



Notice of Motion

Providing Free Wi-Fi Access to TTC's Surface (Bus & Streetcar) Routes

Moved by: Commissioner Alan Heisey

Seconded by: Commissioner Jennifer McKelvie

Summary

In 2017, City Council identified accessible internet connectivity as a priority for economic development and social equity, unanimously adopting the Toronto Broadband Study, which includes the recommendation to "leverage existing city assets to improve speed, coverage and capacity," among others. In 2018, the TTC completed the equipping of all 69 subway stations with free Wi-Fi access for customers. In recognizing that all Toronto residents deserve continuous connectivity, the TTC needs a contemporary and coordinated Wi-Fi program that reaches every community throughout the city.

The Study and Council-approved directive to undertake a comprehensive Digital Infrastructure Plan (DIP), complement some of the same principles of Toronto's Youth Strategy, the Toronto Poverty and Reduction Strategy and the Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy 2020. These strategies establish the need for prioritizing Wi-Fi access to support low-income residents and support a seamless social support program that can be delivered continuously to achieve equity and inclusion across the City. Canada has the highest internet costs in the G7. In addition to residents in low income communities, many post-secondary students cannot afford the current cost of high speed internet. Unequal access to information and resources further marginalizes low income communities and students.

At present, 24 of Toronto's 31 Neighbourhood Improvement Areas rely solely on the bus and streetcar network and do not have a subway stop (Toronto Tomorrow Survey, 2016). Considering the intersection of public transit's essentiality with Council direction to expand Wi-Fi availability on city-owned assets, the Commission should review the feasibility of improving the experience of bus and streetcar passengers through continuous Wi-Fi connectivity. Wi-Fi access is available on surface route public transportation networks in municipalities such as Ottawa, Vancouver, New York, Atlanta, San Francisco and Cleveland. The TTC should consider a plan to implement free Wi-Fi on surface routes to ensure that all transit riders can have access to the internet in our digital City.

Recommendation

1. Request that TTC staff report back to the Board in November with a plan to implement a free Wi-Fi pilot program to the surface network of busses and streetcars servicing all 31 Neighbourhood Improvement Areas and Higher Education Institutions, with an option to expand to all surface routes, if the pilot program proves successful.
2. That the TTC Board request the City of Toronto Office of Recovery and Restart advocate for provincial and federal funding for accessible and affordable Wi-Fi to create resilient communities.

Date: July 6, 2020