

# TTC 2023 Annual Service Plan Focus Groups Summary

July 5, 7, and 12, 2022, 6:00 – 8:00 pm



## Overview

On Tuesday, July 5, Thursday, July 7, and Tuesday, July 12, 2022, the TTC hosted focus groups with key customer audiences who have continued to rely on transit during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically women, shift workers, and low-income customers. A total of 22 participants attended the three focus groups, organized by key audience.

The purpose of the focus groups was to share and seek feedback on priorities and services to help inform the TTC's 2023 Annual Service Plan and future 5-Year Service Plan Reset. Each focus group was 2 hours long and consisted of an overview presentation and facilitated discussion. See Appendix A for agendas. In each focus group, the discussion was organized into two parts: understanding if customer priorities have changed from what customers identified as their priorities at the beginning of the pandemic (2020) and understanding what TTC services are most important and least important for them to help inform TTC decision making as they continue to operate in uncertain contexts, both in terms of ridership and operational subsidy. See Appendix B for key presentation slides. The focus groups, part of the TTC's first round of public and stakeholder engagement on the 2023 Annual Service Plan, was one of several ways the TTC worked to bring an equity lens to its engagement process by consulting customers who continued to rely on transit during the pandemic.

Recruitment of participants for the focus groups was done through the TTC's Customer Panel: a group of approximately 1,000 customers that are representative of Toronto's diversity. The recruitment process involved identifying prospective participants that are reflective of each key audience focus group and striving for diversity in age, gender (where appropriate), location, and transit use within each focus group, resulting in a preferred participant list for each group. Preferred participants were contacted to see if they were interested and available to participate until a maximum of 8 participants for each focus group were reached. As a thank you for the participants' time and participation, TTC offered pre-paid credit cards with a \$150 value.

This integrated summary includes a high-level summary of feedback across the three focus groups, as well as a detailed summary of feedback from each focus group.

Third Party Public facilitated the focus groups and prepared this integrated summary. The intent of this summary is to capture the range of feedback shared in the focus groups, not to assess the merit or accuracy of these perspectives. It is also not intended to serve as a verbatim transcript. The TTC will also post the final summary on its [project website](#).

## High-level summary of feedback across all focus groups

The following points summarize 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 were 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).

### Thoughts on customer priorities

- **Overall, there were mixed opinions across the three focus groups on the customer priorities identified in 2020.** Participants in the women focus group said the customer priorities in 2020 continue to reflect their priorities now, with crowding being a bigger concern now. Participants in the shift workers focus group agree with most priorities, except for reallocation of services from off-peak to peak hours. However, participants in the low-income focus group had mixed opinions on most priorities, except for “fewer transfers and continuous trips” which remain a top priority for them.
- **Additional priorities were identified that were fairly consistent across focus groups – frequent service, physical safety, reliable service, and improved communication.**
  - Participants across all focus groups identified the 10 minute base network as the most important TTC service. They said having frequent service is important to address crowding concerns and reduce wait times.
  - Safety is a big issue and is an important priority across the three focus groups. The main safety concern is not related to COVID-19, but about physical safety against harassment or assault, especially when travelling at night or stations with fewer people/unmanned.
  - Reliable service was particularly important across the three focus groups. They said it was important for service to be reliable so customers can expect when service will come, and they can get to their destination on time. Not being late to work was particularly important for participants in the shift workers’ focus group.
  - Improved communication was particularly important for participants in the women’s focus group and low income focus group. They shared a range of ways TTC can improve communication with its customers, with installing next vehicle information screens at stops being the most suggested. These information screens would help customers plan their trip, inform them of any service disruptions, and would make travelling on transit less stressful.

### Thoughts on TTC services

- **10 minute base network was the top most important service across all focus groups, followed by 30 minute service standard and weekday peak service.** The 10 minute base network being the top most important service is reflective of the participants' need for frequent service and would make travel more reliable. Having a guaranteed 30-minute service standard is also important. The weekday peak service is important for customers to get to work or drop their kids off at school.
- **The downtown premium express was identified by most participants across the three focus groups as the least important service, with one participant from the shift workers focus group saying otherwise.** The main reason the downtown premium express is not important for them is that they don't use them, however, one participant from the shift workers focus group said that the downtown premium express service could help with traffic and crowding for those travelling downtown.
- **Different customers have different needs.** There were mixed opinions on all 10 other services, with some services identified as less important to some, but identified as important to others. For example, early morning service was not important to many participants from the women and low-income focus groups but was important for participants from the shift workers focus group to be able to travel to work. Express service is another example, where participants from the shift workers focus group and some participants from the low-income focus group said express service was an important service, particularly for those travelling long distances. However, the women focus group had no strong opinion about express service. Participants said that it was important to have a balance amongst the whole transit system as all services may be important to some.

