



Motion without Notice

An Urgent Need to Improve Bus and Streetcar Travel Time and Reliability

Moved by: Commissioner Julie Osborne

Seconded by: Commissioner Fenton Jagdeo

Urgency Statement

The impact of gridlock on **transit** in Toronto rarely figures into the reports and news coverage of the issue.

Effectiveness of new investments: The 2025 TTC Operating Budget included new investment to increase the frequency and quality of service across the City of Toronto. During the budget process, the TTC Board was informed of continuing challenges in operating buses and streetcars in mixed traffic and that the average speed of scheduled bus service has decreased from 20 km/h in 2013 to 17.2 km/h in 2024. Without urgency in implementation of broad, city-wide action on congestion, these new investments will not be effective if buses and streetcars continue to travel slowly and unreliably.

Provincial Action: In November 2024, the Province of Ontario passed the *Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act, 2024*. The TTC supports cycling as an important part of a sustainable and equitable transportation system. The TTC also recognizes that cycling infrastructure projects on Bloor Street West, Danforth Avenue, and Yonge Street have incorporated various measures for transit priority. This includes sections of dedicated bus lanes on Bloor Street West at Jane Street and on Danforth Avenue approaching Victoria Park Avenue. A section of Yonge Street, between Davisville Avenue and St Clair Avenue was configured to provide improved operations for subway shuttle buses. In addition, cycling infrastructure projects have integrated improvements for accessible transit stops in their design.

Should removals of bicycle lanes as a result of the *Act* proceed, it is essential that the improvements to transit operations are maintained. Therefore, it is crucial for the TTC Board to restate the importance of surface transit priority in advance of changes to how road space is allocated and designed in the new legislative context.

Toronto Region Board of Trade: On February 20, 2025, the TRBOT released *Breaking Gridlock: Congestion Action Plan for Toronto*. Its five recommendations focus on overall congestion relief but do not stress the importance of improving surface transit speed and reliability and the impact of gridlock on this vital service to the businesses of the GTHA. Urgent expansion of transit priority measures, dedicated bus and streetcar lanes and removing on-street parking on major transit corridors can provide immediate-term relief for congestion and movement of all people in Toronto.

Summary

The TTC is crucial to mobility in the City of Toronto and the GTHA, carrying over 1.4 million trips a day, of which 70% are on the surface network of bus and streetcar routes. Most of this service operates in mixed traffic and is directly susceptible to traffic congestion and delays, resulting in non-competitive travel times and challenges for service reliability, such as bunching and gapping. As congestion continues to increase in the city, TTC is becoming less attractive for travel and more costly to operate. To meet the City's overall goals for mobility, growth and sustainability, the prioritization of TTC in transportation network and policy decisions is more important than ever.

TTC continues to be North America's third largest and busiest transit system, after Mexico City and New York City. Many of the TTC's bus and streetcar routes are among the continent's busiest; for example, buses on Jane Street carry over 13.2-million people each year, greater than the annual ridership of Saskatoon Transit. TTC is crucial to how people travel to work, with 23% of commutes on transit compared to 71% by car and 6% by walking and cycling combined. (Note staff has been asked to update this number.) Yet the dedication of road space to transit remains disproportionate and transportation decisions often prioritize the needs of single-occupant vehicles. And even less efficient, road space is dedicated to **parked** single-occupant vehicles.

TTC's bus and streetcar services are also critical to equity, with over 510,000 boardings per day in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs). 133 bus and streetcar routes serve NIAs. IN other words NIAs are over-represented on surface transit and therefore are proportionately more penalized by the impacts of gridlock.

Wheel-Trans customers also face undue hardship because of gridlock. Many rely on accessible taxis or WT buses which operate in mixed traffic. Those customers who are making linked trips risk being designated as a no-show if their linked journey is delayed due to congestion.

While general City-wide congestion is increasing and is the primary contributor to slowing transit service, other factors that also play a role include:

1. Construction impacts from infrastructure renewal, new development and rapid transit expansion. These impacts are expected to intensify in the near and medium term.
2. Impact of ride hailing/private transportation companies (PTCs) which accounts for 14.2% of vehicle activity in downtown Toronto and 5% city wide. 33% of this activity is from vehicles travelling without a passenger.
3. Reallocation of road space for other uses, such as bike lanes, curb lane reallocation for on-street parking and patios and expanded public realm.
4. Safety-related changes to streets such as signalling ("no right on a red") more traffic lights, reduced speed limits, protruding curbs, delayed green lights etc.

