

# TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION REPORT NO.

**MEETING DATE:** March 26, 2014

**SUBJECT:** COMMUNITY BUS SERVICES

## **ACTION ITEM**

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Board not approve any routing changes or new service additions to the TTC's Community Bus Services (CBS), pending completion of TTC staff's current work on a plan to more effectively and comprehensively integrate Wheel-Trans and conventional TTC services -- scheduled for early 2015 -- noting that:

- Community Bus Services were introduced in the early 1990s before the TTC had any accessible conventional bus services, while today all bus routes are operated by accessible buses;
- the purpose of CBS was to improve local transit accessibility for people who had mobility limitations that made it difficult for them to access or use conventional transit service, but whose limitations were not severe enough to allow them to qualify for specialized transit service (Wheel-Trans);
- CBS was also intended to attract away and reduce demand from more expensive Wheel-Trans door-to-door services by providing an alternative, more spontaneous travel option;
- ridership on CBS routes has fallen to half their original levels following the introduction of accessible buses on all TTC conventional bus routes;
- CBS routes currently carry 30 to 60 passengers each per day, or a total of 230 passengers per day on all five routes;
- nine per cent of CBS customers are estimated to be eligible for Wheel-Trans; the service has not been successful in attracting demand away from Wheel-Trans door-to-door service;
- all of the locations served by CBS routes have alternate conventional services nearby, and eligible customers can also use Wheel-Trans service;
- none of the TTC's current five Community Bus Services meet the TTC's minimum productivity standards for conventional bus services;
- there is a legitimate demand for CBS-type service from people who have mobility

challenges but who don't qualify for Wheel-Trans; most CBS customers use unique stops which are, on average, 275 meters from the closest conventional bus stop;

- AODA accessibility regulations require all specialized transit service providers to review and update their eligibility categories;
- staff will report back in early 2015 on a plan to comprehensively integrate Wheel-Trans and conventional TTC services, and CBS services will be reconsidered in the context of that work; and
- in the interim, staff will implement operational changes, where possible, to improve the reliability of the five existing community bus services at no additional cost.

### **FUNDING**

This report has no effect on the TTC's 2014 Operating Budget.

### **BACKGROUND**

The concept of Community Bus Service is to link people who have mobility limitations to major trip generators and attractors within a localized neighbourhood. The service was initially a pilot program of a broader provincial and city initiative to improve local transit accessibility at a time when conventional bus routes were not accessible. Community Bus Services were also intended to reduce the pressure on Wheel Trans door-to-door services by providing an alternative, more-spontaneous travel option for Wheel-Trans registrants in the community bus catchment areas. Senior levels of government, who provide social services to seniors and people with limited mobility, were strongly supportive of the initiative because it would allow individuals to maintain an independent lifestyle rather than being institutionalised due to mobility limitations.

When CBS was introduced, it was recognised that it would not meet the TTC's standards for productivity or cost-effectiveness for conventional bus services. At that time, the TTC agreed to operate community bus service "...if the net cost of the service was subsidised by local area municipalities, Metro and the Province". The TTC's 1989 "Choices for the Future" report proposed that Community Bus Services be established on the basis that "conventional TTC riders do not cross-subsidize the cost of community bus services from the fare box" and that "the operation of community bus services be established as a separate funding envelope from (conventional) TTC operations". It was expected that CBS services would receive dedicated funding from senior levels of government. However, such dedicated funding was never provided following the initial test program. Since that test, Community Bus Services have been funded by the City of Toronto through the annual approvals of the Wheel-Trans budget.

In December 2012, the City of Toronto Auditor General provided a report to the Board that included a recommendation, approved by the Board, that:

*“The Commission request the Chief Executive Officer to re-assess the need for the existing Wheel-Trans community bus routes, and cancel or develop alternate routes to ensure the services are cost-effective”.*

This report is, in part, in response to the Auditor General’s directive, although that directive will be addressed more fully in the 2015 report.