## Women's Focus Group Summary

On Tuesday, July 5, 8 participants attended the women's focus group. Feedback shared by participants on the main topics of discussion (customer priorities and TTC services), as well as on others, have been summarized below.

### Customer priorities

**The customer priorities identified in 2020 generally continue to reflect participants' priorities now, with crowding being more important.** Participants said the priorities presented makes sense, with many saying that crowding on vehicles is even more important now. They said they avoid travelling during rush hours to avoid encountering crowded vehicles, which is especially challenging for those who are travelling with strollers, and they also find other customers being frustrated with them. Others said crowding is expected but having less crowded vehicles would be better.

Participants also identified three other priorities:

- **Frequent service**, which is very important because buses are often packed that customers have to wait for the next 2-3 vehicles before they can get on. Participants said this is especially problematic for those travelling with kids, making them wait at stops for longer periods. Frequent service is also important to participants as some said they feel unsafe waiting at stops for long periods of time. Bus routes mentioned having issues with service frequency were 905 Eglinton East Express, 86 Scarborough and 116 Morningside going to Kennedy Station, as well as 505 Dundas and 501 Queen.
- **Reliable service**. Participants said that service needs to stick to the schedule so customers can expect and rely on when the vehicles, particularly buses and streetcars, will come. They suggest installing next vehicle information screens at stops to help customers plan their trip and make travelling on transit less stressful. Participants prefer the information screens at stops to checking mobile apps as it is accessible to everyone.
- **Physical safety**. Participants said safety is a big issue when taking transit. There were a range of safety concerns, but mainly about harassment or intimidation. They said they avoid travelling on transit at night due to concerns and previous experiences of being intimidated and harassed. However, they said it can also be an issue during early morning trips, when there are fewer people around, or in unmanned stations like St Clair Station. They also shared fears about unintentionally triggering people experiencing homelessness and people with mental health issues, which they said is a concern for both men and women. One participant shared concerns with unsafe boarding and exiting of buses for people with medical/mobility issues.

Participants said they understand that safety issues regarding harassment are not the TTC's responsibility, but they shared a range of suggestions TTC could consider making so customers feel safer on transit, including:

- more emergency systems at accessible places to report incidents in stations, stops, and vehicles.
- advertise that the "Request Stop" program on buses between 9:00 pm to 5:00 am still exists and educate drivers about this program.
- TTC staff stationed in the middle and back areas of streetcars as the streetcars are too long for drivers to notice what's happening in the back.

- Special Constables spread out at stations to serve as a deterrent, especially on subway platforms and at night. Make sure that Special Constables are focusing on being aware of surroundings and paying attention to customer safety.

## TTC services

**10 minute base network is the top most important service.** Almost all participants said the 10 minute base network is the most important service for them, which is reflective of their travel needs and priority for frequent service.

**30 minute service standard, weekday peak and off-peak service, and weekend service are the next most important services.** Many participants said having a guaranteed 30 minute service standard is important. They also said that weekday peak service is important so they can go to work and drop their kids to school. They said the weekend service is important and they like travelling on weekends as it is less stressful because they don't have to rush. However, a participant said that switching to buses from subways during weekend closure is never smooth.

**Blue Night network is the top least important service for many participants, with one participant saying it is important for them.** Most participants said they don't travel late at night, however, one participant said that the Blue Night network provides an important service for those travelling late at night. Even though the service is only on major streets, it still provides a safe way for people to get home at night.

**Downtown premium express and community bus are the next least important services.** Some participants said these services are not important as they do not affect them.

**Mixed opinions on early morning service, regional connections, and GO transit connections.** Some participants said early morning service is not important for them as they don't travel early morning, however, a participant said it is important for them to be able to get to work. A few participants said regional connections are important for them to connect to UP Express and Durham Region Transit, however, a participant said it's not important for them. Similarly, GO transit received mixed responses, with one participant who said it is important for them, and one participant who said that it is not important.

