Correspondence submitted by
TTC Chair Josh Colle on behalf of
ACAT Chair Mazin Aribi

TTC Advisory Committee on Accessible Transit (ACAT)

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September 30, 2016

TTC Board Members
Toronto Transit Commission
1900 Yonge Street
Toronto, Ontario
M4S 1Z2

Dear Board Members:

Re: ACAT Motion - Improving Safety and Accessibility When Moving between Subway Train and Platform for all Customers Including Those Using Mobility Devices

As part of ongoing efforts to expand and improve transit services for persons with disabilities and seniors through the Wheel-Trans 10-Year Strategy, the TTC is moving towards a model that incorporates conventional transit for these customers, where appropriate. There is, however, a known issue regarding larger than normal gaps between platforms and trains at some subway stations which, if left unaddressed, will compromise the reliability and attractiveness of subway travel for customers using mobility devices (i.e. wheelchairs, scooters, and walkers).

At its September 29, 2016 General Meeting, ACAT passed a motion recommending the following to the TTC Board regarding the issue of subway platform gaps, in the interest of safety and removing physical barriers for customers with disabilities on conventional transit:

1) Expedite detailed measurements of subway vertical and horizontal platform gaps at all stations where this data remains to be collected;

2) Define the scope of remedial work; and

3) Package work as a capital project to be funded and implemented as soon as possible.

Background:

TTC staff, with input from ACAT, have been investigating an issue with subway platform-to-train gaps. The problem is that on some platforms, there is a wider than normal gap between the platform edge and train car doors. In addition, there are platforms where there is a large discrepancy between the height of the platform and that of the train car door threshold, creating a significant step. These issues have in many instances resulted in customers getting stuck in the gap as the wheels of their mobility device drop into the empty space -- causing panic, unnecessary wear/damage to mobility devices, and system delays -- ultimately undermining confidence that the subway is truly accessible.

While these characteristics are believed to affect a minority of subway platforms and are often localized to only part of the platform, the full extent of their existence has yet to be determined and is currently being ascertained by Track and Structure Maintenance Engineering. Unfortunately, the timeline for the completion of their measurements is lengthy (over one year) due to resource restrictions among competing activities. Understanding the full extent of the issue is critical to formulating and acting upon a solution.

At the same time, the TTC, as part of its mission to provide barrier-free, accessible service that is efficient, reliable, and available, and in compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), is currently transforming the way customers use accessible transit services as part of the Wheel-Trans 10-Year Strategy. A key component of this strategy is promoting the “family of services” concept to customers, meaning those who are able to use conventional transit modes do so, ensuring the availability of Wheel-Trans service for those who need it.

This means that an increasing number of customers with disabilities will be asked to use the subway system for all or part of their journey. As this places more pressure on the conventional system to accommodate customers with varying needs, it will be more important than ever that those who use mobility devices can expect to board and deboard subway trains safely and consistently, especially when those trains serve stations marked “accessible”.

Thank you in advance for consideration of ACAT’s recommendations.

Sincerely,

Mazin Aribi
2016 ACAT Chair