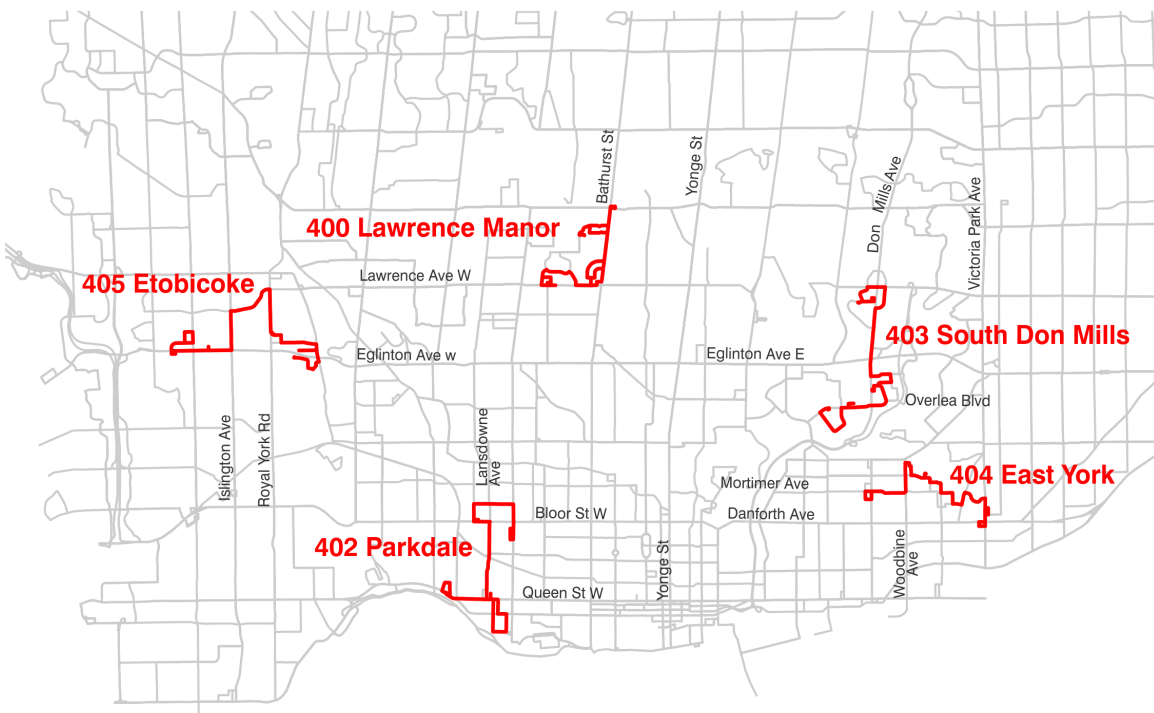
**DISCUSSION**

The TTC currently operates five Community Bus routes. Four of these -- Lawrence Manor, Parkdale, South Don Mills, and East York -- were introduced between 1990 and 1992. Two additional services were tested in the early 1990’s -- one in the North Bathurst area, and another in the downtown in the University of Toronto/Queen’s Park/hospital district -- but these services were cancelled due to low ridership. In September 2005, a fifth route was added, on a trial basis, in the central Etobicoke area.

Figure 1 illustrates the current five community bus services:

- 400 Lawrence Manor
- 402 Parkdale
- 403 South Don Mills
- 404 East York, and
- 405 Etobicoke

**Figure 1: TTC Community Bus Routes**



Detailed maps of the current CBS routings are provided as an attachment to this report. Service is provided on these routes on weekdays between approximately 9:30am and 5:30pm, and is scheduled to operate every 60 or 75 minutes. The routes, schedules, and frequencies have remained as originally established, with minimal modification, since they were originally introduced. The service operates on fixed routes and schedules. Community Bus routes are more circuitous than conventional bus routes and generally provide a one-seat trip connecting places like senior citizens' homes and apartment buildings to hospitals, medical centres, shopping centres, and community facilities. In many cases, customers could make the same direct trip on conventional bus services, but would have to walk further to and from bus stops.