**No feedback was shared on the Express network.**

## Other feedback

- A participant said they avoid travelling during rush hours as pets are only allowed on transit outside of peak periods. Participants also noted that the duration of rush hours is getting longer.
- Wheel-Trans provides excellent and safe service.
- Keeping fares affordable is important.

## Low Income Focus Group Summary

On Thursday, July 7, 6 participants attended the focus group with low income customers. Feedback shared by participants on the main topics of discussion (customer priorities and TTC services), as well as on others, have been summarized below.

### Customer Priorities

**Overall, providing fewer transfers and continuous trips continues to be a priority for participants, however, there were mixed opinions on the rest of the customer priorities presented.** Participants said fewer transfers and continuous trips remain a top priority for them. They said continuous trips and improved connectivity make travel times better, and it is particularly important for those that live far from main transit stations (e.g., Scarborough residents).

**Concerns about crowding are related to shuttle service use during subway closures and overcrowded subway platforms.** Participants said crowding is normal and expected and that they're not worried about it when taking transit, except when the subway is down and customers have to use shuttle buses. One participant said overcrowding on Line 2 subway platforms is dangerous and should be looked at.

**Mixed opinions on the express network being a priority for customers.** Some participants said express service is important for customers travelling long distances, for example, those who are travelling from Scarborough. Others said it is not important to them because they find that the service confuses people who are taking a bus in an unfamiliar area. Accidentally taking an express bus would mean having to walk far to their intended stop because express stops are far from each other.

**Mixed opinions on focusing service on busier routes during peak periods,** with one participant who said it remains a priority for them and another saying it wasn't a priority.

Participants also identified three other priorities:

- **Physical safety.** Participants said safety is an important priority for them, and that they are more concerned with their physical safety than safety related to health (COVID-19). They were concerned about safety related to crowded subway platforms and being assaulted. Participants also said that safety issues discourage people from taking transit. Suggestions on how to make customers feel safe on transit include installing platform doors on subway platforms, more special constables available throughout stations, and following up with customers who have reported an incident, so customers feel that they were heard, and their issues have been addressed.
- **Improved communication.** Participants flagged the importance of improving the ways TTC communicates with and promotes its services to customers. They shared a range of ways TTC could improve communication, including:
  - install better route signage
  - better information posted at stops, not just in stations, during service interruptions as not everyone has access to a mobile device and not everyone will go to stations
  - install real-time displays at all bus shelters, and if there aren't shelters then post the route schedule on bus stop poles

- mark express routes well to avoid confusion and instruct bus drivers to tell boarding customers that the bus is an express
- **Reliable service.** Participants said that it's important for service to operate on schedule times so customers are not delayed, particularly those travelling long distances.

## TTC Services

**10 minute base network, weekday peak service, and Blue Night network were the most important services for many participants.** The 10 minute base network is important to many participants because it makes travel reliable. Service during peak periods was also identified by many participants as important. Additionally, participants said that knowing that an overnight service is available when needed is important. One participant said that it's helpful to keep people from driving at night when they shouldn't.

**30 minute service standard, regional connections and community buses are the next most important services.** Participants did not provide a detailed explanation as to why the 30 minute service standard and community bus are important to them, but no participants said these services were not important to them. One participant said regional connections are important for transitioning to other transit agencies.

**Downtown premium express was the top least important service for participants.** No participant said this service was important to them.

**Mixed opinions on the express network, early morning service, weekend service, weekday off-peak service, and GO transit connections.** Express service is important for those travelling long distances, however, others said this service is not important to them. The latter four services had the same number of participants say it was important and not important to them. Participants did not provide detailed explanations for all services, but one participant said early morning service is not important to them because they don't use it, and another said that weekend service is important to them because they use it, even though the service is slow.

**Different customers may have different needs.** It is important to note that while participants identified which services are most important and least important to them, they acknowledged that other customers may have different opinions because they have different needs.

