



Future of the Transport Bus Initiative – Winter 2024/2025

Date: October 29, 2024
To: TTC Board
From: Chief Safety Officer

Summary

As part of the TTC's Community Safety, Security and Well-being program, the TTC operated the transport bus initiative from November 15, 2023, to April 15, 2024, in response to the ongoing use of the transit network by persons experiencing homelessness. It was intended to be a short-term solution, providing transport from Union and Spadina Stations to warming centres and shelters and offering a warm space so that persons experiencing homelessness would not remain in the stations. However, given a lack of space and flow in the shelter system, the initiative resulted in providing warming space on the buses. While the TTC provided transport and a temporary warming location on 5,914 occasions, only 98 individuals were transported to warming centres during the 2023/2024 winter season.

Following the initiative, the TTC and the City of Toronto reviewed the challenges and assessed the outcomes. The challenges included lack of shelter system capacity compared to demand, heating, logistics and location challenges, safety incidents and concerns, and the ability to sustain social supports. The warming bus component was determined to be unsustainable on a recurring basis for several reasons, including accessibility concerns, such as not being able to provide services to meet the needs of all individuals, cost and limited options to refer individuals into Toronto's shelter system due to system capacity pressures.

This report includes an overview of options to reduce dependence on the TTC transit network for shelter. The use of decommissioned TTC property is not a viable option for warming centre spaces, and due to the challenges experienced last season, TTC buses will not be used as a warming solution during the 2024/2025 season. In consultation with the City of Toronto, it has been determined that TTC buses will only be used to transport individuals to available warming centres and shelters when the temperature reaches –15 Celsius. Operational details of this approach will be captured in the TTC's upcoming winter planning.

The TTC will continue its multidisciplinary approach to community safety through ongoing implementation of control measures in the areas of high-visibility presence and incident management, social supports for individuals in need, and community safety program support.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the TTC Board:

1. Approve the use of buses for transport only when the temperature reaches –15 Celsius and not as a warming solution for individuals using the transit system for shelter during the 2024/2025 winter season.
2. Request the City of Toronto Shelter and Support Services to continue to actively search for additional warming centre opportunities to reduce dependence on the TTC transit network for shelter during the 2024/2025 winter season.

Financial Summary

Transport Bus Initiative

During the 2023/2024 winter season, the cost of providing transport buses totalled \$1.2 million. Based on the year-to-date cost and the number of individuals serviced, the cost to provide a temporary warming location to an individual was \$147, and the cost per individual shuttled between Spadina and Union stations or transported to a warming centre or a shelter was \$292, as summarized in Table 1 below. These cost figures represent the fixed cost divided by the number of people served – with a higher cost resulting from fewer people being served by the transport buses due to lack of available space in the shelter system. A breakdown of the number of clients transported and the number of clients stationary is provided in Table 2 below.

Table 1: Cost by Individual Sheltered and Individual Transported

Cost for Transport Bus Initiative	
	November 16, 2023, to April 15, 2024
Total Fixed Cost for Shelter Buses	\$853,124
Number of Individuals Sheltered	5,816
Cost per Individual Sheltered	\$147
Total Fixed Cost for Transport and Shuttle Buses	\$86,547
Number of Individuals Transported or Shuttled	296
Cost per Individual Transported or Shuttled	\$292

Table 2: Number of Clients Transported or Stationary (November 2023 to April 2024)

Date	Number of Clients Transported to Warming Centre or Shelter	Number of Clients Stationary
November 2023	49	62
December 2023	22	423
January 2024	24	986
February 2024	3	1,648
March 2024	0	1,930
April 2024	0	767
Total	98	5,816

Funds of \$1.0 million were included in TTC’s 2024 Operating Budget, as approved by the TTC Board on December 20, 2023, and approved by the City Council on February 14, 2024. Under the proposed model of transporting individuals on Extreme Cold Weather days only, based on the historical experience of Extreme Cold Weather days, the anticipated costs for providing transport buses only for the 2024/2025 winter season (i.e. November 15, 2024, to April 15, 2025) would be approximately \$0.2 million.

The Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

Equity/Accessibility Matters

As a proud leader in providing accessible public transit in the city of Toronto, the TTC is committed to ensuring reliable, safe, and inclusive transit services for all customers. The TTC also expects all employees to perform their duties equitably, inclusively, respectfully, and safely.

Solving community safety, security, and well-being challenges are compounded by Toronto’s complex societal challenges. Like other major public-facing services, innovative solutions to support individuals in need are required for both the short-term and long-term. The solutions to these issues need to be multifaceted and require a compassionate and people-first approach. The TTC has proactively partnered with the City of Toronto’s Social Development, Finance and Administration division, Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS) division (formerly Shelter, Support and Housing Administration), including Streets to Homes, Central Intake and the Duty Office, One Community Solutions (contracted by TSSS), Toronto Police Service (TPS), LOFT’s Multi-Disciplinary Outreach Team (M-DOT), and community agencies to address the

needs of persons experiencing homelessness and individuals with complex needs. The partnerships ensure that equity and compassion are central to meeting the needs of the community and TTC operations.

Decision History

At its meeting on February 28, 2023, the TTC Board received the [Community Safety Issues and Response Report](#). The report included information on data trends, action plan updates and the multidisciplinary approach required to manage the increasing number of societal challenges that have shifted onto public transit. During this meeting, the TTC Board adopted recommendations to delegate authority to the CEO to respond to an emergency, including increasing the delegated expenditure authority to a cumulative \$15 million and requesting a detailed update on expenditures at the next TTC Board meeting.

At its meeting on March 30, 2023, the City Council considered agenda item [EX3.13 Community Safety Issues and Response](#), and, in so doing, approved various directives to the TTC and City of Toronto staff related to community safety and security. The TTC is collaborating with the City of Toronto to develop an integrated response, assign accountabilities, and determine timelines for implementation.

At its meeting on April 13, 2023, the TTC Board received a [Community Safety and Security Update](#) from the TTC, City of Toronto, and Toronto Police Service. Staff presented insights into the effectiveness of initiatives, discussed current system safety supports, and referenced upcoming actions.

At its meeting on June 12, 2023, the TTC Board received the [Community Safety and Security Update Report](#). The report included an update on the implementation of the multidisciplinary approach undertaken by the TTC and the progress of actions to improve community safety. This included an overview of insights from the analysis of key performance indicators, recommendations about continuing current actions, and the next steps in the TTC's planning process. The TTC Board also adopted recommendations, with amendments, proposed by the City Council on March 29, 30, and 31, 2023, as outlined in the [TTC Board Decision – Community Safety and Security Update](#).

At its meeting on July 11, 2023, the City of Toronto's Executive Committee received the [Update on City Partnership to Advance Community Safety and Well-Being on the Transit System Report](#). The report responded to the City Council directives to the TTC and the City of Toronto to develop further actions to advance the integrated work of the TTC, Toronto Police Service, and City Divisions to improve community safety and well-being on the transit system. The report was a companion to the progress report received by the TTC Board at its June meeting.

At its meeting on September 26, 2023, the TTC Board received the [TTC's Partnership Approach to Community Safety, Security, and Well-being on Public Transit Report](#). The report provided an update on the evaluation of current strategies and resources supporting community safety, security, and well-being throughout the TTC's transit network, and based on the evaluation of the TTC's experience to date, recommended

the strategies and resources required for the Fall 2023/Winter 2024 season. The TTC Board adopted the report's recommendations for ongoing community safety strategies and resources, directing that funding to sustain these initiatives be included in the TTC's 2024 Operating Budget submission. The TTC Board also adopted additional motions requesting a report back in Q4 2023 that are the subject of this report, as outlined in the [TTC Board Decision](#).

At its meeting on December 7, 2023, the TTC Board received the [Response to TTC Board Motions Report](#). The report provided information in response to the additional motions adopted by the TTC Board at the September 26, 2023 meeting. Responses were organized under the three areas of focus: 1) enhancing high-visibility presence and improving incident management, 2) supporting persons experiencing homelessness and individuals with complex needs, and 3) ensuring community safety program support. The TTC Board received the report for information.