Unlike conventional bus service, Community Bus Service provides the added convenience of allowing passengers to “flag” a bus along the route to allow for pick-ups and drop-offs at any point along the route. The vehicles used for Community Bus Services are part of the Wheel-Trans fleet, and are smaller buses than those used for conventional TTC service. Community bus stops are often closer to building entrances than conventional bus stops, made possible by these smaller buses. Community Bus service is operated by the Wheel-Trans division of the TTC. Use of the service is not limited to Wheel-Trans registrants, however, and any member of the public may board a Community Bus, paying a standard TTC fare.

Funding for the operation of community buses in the amount of \$900,000 is included in the 2014 Wheel-Trans Operating Budget.

Ridership Analysis

Ridership on the four initial community bus routes has fallen by 50% since 2002, as shown in Figures 2 and 3. The newer route -- 405 Etobicoke -- has had relatively stable ridership. In contrast, system-wide ridership on the TTC has grown by about 28% over this time period.

**Figure 2: Community Bus Routes – Total Ridership, 2002-2013, By Route**

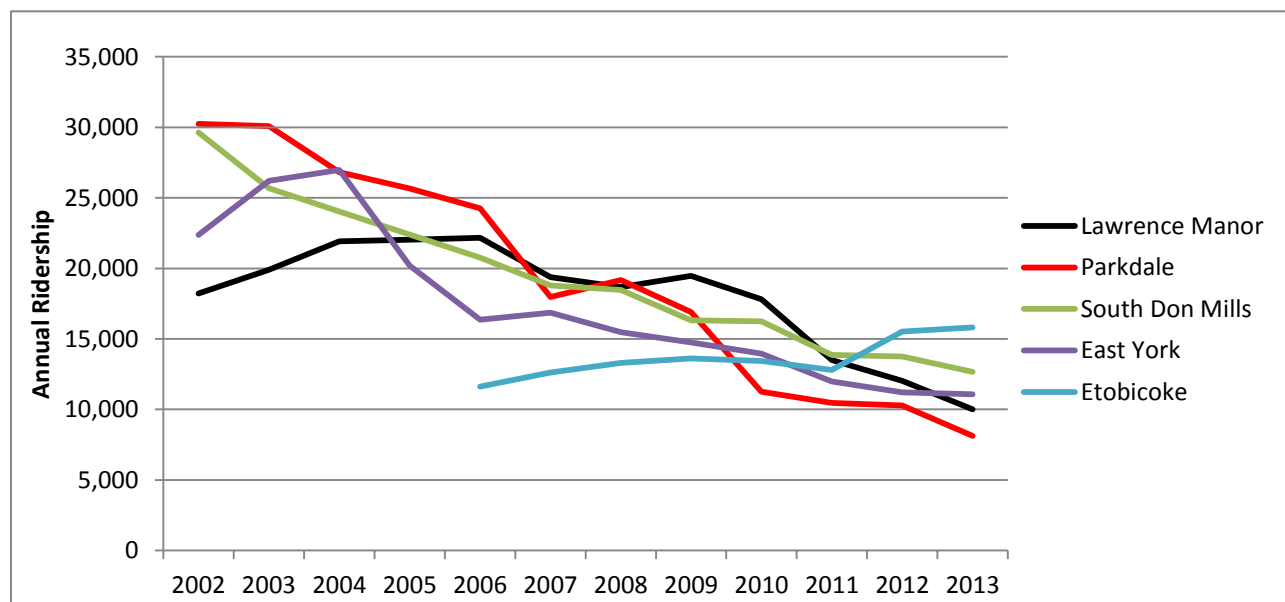
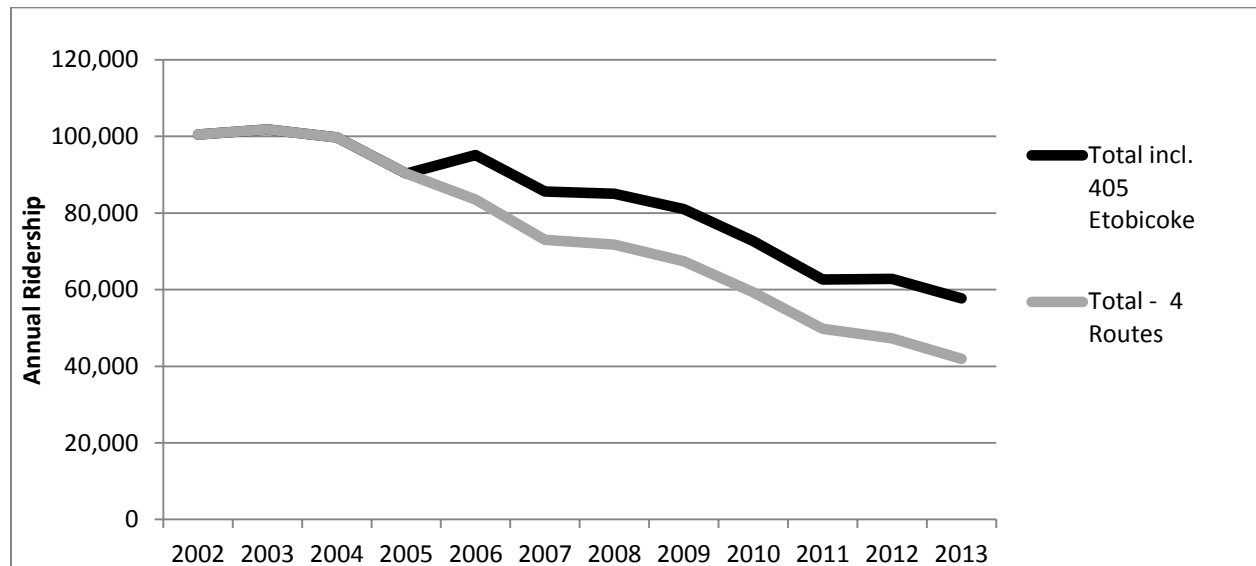
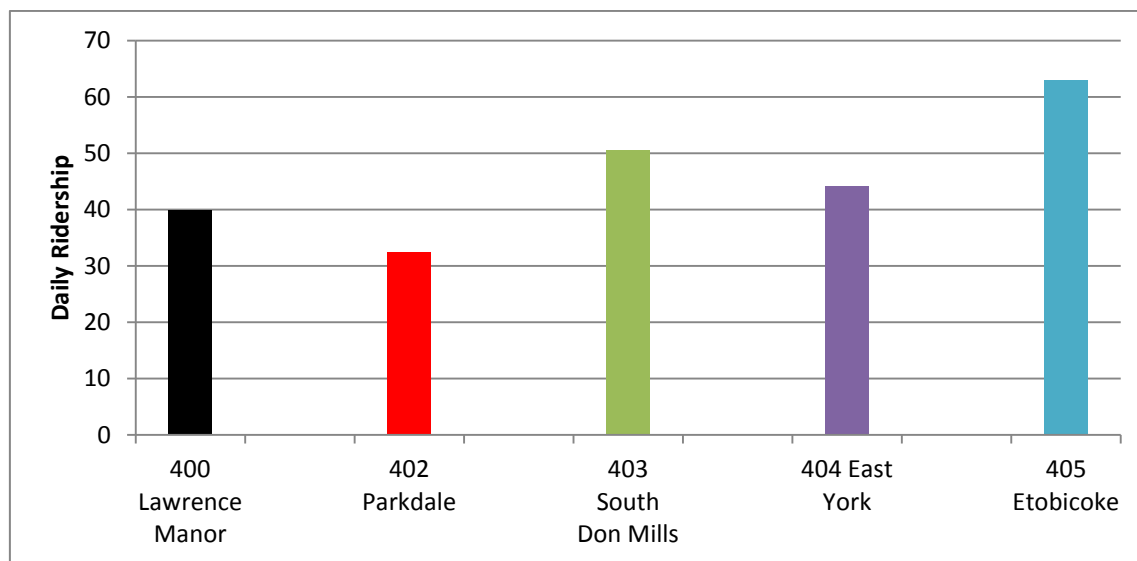


Figure 3: Community Bus Routes – Total Ridership, 2002 – 2013



In total, the five community bus routes carried 57,728 passengers in 2013. As shown in Figure 4, the five Community Bus routes all have similar daily ridership levels of about 30-to-60 passengers per day, for a total daily ridership of 230 passengers per day. Of these 230 passengers, about 10 are non-ambulatory and use mobility devices to board the Community Bus Service, while 21 are eligible for Wheel-Trans services.

