

October 2, 2023

Include TTC tunnels and all transit infrastructure in ConnectTO

Re: EX8.8 ConnectTO Program Update: City Assets for Efficiency and Connectivity

Dear Mayor Olivia Chow and members of the Executive Committee,

TTCriders is a membership-based organization of transit users in Toronto. We are writing to support the recommendations in this report and express our support for free public Wi-Fi in the TTC, including subway tunnels. The TTC should be among the municipal assets leveraged for ConnectTO.

Public Wi-Fi in the TTC will make transit users feel safer, and help bridge the digital divide. Transit users report that they feel least safe in the subway and would feel safer with digital access.¹ The 2021 broadband study found that 34% of Toronto households worry about paying their internet bills, predominantly low-income, single-parent, and racialized households.² Most TTC users are shift workers, women, and low-income.³

It is concerning that the Toronto Transit Commission is not on the list of agencies consulted in preparing the report before you. In February 2021, the Council directed staff to work with and request support from multiple city staff and agencies, including the TTC CEO, to develop a strategic framework and work plan for ConnectTO.⁴

It is much cheaper to add fibre during construction and renovation. We support the staff recommendation to ensure that “new developments, builds, major revitalizations, and upgrades in City-owned facilities assess the inclusion of City-owned in-building wiring and fibre connectivity infrastructure, and use City defined standards and specifications.”

Rogers’ telecommunications infrastructure build-out⁵ in the Toronto subway network is one such opportunity. Provincial priority transit projects such as the Scarborough Subway Extension and Ontario Line should also include public fibre.

TTCriders encourages Toronto City Council to:

- Work towards free public Wi-Fi on all TTC property, including subway tunnels;

¹ <https://www.ttcriders.ca/safetyreport>;
<https://womanaact.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/GTA-Transit-Study-Key-Findings.pdf>

² <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2023/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-239402.pdf>

³ https://ttc-cdn.azureedge.net/-/media/Project/TTC/DevProto/Documents/Home/Public-Meetings/Board/22/July-14/7_Advancing_the_5_Year_Service_Plan_2024_2028_and_10_Year_Outlook_Reset.pdf

⁴ <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2021.EX20.8>

⁵ <https://about.rogers.com/news-ideas/rogers-steps-up-to-bring-5g-full-services-to-ttc-subway-including-911-calling/>

- Include all TTC and transit infrastructure assets in ConnectTO;
- If Toronto- or TTC-owned fibre does not already exist in subway tunnels, ensure that publicly-owned fibre is installed in TTC tunnels as Rogers and potentially other companies install telecommunications infrastructure;
- Leverage opportunities provided by new transit construction to install public fibre.

It is possible that TTC-owned dark fibre exists in subway tunnels, given that the project systems design of the Line 1 TYSSE extension “incorporated spare fibre optic dark fibres for YRT use to link communications between the three stations in York Region.”⁶

The 2017 Toronto Broadband Study notes that “BAI Canada is building dark fibre capacity into their network for future growth in usage and potential future uses for both BAI Canada and the TTC.”⁷ In 2018, BAI Communications reported that they had installed high-count fibre in the TTC subway tunnels.⁸

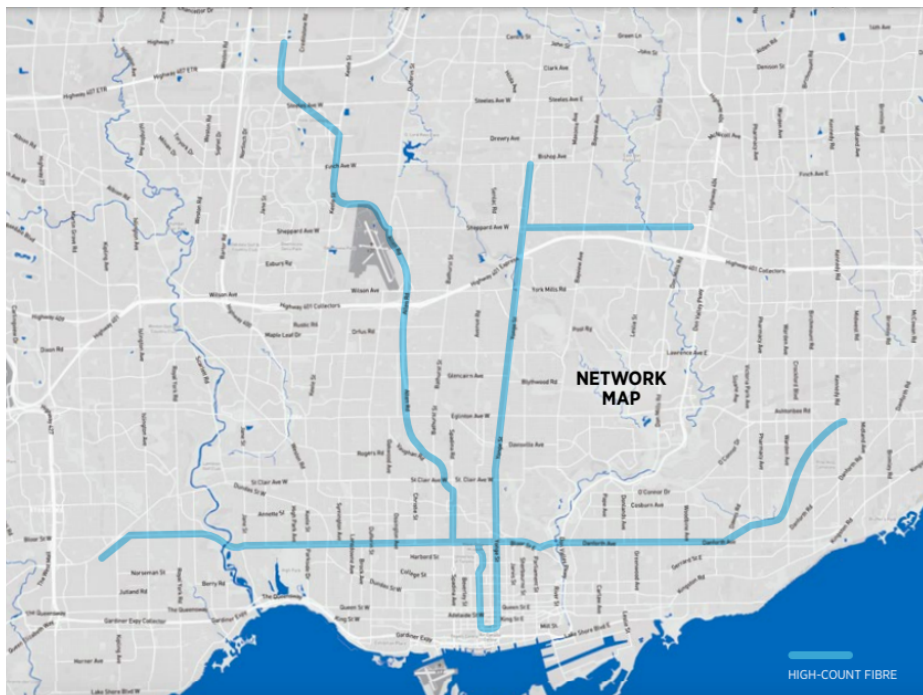


Fig. 1. BAI Communications: <https://www.baicomunications.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Fibre-connectivity-in-Toronto.pdf>

Sincerely,

Shelagh Pizey-Allen
Director, TTCriders

⁶https://pw.ttc.ca/-/media/Project/TTC/DevProto/Documents/Home/Public-Meetings/Board/2017/November-13/19_Line_1_Extension_Operations_and_Maintenance_Agreement.pdf

⁷ <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/ed/bgrd/backgroundfile-108897.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.baicomunications.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Fibre-connectivity-in-Toronto.pdf>