## Other feedback

- Consider integrating regional transit fares and allowing direct payment through credit cards on transit. Also, consider how GO transit can help relieve TTC service when needed. Transferring between TTC and GO transit systems can be easier with fare integration. A participant also said that being able to transfer to GO services was helpful to reduce travel time.
- 2-hour transfer is a great service for low-income transit riders.
- Pleased to see how far TTC has come with making service accessible for customers.
- Pleased to see the changes that will happen along Finch West with the opening of Line 6 Finch West soon as it makes travelling long distances/reaching downtown easier. A participant said that they feel honoured as a non-driver because of the improved service provided by LRT systems.



## Shift Workers Focus Group Summary

On Tuesday, July 12, 8 participants attended the shift workers focus group. Feedback shared by participants on the main topics of discussion (customer priorities and TTC services), as well as on others, have been summarized below.

### Customer Priorities

**Most customer priorities identified in 2020 generally continue to reflect participants' priorities now, except for the reallocation of services from off-peak to peak hours.**

Express bus service and fewer transfers remain a top priority for participants, but the reallocation of services from off-peak to peak is not ideal. They said they understand the frustration of riders on busy routes during peak periods but taking service away from less busy routes during off-peak periods is not good for those communities affected and those who have been accustomed to their service levels.

**Concern with crowding is about being able to get on the bus.** During the height of COVID-19, crowding was a concern but now a certain level of crowding is expected. However, the type of crowding that is concerning now is when riders can't get on the bus. A participant said they prefer travelling at night because there is no crowding and they can get a seat.

**Express bus network is a great service.** Many participants said they highly appreciate express buses, especially when travelling long distances, with one participant calling it the "greatest invention". One participant noted that they saw an improvement on the 929 Dufferin Express route with more frequent service. However, participants also said that express services should be more reliable as some weeks they find the wait times longer than other weeks.

Participants also identified two other priorities:

- **Reliable service.** Participants said it is important to have reliable service to make sure people get to their destination on time. This is especially important for those who need to make transfers to different bus routes because one bus not coming on time will result in missing their next bus. Others said they tend to leave home early to add a buffer time to make sure they get to their workplaces on time. Another participant said they learned to always check TTC social media/websites for service updates or changes.
- **Physical safety.** Safety is an important priority, especially on the Blue Night network. One participant shared an incident that happened to their friend while on the Blue Night bus.

### TTC Services

**10 minute base network is the top most important service to many participants.**

Customers would feel good about transit if the 10 minute base network is implemented across the city.

**Early morning service, Express network, 30 minute service standard, and weekday peak and off-peak services are the next most important services.** Participants particularly explained that early morning service and Express network are important because a lot of people use these services to travel to work. Others said providing Express service on weekends would be helpful.



**Mixed opinions on weekend service and Blue Night network, with some saying they are important services for them and at least one participant saying otherwise.** Many participants said weekend service is important as they use it to get to work and other places, however, one participant said it was not an important service for them. Some participants also said the Blue Night network is important for them as their work shift either end late or they need to get to work very early, however, one participant said it was not important for them.

**GO transit connections and community bus are the least important services.** Some participants said these services are not important to them, and no participants said these services are important to them.

**Mixed opinions on regional connections and downtown premium express, with some saying they are not important services for them and at least one participant saying otherwise.** Many participants said regional connections are not important for them because they don't use them, however, one participant said it was important for them because they do not drive and having services that connect to regions outside of Toronto is helpful. A few said the downtown premium express is not important for them because they don't use them, however, one participant said that the downtown premium express service could help with traffic and crowding for those travelling downtown.

**Need for balance.** While most participants identified which services are most important and least important to them, some said it was difficult to choose because balance is needed amongst the whole system and all services may be important to someone.

#### Other feedback

- Mixed opinions on the 2-hour transfer. Some participants said they like the 2-hour transfer while one participant suggested extending it. Others suggested for the TTC to consider allowing reloading of PRESTO cards in more locations beyond transit stations and Shoppers.
- Consider a partnership with BikeShare so TTC customers could use BikeShares to help connect to TTC services.
- Consider an arrangement between GO transit and the TTC so that when a service disruption occurs, TTC customers can use GO services. Clarification from TTC: This arrangement already exists. If a major transit incident happens on the TTC or GO, the other system will let customers use their service, however, this mainly happens for services on Union Station.

## Appendix A. Agendas

### TTC 2023 Annual Service Plan Customer Panel Focus Groups: Women

Tuesday, July 5, 2022

6:00 – 8:00 pm

Meeting held online



#### Meeting purpose

To share and seek feedback on priorities and services to help inform the TTC's 2023 Annual Service Plan and future 5-Year Service Plan Reset.