Figure 4: Community Bus Routes – Average Daily Ridership, 2013



The number of Wheel-Trans-eligible passengers who use Community Bus has fallen substantially: today, only 9% of passengers on Community Bus routes are Wheel-Trans registrants. In contrast, the demand for Wheel-Trans service has doubled since 2002 and is continuing to grow at a rate of

5% to 10% per year. This suggests that Community Bus routes have not succeeded in attracting-away and reducing the demand for Wheel-Trans door-to-door service.

The fall in ridership on the Community Bus routes coincides with the introduction of accessible conventional bus services. Now that all conventional bus services are accessible -- a process that was complete at the end of 2011 -- ridership on the Community Bus Services appears to have stabilised at a low level.

Four of the five routes -- 400 Lawrence Manor, 402 Parkdale, 403 South Don Mills, and 405 Etobicoke -- largely duplicate accessible conventional bus routes. While ridership on CBS routes is low, the majority of CBS customers board or alight at one of the unique stops along the route -- located, on average, approximately 275 meters from the closest conventional bus stop -- at shopping malls, health care facilities, or seniors' homes. The fact that the unique stops are the most used illustrates that the users of the service value the extra convenience the service provides. Customers who use these stops are willing to wait for a much-less frequent service and take long, circuitous trips in order to take advantage of the added convenience of the unique pick-up and drop-off points. It is likely that those people who continue to use Community Bus Service today have legitimate reasons for doing so, and would have significant difficulty in changing to conventional TTC bus services.

#### Productivity, Cost-Effectiveness, and Efficacy of CBS

Ridership on the Community Bus routes has fallen from 12 passengers per service-hour in 2004 to less than 6 passengers per service-hour in 2013. The minimum productivity standard for conventional bus services is 15 passenger-boardings per service-hour. The productivity of the current Community Bus Services is less than half of the current minimum performance standard for conventional TTC bus services.

Each trip on a CBS route is subsidised at a rate of \$14.63 (2013 data), compared to \$33.60 for each passenger-trip on Wheel-Trans services, and \$0.78 per passenger-trip on conventional services. The \$900,000 currently used to subsidize about 58,000 community bus trips annually is the same subsidy as is required for 1.1 million trips on conventional bus services.

Based on customer surveys and current CBS ridership by non-ambulatory passengers, it is estimated that 9% of the current CBS customers are eligible for Wheel-Trans. On this basis, the Community Bus Services provide 0.9 Wheel-Trans-eligible passenger-trips per service-hour, compared to Wheel-Trans's current productivity rate of 2.14 passenger-trips per service-hour for their door-to-door service. Therefore, Community Buses provide less than half the number of trips for Wheel-Trans registrants than could be provided if the current resources were used for door-to-door service. For 2014, Wheel-Trans' budgeted unaccommodated trip rate is 0.9%. The service hours currently used to provide Community Bus Service would, if re-allocated, reduce Wheel-Trans's unaccommodated rate to almost zero.

#### New and Modified Community Bus Routes

The TTC has received five requests for new Community Bus routes in various areas of the City over the past three years. Staff have reviewed each of these requests, but recommend that no

new Community Bus routes be implemented due to the poor performance and efficacy of CBS services, as described in this report.

There is no budgeted funding or resources to operate any new CBS service. Introduction of new CBS routes would require the TTC to take away resources currently used for Wheel-Trans door-to-door service. This would result in an increase in Wheel-Trans's unaccommodated rate, meaning that an increased number of trips would be denied to Wheel-Trans clients.

It is recommended that no changes be made to any of the existing Community Bus routes, for the purpose of expanding their service areas because, without committing more resources, such changes could only be made by increasing running time and decreasing service frequencies, thus making these routes even less attractive. The TTC should continue to operate the existing Community Bus Services pending the review described below.