In 2024, daily average ride hailing trips reached an all-time high of 214,000, almost equivalent to daily ridership on TTC's streetcar network. If the surface transit were faster and more reliable, how many of these ride hailers would opt for transit?

The discussion around a congestion crisis in Toronto has intensified in the last 15 years, with various plans for congestion management and reduction. While initiatives to manage and reduce congestion continue to be explored and implemented, congestion is not improving. On-time performance for the TTC continues to not meet targets, with bus on-time performance in the low- to mid- 80% range through 2024 and streetcar under 70% through much of the year.

Because of congestion, TTC is increasingly less competitive as a transportation choice. While subway service continues to provide fast and reliable service compared to other modes, ever slowing bus and streetcar service makes it less and less attractive compared to driving, ride hailing, cycling and walking. Between 2013 and 2024, average scheduled travel times on the bus network has decreased from 20 km/h to 17.3 km/h, which means service is not only slower, but less cost-efficient for the TTC to operate.

Since 2019, congestion has cost the TTC an additional \$60-million in annual operating costs, with more in lost capacity resulting from longer wait times in response to congestion. Comparatively, on-street parking revenue at the Toronto Parking Authority was \$50.6-million in 2023. CafeTO was estimated to provide \$200-million in economic benefits in 2022. A study in late 2024 showed that every \$1 invested in transit generates \$7.14 in economic benefits. Therefore, congestion-related costs mean transit investment is not realizing over \$425-million in economic benefits per year. This raises the question whether we need to better connect revenue generation, economic benefits, costs, and operating impacts when determining the best use of city streets.

Despite the known benefits to transit, slow progress has been made to create a network of dedicated transit lanes across the city. As of 2024, Toronto has 33 kilometres of dedicated bus lanes and 10 kilometres of dedicated streetcar lanes. The city lags behind major cities across North America, such as Vancouver, San Francisco, Boston and New York, all of which are aggressively expanding their networks:

- Vancouver grew its all-day bus-only priority network from 27 kilometres in 2019 to 72 kilometres in 2023. 17% of its bus frequent bus network operates with some type of bus priority (dedicated bus lanes, HOV lanes and peak-only bus lanes)
- San Francisco has 112 kilometres of bus lanes, 25% of which were added during the pandemic
- Boston had only 5 kilometres of bus lanes in 2015 and expanded to over 40 kilometres by 2021
- New York has over 270 kilometres of bus lanes, 55 kilometres of which was added in the past three years

Since the five priority dedicated bus lane corridors were identified in 2018 by TTC, only the Eglinton East corridor has been implemented. The early closure of Line 3 resulted in relatively fast implementation of bus priority between Kennedy Station and Scarborough Centre in 2023, showing that urgency can lead to action. While

progress is being made towards implementation of dedicated bus lanes on Jane Street, Dufferin Street and Bathurst Street, full build out of the City's busways needs to be accelerated and prioritized, in the same way the City's cycling network was prioritized.

Urgent action is needed to improve the speed and reliability of all surface vehicles including and especially buses and streetcars in Toronto. Improving travel times will ensure investment in TTC service is effective while providing service that attracts more riders, discourages car use and helps to manage congestion. Improving transit competitiveness is crucial to attract more riders onto transit. More transit riders mean fewer cars on the road, while continuing degradation of surface transit will only encourage more people to use private vehicles and ride hailing services.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the TTC Board:

1. Affirm the position of the TTC Board that urgent prioritization of surface transit in the City of Toronto is crucial to improve travel times and reliability and to encourage transit use and help manage congestion; and that any changes to Toronto's roadways contemplated by the City consider the impact on transit.
2. Request that City Council request the General Manager, Transportation Services, provide a report to the TTC Board on how transit travel times and reliability is prioritized in roadway design, decision-making, and operations and how we rethink the place that public transit occupies in this analysis.
3. Request that City Council request the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning to report to the TTC Board how transit travel times and reliability are being prioritized in planning decisions and city-wide policy.
4. Request City Council in conjunction with the Toronto Parking Authority and the TTC evaluate the impact of dedicating scarce arterial road infrastructure to vehicles that are not moving, i.e. street parking. This analysis could include but not be limited to parking policy, parking alternatives, supply and pricing.
5. Request City Council to accelerate the implementation of RapidTO on priority corridors identified in the TTC's 5-Year Service and Customer Experience Action Plan and provide resources to advance implementation of the Surface Transit Network Plan to provide a network of transit priority corridors to benefit transit riders across the entire city.
6. Forward this motion to the Toronto Region Board of Trade, Metrolinx, and the Ministry of Transportation, Ontario.

Date: February 21, 2025