At its meeting on May 16, 2024, the TTC Board approved a new five-year [TTC Corporate Plan, 'Moving Toronto, Connecting Communities, TTC Corporate Plan 2024-2028 & Beyond'](#). Highlighted in Action 2.2.2, the Corporate Plan identified enhancing Community Safety, Security and Well-being on the System; working with partners to support individuals in need and creating supports that focus on providing a positive customer experience for all transit riders. This report provides an update on activities supporting Corporate Plan Action 2.2.2.

At its meeting on July 17, 2024, the TTC Board received the [Update on TTC's Partnership Approach to Community Safety, Security and Well-being on Public Transit Report](#). The report provided an update on the TTC's community safety action plan, including key findings from community safety metrics and outcomes from the Transport Bus Initiative. Additionally, it included an update on the partnerships the TTC has established with external organizations and government agencies. The TTC Board adopted the report's recommendations to reaffirm support for the TTC's multidisciplinary approach and request to report back on options to reduce dependence on the TTC transit network for shelter. The TTC Board also adopted additional motions as outlined in the [TTC Board Decision](#).

Issue Background

In response to societal issues impacting the transit system, a multidisciplinary approach was established in January 2023 recognizing that the TTC, as a transit system operator, required the skills and support of social service as well as mental health providers to best support individuals with complex needs in the transit system. Since then, the TTC has continued measures that advance its goal of improving and strengthening community safety, security and well-being using a compassionate and people-first approach. Key metrics are reported monthly through the CEO's Report and the City of Toronto [Community Safety and Well-being on Transit Dashboard](#), which monitors incidents, interventions, and perceptions.

In consultation with its partners at the City of Toronto and other agencies, the TTC mobilized dedicated buses in November 2023 to provide a means to transport people to warming centres and shelters. The City's TSSS division, Community Safety Teams and

M-DOT supported the initiative. In addition, TPS, Security Guards, and a TTC Supervisor assisted with managing incidents on-site.

Throughout the initiative, the TTC provided transport and a temporary warming location on 5,914 occasions throughout the 2023/2024 winter season. Although first intended to provide both transportation to shelters and an alternative warming space to stations, due to a lack of space and flow in the shelter system, the initiative resulting in the TTC primarily providing a temporary warming space on the buses. Overall, 98 clients were transported, and 5,816 clients remained stationary on the warming buses.

Several challenges were noted and the use of buses as a warming solution was found to be unsustainable on an ongoing basis. The challenges included:

1) Shelter system capacity versus demand

Toronto's shelter system is at capacity nearly every night. Despite securing additional shelter and warming centre spaces as part of the winter response, demand continued to be greater than the system could accommodate. This resulted in buses remaining stationary and an increase in the number of buses required to meet this demand, as there was a maximum of 10 to 15 people per bus.

2) Heating challenges

Initially, buses were idling, resulting in complaints due to diesel fumes and noise. The mobile battery packs added to power heaters onboard the buses were insufficient, and eventually, battery-electric buses were introduced to ensure sufficient heating.

3) Logistics and location challenges

When the number of buses increased, Spadina Station was unable to accommodate all buses. The additional buses were parked on the street, resulting in multiple locations to monitor.

4) Safety incidents and concerns

The TTC increased cleaning requirements to address concerns with drug paraphernalia, biohazards, and garbage. During the initiative, there were also reports of drug use, disorderly conduct and individuals carrying weapons inside the station, on the buses and in the surrounding area. In total, the TTC received 41 Weapons Calls at Spadina Station between November 15, 2023 and April 15, 2024. There were three incidents recorded where a weapon was used and three incidents involving possession of a weapon.