#### Wheel-Trans and Conventional Service Integration Plan

The AODA Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation requires that specialized transit service providers review and update their eligibility rules. The City's Auditor General's December, 2012 report requested the TTC to find ways to improve the cost-effectiveness of Community Bus Services. In response to both of these, TTC staff are working to develop a plan to more-comprehensively integrate Wheel-Trans and conventional TTC services. This plan will be developed by early 2015. The plan will evaluate what role the Community Bus Services can play in this integration strategy. Any changes to these services will involve customer and community consultation.

#### Interim Improvements to Existing CBS Routes

The reduction in the number of CBS customers described earlier may also relate to the routes' poor service reliability. Over time, running time and operational challenges have arisen on these routes, making it difficult to keep to schedule. Service changes are being developed to address these concerns. However, no additional resources can be justified for these services, nor are they available so, in order to reflect current operating conditions, the frequencies on routes 400, 402, and 405 will have to be changed to every 75 or 90 minutes, as shown in Table 1. Maintaining the current frequencies on routes 400, 402 and 405, using the same number of vehicles, would require eliminating significant portions of each route, which is not desirable.

**Table 1: Community Bus Service Levels, Current and Proposed**

<b>Route</b>	<b>Current Frequency</b>	<b>Proposed New Frequency</b>
400 Lawrence Manor	60 minutes	75 minutes
402 Parkdale	75 minutes	90 minutes
403 South Don Mills	60 minutes	No change
404 East York	75 minutes	No change
405 Etobicoke	74 minutes	90 minutes

These changes will take effect in June, 2014. The hours of service will remain roughly the same after the changes are implemented. Following implementation, and allowing for some time for

customers to adjust to the new frequencies, the efficiency and ridership of the existing Community Bus routes will be re-evaluated.

**SUMMARY**

The original need and rationale for Community Bus Services has diminished significantly now that all conventional TTC services buses are accessible. Community Bus Services have not been successful at attracting customers away from the Wheel-Trans door-to-door service. Service changes will be implemented to improve the quality of service on the existing Community Bus Routes. A plan is being developed to more-comprehensively integrate Wheel-Trans and conventional TTC services, and Community Bus Service will be reviewed again in that context.