#### Proposed agenda

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

TTC

*Third Party Public (formerly Swerhun Inc.)*

**6:15 Update and overview of the 2023 Annual Service Plan**

TTC

- 5-Year Service Plan overview
- 2023 Annual Service Plan overview

*Questions of clarification*

**6:45 Discussion: COVID-19 learnings**

*Thinking both generally and of your experience as a woman:*

#### Priorities

1. To what extent do you agree with these priorities?
2. Based on your experience since the pandemic began, how do you think these priorities should change (if at all)?

#### Services

3. Given how travel patterns have changed, how well do you feel these services are meeting customers' needs?
4. Which of these services (if any) do you think are most important (and why)? Are there any you consider less important?
5. Do you have any other advice you'd like to share?

**7:50 Wrap up and next steps**

**8:00 Adjourn**

# **TTC 2023 Annual Service Plan Customer Panel Focus Groups: Low Income**

Thursday, July 7, 2022

6:00 – 8:00 pm

Meeting held online



## **Meeting purpose**

To share and seek feedback on priorities and services to help inform the TTC's 2023 Annual Service Plan and future 5-Year Service Plan Reset.

## **Proposed agenda**

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

*TTC*

*Third Party Public (formerly Swerhun Inc.)*

### **6:15 Update and overview of the 2023 Annual Service Plan**

*TTC*

- 5-Year Service Plan overview
- 2023 Annual Service Plan overview

*Questions of clarification*

### **6:45 Discussion: COVID-19 learnings**

*Thinking both generally and of your experience as a low income TTC customer:*

#### Priorities

1. To what extent do you agree with these priorities?
2. Based on your experience since the pandemic began, how do you think these priorities should change (if at all)?

#### Services

3. Given how travel patterns have changed, how well do you feel these services are meeting customers' needs?
4. Which of these services (if any) do you think are most important (and why)? Are there any you consider less important?
5. Do you have any other advice you'd like to share?

### **7:50 Wrap up and next steps**

### **8:00 Adjourn**

## **TTC 2023 Annual Service Plan Customer Panel Focus Groups: Shift Workers**

Tuesday, July 12, 2022

6:00 – 8:00 pm

Meeting held online



### **Meeting purpose**

To share and seek feedback on priorities and services to help inform the TTC's 2023 Annual Service Plan and future 5-Year Service Plan Reset.

### **Proposed agenda**

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

*TTC*

*Third Party Public (formerly Swerhun Inc.)*

#### **6:15 Update and overview of the 2023 Annual Service Plan**

*TTC*

- 5-Year Service Plan overview
- 2023 Annual Service Plan overview

*Questions of clarification*

#### **6:45 Discussion: COVID-19 learnings**

*Thinking both generally and of your experience as a shift worker:*

##### Priorities

1. To what extent do you agree with these priorities?
2. Based on your experience since the pandemic began, how do you think these priorities should change (if at all)?

##### Services

3. Given how travel patterns have changed, how well do you feel these services are meeting customers' needs?
4. Which of these services (if any) do you think are most important (and why)? Are there any you consider less important?
5. Do you have any other advice you'd like to share?

#### **7:50 Wrap up and next steps**

#### **8:00 Adjourn**

## Appendix B. Key Presentation Slides for Discussion

### | Customer priorities from 2020

- Service Standards Feedback Study conducted in July 2020
- Customers identified the following:
  - Crowding on vehicles is the most important priority
  - Transit services that provide more continuous trips (fewer transfers) are preferred, even if it means a longer journey
  - Express routes that provide faster service are preferred, even if it requires a longer walk to/from transit stops
  - Service on busier routes during peak periods is preferred, even if it requires reallocation of resources from less busy routes and off-peak periods
- Do 2020 priorities continue to reflect your service needs and priorities now?

### | TTC service priorities

As we continue to operate in uncertain contexts, both in terms of ridership and operational subsidy, we want to know which kinds of service are most important to our customers

- 10 minute base network
- 30 minute service standard
- Weekday peak service
- Weekday off-peak service
- Weekend service
- Early morning service
- Blue Night network
- Express network
- Community bus
- Regional connections
- GO transit connections
- Downtown premium express