinding and signage at stations where multiple providers stop (such as at Kipling Station). They also suggested places where connections between different service providers could be improved, including:

- Between GO Transit and TTC at Scarborough Centre. A pedestrian walkway or crossing would help improve the connection here, especially when the mall is closed.
- Between the Megabus stop on Borough Drive and Scarborough Centre (which currently requires paying a TTC fare).
- Between Scarborough Centre and Union Station (via a GO Bus or Express Bus).
- Between Scarborough Centre and Don Mills Station.
- Between Toronto and surrounding municipalities' centres (like Markham)

In terms of integration with other transportation modes, a few said they would like to see better integration with bicycling. Specific suggestions included:

- add more bike parking at every station entrance.
- make bike parking more visible and easier to find (supported with good signage and communication).
- provide more communication about how to use bike racks on buses.
- dedicate space on vehicles for bikes, strollers, or shopping trolleys.
- provide clear communication about rules around bringing electric scooters onto transit vehicles.

## Other comments and suggestions about TTC service

Customers shared system-wide and area- and route-specific feedback about improving service. Talking about the system overall, customers shared on-going issues they'd like to see addressed, including crowding, the high cost of fare, long wait times, and vehicle bunching. They also offered suggestions on how to improve the system overall, including: increasing overnight, weekend, and Sunday morning service; extending the two-hour transfer time; and adding more red lanes for buses.

### Route- and area-specific suggestions

Customers identified several routes where they thought TTC should provide more frequent and consistent service, including: 10 Van Horne, 16 McCowan, 21 Brimley, 25 Don Mills, 36B Finch West (particularly at night), 40 Junction-Dundas West, 41 Keele, 45 Kipling, 85 Sheppard East, 96 Wilson, 98 Willowdale-Senlac, 106 Sentinel, 111 East Mall (which would also benefit from an Express route), 112D West Mall, 129 McCowan North, and 134B Progress (some drivers do not follow the proper route). A few said more frequency is needed on Line 1 (especially during evening rush hour) and that Line 2 should run until at least 2am to facilitate connections with the last Line 1 trains.

Broader, area-specific comments and suggestions included:

- Offer a service between Humber College North Campus and Line 6 Finch West when it opens.
- Provide more buses on busy routes in the morning at Don Mills and Pape stations.
- Find a better solution to provide transit in Scarborough since the Line 3 closure – the current replacement service adds 20 minutes to the journey.
- Install better signage to help customers navigate Line 3 replacement buses.
- Offer an Airport Express connection to Line 5 when it opens.
- Offer an overnight bus service on University Avenue

## Feedback about the Customer Experience Action Plan

At the pop-ups, the TTC asked for feedback on how it could improve the customer experience through six focus areas: safety, trip planning, real-time information, station amenities, stop amenities, and cleanliness. This section summarizes feedback shared about each of these focus areas across all six pop-ups.

### Safety

Across all pop-ups, safety was one of the most common topics discussed. Some customers said they hadn't personally experienced any safety issues, and a few said they felt safety concerns were overblown by the media. Most said that safety and security on the TTC had become a concern for them, with several citing incidents in which they had felt afraid or, in a few cases, been assaulted. Several customers said they had adjusted their lifestyle or travel behaviour to reduce perceived safety risks on transit, including using ride share services at night, never having their back to someone on a vehicle, avoiding the subway, and changing jobs or seeking work-from-home opportunities to minimize commuting on public transit. Others said they saw safety issues on the TTC as the result of societal problems outside of TTC's control, such as lack of affordable housing and declining health care. They said they appreciated that the TTC has initiatives to try and improve a challenge not of their making.

A few themes emerged consistently in customers' suggestions about how the TTC could improve the customer experience through a safety lens:

- **More staffing and more visible presence of supports.** While customers differed in opinion on the type of staffing response needed — some advocated for increased police and security while others wanted more outreach and social support workers — most said they would feel safer if there was a more visible presence of staff across the transit system. They said they wanted to see more people whose job is to keep customers safe and address customers who either pose or appear to pose a threat. They also said they would like to see people in this role with rigorous training (“not just contract security guards”) and they would prefer for these staff not be identified as “crisis response teams” or similar, saying that kind of label makes customers uneasy. One customer said TTC initiatives like automatic train control have reduced the presence of staffing, making them feel less safe.
- **Improve response times when there's a problem.** Some said that it can take too long for someone to come respond to a safety issue. They suggested setting a faster target for the time it takes for either a security or support worker to respond to a situation.
- **Unsure about QR codes to report safety issues.** Many participants said they weren't sure if they would use a QR code to report a safety issue. They said QR codes can be slow and require a cellular or data connection – both of which could be barriers in an emergency.
- **Provide some base level training to TTC staff,** such as how to administer care for someone with an urgent health need.