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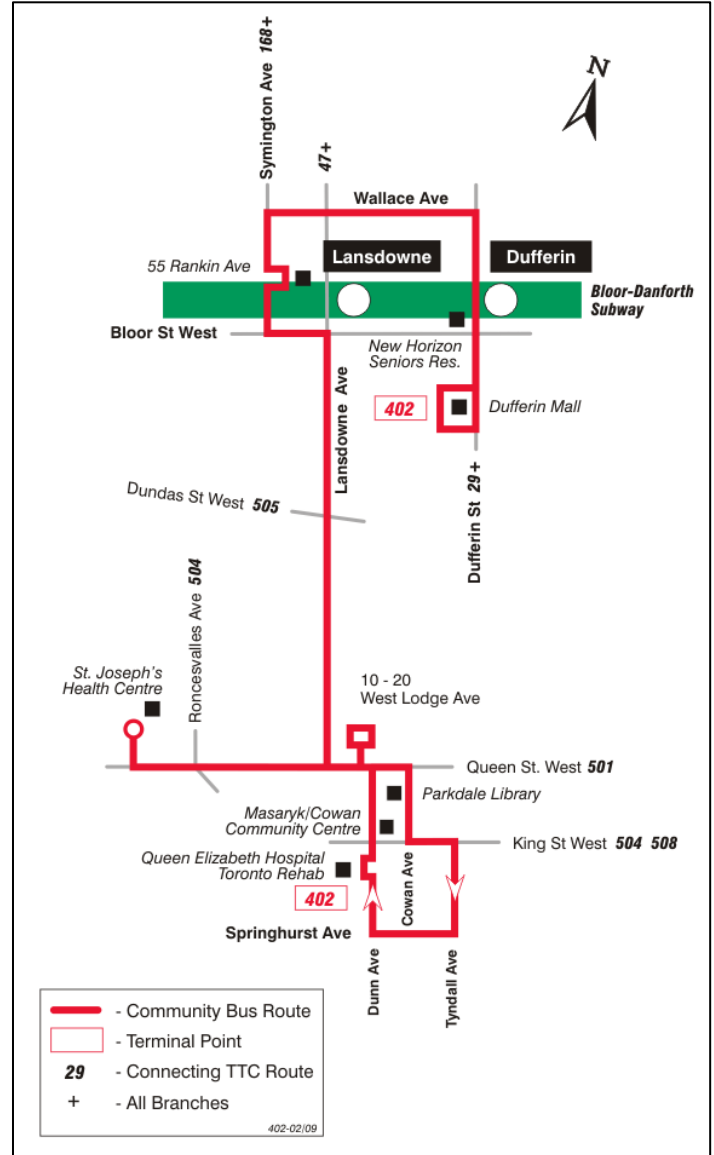
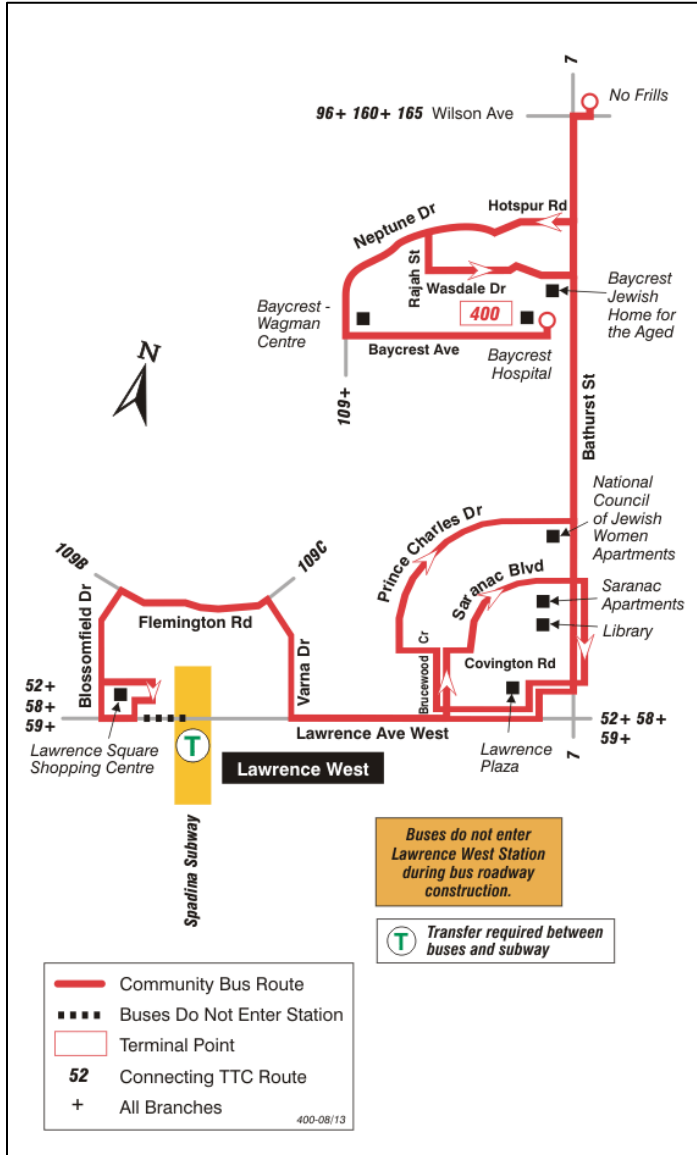
Attachment: Maps of Community Bus Routes