On a year-over-year basis (January to March 2023 to January to March 2024), TPS noted a reduction in calls for service on the TTC system. However, TPS attended the station more frequently due to drug-dealing activities, since suspected drug dealers were taking advantage of conducting business with

clients seeking a warming space. The Community Safety Teams also recorded 70 safety incidents over the five months of the initiative. In response to the illicit activity, a joint investigation between TTC Special Constables and TPS was conducted, with an increase of both uniformed and plainclothes presence from both groups.

5) Challenges sustaining social supports

While available social supports ensured clients received information on services, shelters and housing solutions, there was still insufficient space and inconsistency in providing supports as individuals moved through the system. The warming bus component of the initiative was intended to provide a warm alternative to the outdoor elements, and while a Community Safety Team member was available to monitor safety, including first aid and overdose response, the full care needs of individuals were not able to be addressed.

The TTC, in consultation with the City of Toronto, was requested to report back to the TTC Board on options to reduce dependence on the TTC transit network for shelter during the 2024/2025 winter season.

Comments

City of Toronto's Winter Service Plan

Toronto's Shelter System

Toronto's shelter system is the largest shelter system in Canada. The City continues to experience unprecedented demand and pressure for shelter services. Demand for shelter services has increased significantly over the past few years and is projected to continue throughout 2024 and into 2025 for many reasons including, but not limited to, insufficient affordable housing supply, insufficient supportive housing for people who have complex needs, increased costs of living, inadequate wage and income supports, and an increase in the new arrivals to the city who are in need of shelter. In 2023, 32,000 unique callers contacted the City's Central Intake service seeking access to a shelter program. On average, 233 callers are turned away each day.

2024/2025 Winter Services Plan for People Experiencing Homelessness

Each year, the City of Toronto activates a [Winter Services Plan](#) to provide additional capacity and services to support individuals experiencing homelessness during the cold winter months, when health and safety risks are higher than normal. People experiencing homelessness living outdoors are at increased vulnerability to illness and injury related to exposure to cold temperatures. As part of this plan, the City adds spaces in the shelter system, including a network of 24/7 warming centres that are opened during a winter weather event warning or when temperatures dip below -5 Celsius. When the temperature drops to -15 Celsius, the City opens surge spaces to provide additional capacity and to ensure centres are accessible for more days during the winter season.

The 2024/2025 Winter Services Plan for people experiencing homelessness is expected to be larger than last year's winter response, and will focus on the following pillars:

- Maintaining and adding space in the shelter system;
- Warming Centres (–5 Celsius) and surge capacity (–15 Celsius) during cold weather;
- Enhancing street outreach; and
- Opening new supportive housing units and accessing available social housing units with supports.

City staff have identified four Warming Centres locations for the 2024/2025 winter season, to be activated at –5 Celsius, and one surge space to be activated at –15 Celsius. In addition, many daytime drop-ins support the Winter Services Plan by extending existing hours to keep people inside longer and support referrals to shelters and other winter services. These extended hours also support a more seamless transition to other winter services, including Warming Centres and winter respites, reducing the likelihood that people will use the TTC as shelter.

Throughout the winter season (November 15, 2024, to April 15, 2025), the City will open 286 new social and supportive housing units for people experiencing homelessness. Even with this increased capacity, people often seek respite in other public spaces, such as hospital emergency departments, libraries, coffee shops, and the transit system. Details of the City's Winter Services Plan can be found on the [City's Warming Centres webpage](#).

Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Plan (HSCIS)

The City developed the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Plan (HSCIS) in response to the need for permanent shelter space and to ensure stability and recovery of the City's shelter system. The HSCIS is a 10-year strategy (2024 to 2033) that will guide capital spending decisions for Toronto Shelter and Support Services. The HSCIS was adopted by City Council in November 2023 and includes a plan to develop 20 new purpose-built and long-term use shelter sites with 1,600 spaces.