### Real-time information and trip planning

Customers often discussed real-time information and trip planning as two connected topics, so their feedback about them is combined in this section. Many said that good, accurate real-time information supported by reliable trip planning services is very important to their experience of transit and that many of the current tools fall short of their expectations. Common themes in their feedback included:

- **The data feed informing transit apps and other services needs to be more accurate.** Many customers said they use smartphone apps to make decisions about their trip, including standalone transit apps as well as multi-modal mapping apps. Some said they find these apps helpful, but many said the data is unreliable and inaccurate. Across all pop-ups, customers said improving the accuracy of the data feed informing these apps and services should be a priority for TTC.
- **Interest in a TTC-made app.** Citing frustration or lack of trust with other apps and services, several said they would like the TTC to develop its own app. In addition to sharing real-time info, this app could

also share information about other transit agencies' schedules and be a one-stop-shop for information and services related to using transit in Toronto. This app could also support multi-modal trip planning, especially for customers using a bike as part of their journey. Waterloo's GRT app was suggested as an example TTC should review.

- **Information should be shared earlier and more frequently.** Both customers and operators that participated in the pop-ups said that getting information to customers as soon as possible is most important, independent of how that information is delivered. The earlier in a customer's journey they receive information — especially when it comes to service disruptions — the easier it is for them to adjust their plans. They said that, to achieve this type of communication, it might be necessary to communicate about disruptions on connecting routes, not just the route affected. Operators said that there should be a mechanism for them to be informed of disruptions as early as possible so they can be prepared for customer inquiries. Finally, several said communications about replacement shuttle service during subway disruptions were particularly frustrating, with customers being directed to wait for buses even after subway service had resumed.
- **Announcements need to be clearer.** Customers said that announcements about service updates, disruptions, and other information are sometimes inaudible and difficult to understand, saying the audio quality needs to be improved. A few also suggested some operators would benefit from training on how to deliver announcements more clearly.
- **The TTC's stop text system is useful and reliable.** Several said they use the TTC's stop-based texting system to get real-time information, with a few saying they found it more accurate than apps.
- **Better communication about overnight service is needed.** Customers who rely on the overnight network said they would appreciate better communication about overnight schedules and stop locations. Since this service is less frequent than daytime service, the consequences of a missed bus or transfer are significant.

## Stop and station amenities

Customers shared feedback about how TTC could improve surface transit stop amenities and subway station amenities.

The most common suggested improvement for **stop amenities** was adding more seating and shelters at surface stops, with many suggesting these shelters should be heated. Adding garbage cans was another common suggestion, with some saying this improvement could also help improve the cleanliness of the system. Finally, a few said they wanted to see more next vehicle arrival boards at bus stops, though they said the data feeding these boards would need to be accurate.

Discussing **station amenities**, customers suggested improving wayfinding (especially to indicate where bike parking is), installing better air conditioning, adding more customer washrooms, offering more vending machines, and offering better, faster Wi-Fi. They also said offering more seating, new wayfinding maps (with cardinal directions indicated), and having attendants at all ticket booths and entrances would improve the customer experience at stations.

## Cleanliness

Many customers said they didn't think cleanliness was a major issue on TTC. Some said the system could be cleaner, especially at Downtown stations, and added that when they encounter issues, they notify an operator or dial 311. A few said that they would use a QR code to report cleanliness issues.

## Other feedback and suggestions

Over the course of the pop-ups, customers offered other insights and suggestions on how to improve the customer experience. At the time of the pop-ups, Metrolinx had recently launched tap-to-pay with debit and credit cards, which many customers saw as a positive change (though some were worried about the potential for fare payment data to be used to track people). Other suggestions included:

- **Provide more resources to help people learn about the system**, such as bringing back the Ride Guide or offering sessions for newcomers about how the system and fare payment work.
- **Enhance operator training** Some customers said they had had great experiences with operators, while others said they thought operators would benefit from some training, specifically to:
  - discourage operators from having small talk in front of waiting customers.
  - require operators to give customers a reason and understanding about how long they'll be away when they step off a vehicle at a terminal station.
  - require operators to run air conditioning in hot weather.
  - require operators to tell customers to move to the back to distribute crowding.
  - train operators to drive more carefully, with less sudden accelerating and braking.
  - provide operators with training on the area surrounding their route so they can better answer customer inquiries.
  - train operators to be more courteous and compassionate.
  - encourage operators to ask customers to use headphones when listening to music (as opposed to portable speakers).
  - require drivers not to leave passengers waiting at a stop, especially when their bus is half empty.
- **Improve the experience for people using mobility devices**, including by:
  - adding more Wheel-Trans service – many operators of “regular” vehicles do not have patience for seniors.
  - providing ways for Wheel-Trans users to reports incidents or accidents (or better communicate about existing ways to make these reports).
  - adding signage or requiring drivers to announce that people using mobility devices or stroller have vehicle boarding priority.
  - encouraging customers to have their fare ready when boarding (so those using mobility devices don't have to wait for people ahead of them to clear the way).
  - Improving the Wheel-Trans booking system for same day booking or changes. This system works well for long-term planning, but re-booking at the last minute is time-consuming.
- **Improve the fare payment experience through:**
  - encouraging Metrolinx to work with smartphone companies to add support for adding Presto cards to digital wallets like Apple Wallet.
  - bringing more consistency to fare enforcement or have a clear explanation as to why TTC does not appear to enforce fare payment for some customers, such as unhoused customers. Several said that they feel discouraged when they pay their fare and see others get away with not paying theirs.
  - offering post-secondary single fare discounts.
  - introducing fare capping, where customers can reach a “maximum amount paid” within a given period.
- **Offer tools to TTC staff in stations to help customers**, such as translation tools and digital maps.
- **Do not require customers be vaccinated** to take the TTC.