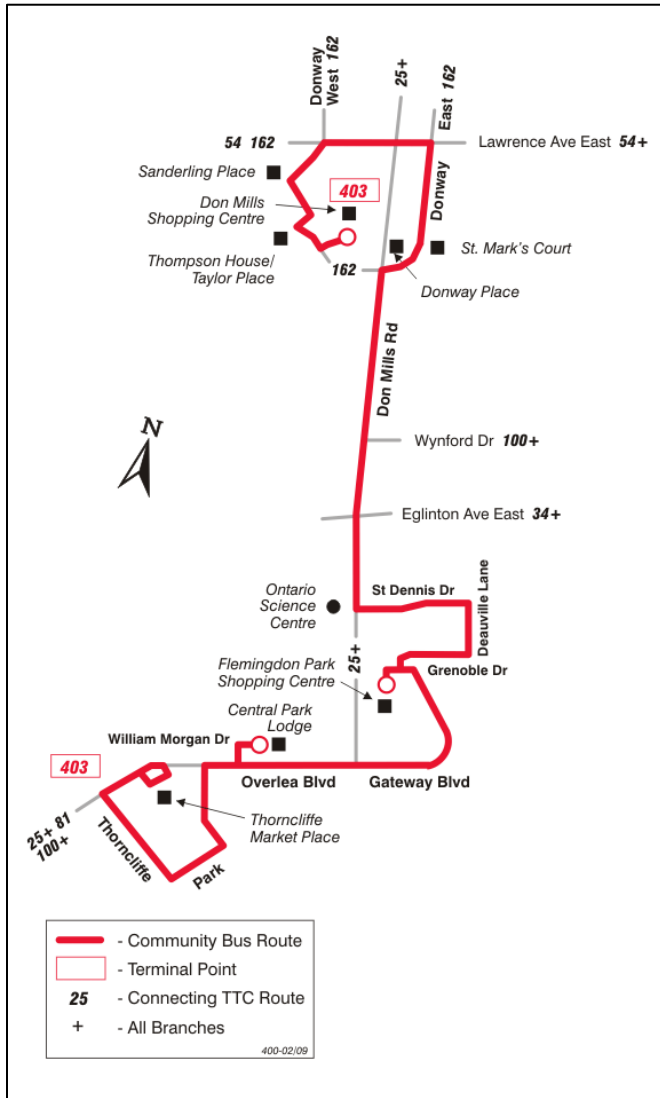
Appendix 1: Community Bus Route Maps

400 Lawrence Manor

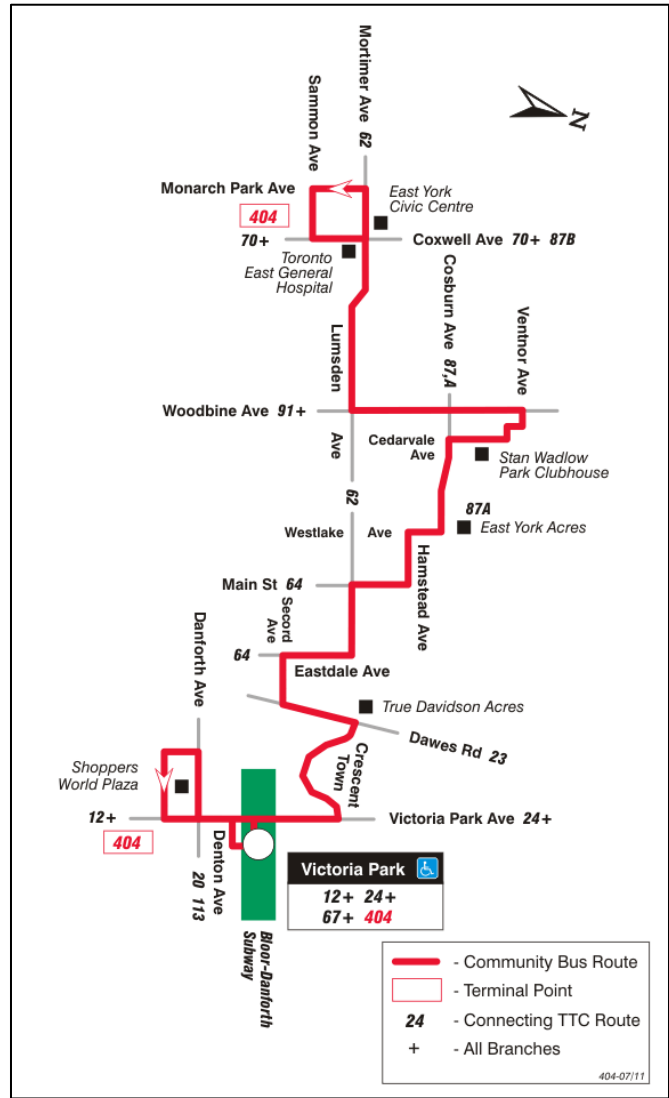
402 Parkdale



403 South Don Mills



404 East York



405 Etobicoke