Shelter sites developed through HSCIS will follow the Shelter Design and Technical Guidelines (SDTG) to improve outcomes for users, staff, visitors, and the community. In acquiring new shelter sites, TSSS, in collaboration with Corporate Real Estate Management (CREM) and CreateTO, is taking into consideration built-form requirements aligned to the SDTG. These include accommodating 80 to 100 clients, ensuring barrier-free accessibility, enhancing safety and programming, and providing 24/7 staffing for comprehensive shelter support. The HSCIS provides a transition from short-term leases to long-term purpose-built shelters. In the long-term, this is more cost-effective, provides stability, reduces the risk of losing critical shelter capacity, and is more responsive to the needs of shelter clients.

One of the key goals of HSCIS is the development of a winter infrastructure plan to support a long-term winter shelter strategy. The plan ensures there are additional homelessness service responses activated during the winter season to provide warm and welcoming places for people experiencing homelessness who are vulnerable to illness and injury as a result of exposure to cold temperatures. As part of this plan, the

City has entered into multi-year agreements to provide yearly winter warming centre and winter respite services.

TTC's Proposed Recommendations and Next Steps

The TTC and the City of Toronto reviewed the Transport Bus Initiative's outcomes, noting the initiative's temporary nature and the many challenges related to the warming bus component. These challenges have made warming buses unsustainable on an ongoing basis, whether on TTC or non-TTC properties. As a result, the TTC will not be using buses as a warming solution during the 2024/2025 winter season.

Other options to reduce dependence on the TTC transit network for shelter were also explored, including the use of decommissioned TTC property. TSSS started investigating both 610 Bay and McCowan Station for use as potential warming centres prior to the start of last winter season. During those investigations, staff from divisions and agencies with jurisdictional authority over the sites indicated that there were other planned uses for the sites. It was indicated that the locations would not be available for a length of time that would make them viable for use as winter sites and would not justify the capital costs and time required to make the sites suitable for use as a warming centre.

Recommendations

The TTC recommends the following response and outreach approach during the 2024/2025 winter season (November 15, 2024 to April 15, 2025) to continue to support individuals sheltering within the transit system:

- TTC Stations staff will continue to encourage individuals in need to move to Spadina and Union stations upon station closing.
- Streets to Homes workers will continue to be available at these stations to connect individuals with social supports. These workers provide the following services:
 - Conduct referrals to the shelter system through Central Intake, which may include directing individual(s) to warming centres, as appropriate;
 - Conduct referrals to housing workers, for those who are not already working with other housing workers or agencies;
 - Conduct wellness checks;
 - Provide clothing and supplies;
 - Provide harm reduction supplies and harm reduction services; and
 - Provide seasonal resources (sleeping bags, socks, hats, hand warmers), snacks and gift cards, and PRESTO cards.
- Special Constables will be notified to assist, if required, and will encourage individuals to access available social supports and resources.
- Redirecting individuals to available warming centres and shelters allows them to access locations that meet the expectations outlined in the Toronto Shelter Standards.
- However, it is expected that individuals will also move to other available locations within the network, i.e. streetcars, until stations reopen.

- The TTC will continue to provide transport from Spadina and Union Stations to available warming centres and shelters when the temperature reaches –15 Celsius, upon notification by the City.
- Bus Operators will receive information and guidance regarding their role in providing this service through face-to-face communication. This is in addition to the de-escalation training they receive as frontline employees. The TTC will also be issuing communications to inform employees of the response and outreach approach this winter season.
- The City’s Community Safety Teams will provide support to the TTC by working with the TSSS Duty Office to find available space during Extreme Cold Weather days. They will also assist with co-ordinating the movement of individuals onto the buses and accompany Bus Operators in the vehicles during transport.
- The TTC will continue to provide shelter buses at the request of emergency services, i.e. building fire.

Overall, TTC buses will not be used as a warming solution for individuals that are using the transit system for shelter during the 2024/2025 season. However, the TTC will continue to work with its external partners to ensure social support is available to those in need and to support transport to available warming centres and shelters. The City will continue to actively search for additional warming centre opportunities.

Operational details regarding the use of buses for transport when the temperature reaches –15 Celsius will be incorporated into the TTC’s winter planning. The TTC will continue to provide updates to the TTC Board on its community safety efforts, including the use of buses for transporting individuals sheltering within the transit system.

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