Toronto Transit Commission
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April 10, 2024

Chrisanne Finnerty, Director – Commission Services
Toronto Transit Commission
1900 Yonge Street, 7th Floor
Toronto, ON M4S 1Z2

Dear Ms. Finnerty

Re: Administrative Inquiry on service changes in the event of winter weather and the closing of fifty-six bus stops on March 22nd, 2024

Commissioner Moise submitted an Administrative Inquiry to seek clarity and information on the TTC's procedures for issuing a service change in the event of severe weather.

This letter responds to this request. It has been developed in collaboration with Transportation and Vehicles, Operations and Infrastructure and Strategy and Customer Experience Groups.

Introduction

Based on lessons learned from last winter season, the TTC has made several adjustments to 2023/24 plans and processes, including:

- New winter weather information signs have been installed at 56 bus stops along routes where heavy snow and freezing rain are known to impact bus service. The signs include a QR code enabling customers to find real-time information about the in-service status of a stop, and information on the nearest in-service stop.
- Development of a tracker for stuck or trapped buses, enhancing recovery coordination.
- Implementation of a protocol for managing stuck buses, ensuring operators are appropriately managed based on disablement duration.
- Introduction of a corporate action checklist, facilitating decision-making and inter-departmental coordination during storms.

Response

Please find below responses to each of the questions submitted.

1. *In the event of severe weather, does the TTC coordinate with the City's Transportation Services division to ensure that snow clearing on TTC routes is prioritized?*
   a. *If yes, why isn't there a plan in place to minimize the number of bus stops that are shut down on March 22, 2024?*

b. *If not, why is this the case?*

Prior to the beginning of the winter season, TTC staff met with the City's Transportation Services Division to discuss prioritizing TTC routes, specifically routes with pre-identified problematic stops where buses could be trapped/stuck. The response we received is. However, bus routes on arterial and collector roads are prioritization; however, bus routes on arterial and collector roads receive the highest level of service for both salting and plowing operations.

Salting activations begin when snow begins to accumulate while plowing operations for bus routes on arterial roads begin with five cm accumulation. Salting operations for bus routes on local roads are serviced shortly after the arterial and collector road equipment are deployed, while plowing is started after eight cm accumulation.

Currently, the City and the TTC do not collaborate prior to every forecasted winter event. However, pre-winter storm meetings between the City of Toronto and the TTC will be established for the 2024/2025 winter season.

2. *When determining what bus stops would be closed, does the TTC take into consideration the inconvenience for riders to get to the closest stop that is in service? For example, TTC riders would need to walk 900m north for line 25 - Don Mills and 925 - Don Mills Express.*
   a. *What can we do to remediate an accessibility concern regarding the differently able and elderly residents who might not have access to this information?*

The TTC prioritizes customer convenience when determining bus stop closures during inclement weather. The evaluation process considers various factors, including roadway grading and past incidents of buses becoming stuck. Each stop is equipped with a physical information card detailing the direction and location of the nearest available stop to assist passengers. Furthermore, by proactively removing less than 1% of stops from service, the TTC aims to minimize disruptions for a larger population of customers along the route.

This strategic approach reduces the likelihood of inconveniencing passengers if a bus were to encounter difficulties in a known problematic location during severe weather. Without proactive measures, passengers may face unexpected service interruptions, highlighting the importance of our proactive stance in ensuring efficient and reliable transportation services.

TTC Bus Maintenance currently operates its bus fleet using aggressive all-season tires on its 40-foot buses, and snow-rated tires on its articulated buses. Bus Maintenance will pilot running snow tires on 40-foot buses that service these stops for the 2024/2025 winter season. Bus Maintenance is currently running a four-season, all-weather tire on the fleet, specifically the Bridgestone R192.

These tires are designed to have optimal performance in all weather, including snow. These

tires meet the performance requirements of the three peak mountain snowflake criteria for snow traction performance. We are in the process of installing these tires on the fleet as the previous Goodyear tires wear out. These tires will be used all year and in all weather conditions as that is their intended purpose as designed by Bridgestone.

3. *On the #16 Mccowen line, the #4962 Seminole Avenue stop was cut even though the Tansley Stop 160 m South and Barrymore Stop 290m north of Seminole Stop in distance. What was the point of removing a stop like this due to inclement weather?*

   This particular stop is proactively taken out of service due to the grading and past experiences of buses being unable to move off once stopping in the snow. Although the stop at Tansley also has an incline grade, it is a slight grade and buses are able to navigate it without issue.

4. *What threshold of snow or freezing rain fall must be reached before the TTC announces a service change?*
   a. *What triage of communications is used to push this information out to TTC riders at the fastest dissemination?*

   The TTC has a corporate winter plan, which provides guidelines for minimizing impact to service during inclement weather due to snow and ice weather events. We rely on weather forecast provided by Environment Canada. The corporate plan has identified different thresholds with four levels of response. Stops may be taken out of service at Level 2, which has a threshold of five to nine cm of forecasted snow.

   These stops are taken out of service proactively as information from Operating staff is reported. On Level 3 (10-24cm) or 4 (25+cm), these stops are taken out of service proactively as the likelihood of buses becoming stuck is extremely high. The TTC will utilize social media, the ttc.ca website, and media outlets to push communication to customers. The information card on each stop is equipped with a QR code which will direct customers to ttc.ca for the information.

5. *Why did the TTC announce an arbitrary 3:00pm stop in service instead of actively monitoring the situation and issuing service changes as needed contingent on weather conditions? (for example, issuing an advisory that when snow reaches ##cm, service will be adjusted)*

   On March 22, 2024, we had taken the bus stops out of service at 3:00pm. This is in accordance with the forecasted snowfall from Environment Canada. The forecasted amount was 15cm of snow, which falls under our Level 3 response (info in response of Q.4) with heavy snow fall amounts beginning at 3:00pm. This response is to be proactive in the approach as opposed to reactive.

If waiting until it reaches the 5-10 cm amount it may be too late as well as take time to disseminate the information to customers. Taking the stops out of service when buses are stuck is very challenging.

6. *What plans are in place or are being made to address the root causes of the buses getting stuck in the snow at the fifty-six bus stops?*

   After conducting a thorough review of all 56 stops, the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) has identified that approximately half of the existing sites can be addressed through state-of-the-good repair work and stop relocation, within our Bus Stop Improvements Program (https://www.ttc.ca/service-advisories/construction-notices/AODA-Bus-Stop-Improvements).

   Additionally, some sites may need to be consolidated due to poor conformance with TTC Service Standards and the City of Toronto's Vision Zero program. However, the remaining half of these locations pose challenges that cannot be reasonably addressed due to existing road grades and other geographical constraints, hindering significant improvements to the roadway or transit stop.

   In the realm of bus maintenance, initiatives have been undertaken to address winter-related challenges. Snow tires were piloted on articulated buses in 2023, and now, attention will be given to pilot snow tires for vehicles servicing these stops in 2024/2025. The aim is to complete this pilot by 2025 and subsequently assess whether snow tires have provided buses with the necessary traction to significantly reduce the number of stops proactively taken out of service

7. *What steps is the TTC taking to minimise service changes and disruptions to commuters during severe weather moving forward?*

   TTC proactively removes a small percentage of stops to reduce the probability of overall disruptions. Operational experience and judgment guide decisions to minimize inconveniences to customers while ensuring safety.

Sincerely,

Fortunato Monaco
Chief Operations and Infrastructure Officer

cc:
Richard J. Leary, Chief Executive Officer
Wendy Reuter, Chief Strategy and Customer Officer (Acting)
Rich Wong, Chief Transportation and Vehicles Officer