



Pilot - Free Transit for Grade 7-12 Student Field Trips Update

Date: September 10, 2025

To: TTC Board

From: Chief Strategy and Customer Experience Officer

Recommendations

It is recommended that the TTC Board:

1. Receive this report on the pilot program's outcomes, including service, financial, and operational implications.
2. Approve an extension of the free transit for Grade 7 to 12 student field trips pilot program for the 2025-2026 school year, at an estimated financial impact of \$25,000 in foregone fare revenue.

Summary

In May 2024, the TTC Board approved a pilot program offering free transit for Grade 7 to 12 student field trips during the 2024-2025 school year. This report presents the results of the pilot, aligned with its objectives, and highlights specific impacts on schools located within Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs).

The program required participation agreements with Toronto's public and separate English- and French-speaking school boards, which specified when field trips were eligible for reimbursement through the pilot program. As a result of requiring participation agreements, program uptake was lower than originally projected. Of the 531 eligible schools, 28 participated, collectively receiving reimbursement for 2,664 Youth PRESTO Tickets used on 77 field trips. While both Toronto French school boards signed agreements to participate in the pilot program, neither requested reimbursements for field trips taken during this period.

Although uptake was limited, there were notable successes that can be built upon in future years if the pilot is continued:

- One-third of participating schools were in NIAs (36%), and over half of field trips originated from these areas.
- More than 1,800 students received educational materials and participated in discussions aimed at increasing their comfort and confidence using transit.
- Survey responses indicated that more than 80% of participating teachers said the pilot incentivized taking a field trip, and 63% agreed that the program enabled an educational outing that would not have occurred otherwise.

Survey results also indicated that two-thirds of teachers lacked awareness or knowledge of the pilot program. However, among those who were aware, more than half of the teachers used the program to facilitate a field trip. Improvements to the program that could increase uptake in the future and allow for a better assessment of the program impact include:

- **Increased promotion.** Continue to provide materials to school boards to share with teachers and educational support staff to increase awareness of the program.
- **Expanded educational materials.** Update the classroom training materials to include specific information about the pilot, group travel, and how to use PRESTO Tickets on the TTC.
- **Amended service parameters.** Conditions have been put in place to enable this pilot to ensure no additional service is required to accommodate field trips. As pilot uptake has been lower than originally anticipated, expanding the permitted days of week, times of day, and routes could increase program utility. However, additional service may be required should the parameters be amended.
- **Streamlined administration process for reimbursements.** Explore ways to improve submission requirements for school boards to improve data entry, data submissions, and verification.

TTC staff recommend extending the pilot program with the current service parameters for the 2025-2026 school year to allow for comprehensive data collection and monitoring to evaluate the pilot's effectiveness. It is anticipated that heightened program awareness and expanded educational materials will lead to increased participation, providing more robust data for evaluation of the program. Upon review of the service parameters, it may not be possible to further expand the permitted days, times, and routes without additional resources due to impacts on ridership, crowding, and resource requirements.

Background and Analysis

Following the TTC Board's approval of a motion to adopt the pilot for Free Transit for Grade 7 to 12 Field Trips in May 2024, TTC staff implemented the pilot program at the start of the 2024-2025 school year. The pilot program ended on June 27, 2025.

The intent of the program is to help students build familiarity and confidence in using public transit, skills that could encourage lifelong transit ridership. Additionally, by removing transportation costs as a barrier, the program aims to expand students' access to educational opportunities across the city.

The pilot program parameters were built on:

- Leveraging only routes and times of day where the system may have excess capacity rather than adding additional service;
- Using the school boards' existing bulk Youth PRESTO Ticket ordering processes; and
- Administering the program using current TTC staffing levels.

The service parameters for eligible field trips were Monday and Friday between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m., subject to route and group size, as outlined in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Service Parameters

Group Size	Route Availability	Time of Travel
5 or less	All modes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mondays between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. • Fridays between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m.
6-20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All subway lines • All streetcar routes • Bus routes operating every 10 minutes or better <p>Exclusions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bus routes that operate less frequently than every 10 minutes 	
21-50	All subway lines	
51+	None	None

School boards were responsible for promoting the program to schools, teachers, and educational support staff. Each school board's method for schools to collect, track, and submit field trip transit fare information for reimbursement to the TTC was unique to leverage their existing processes. TTC staff liaised with school board staff to review and validate submitted PRESTO tickets to confirm eligibility for reimbursement.

Analysis

The pilot was approved for the 2024-2025 school year. TTC staff collaborated with school board representatives from all four of Toronto's public and separate school boards to formalize participation agreements and develop processes for submitting reimbursement requests for eligible field trips. School boards were also responsible for communicating the program details and eligibility criteria to schools. The TTC and school board staff have protocols in place to administer the program.

As the first eligible field trips took place in December 2024, following the completion of administrative processes, the evaluation results presented below provide an incomplete assessment of pilot program outcomes. While the initial results have been positive, overall program uptake was lower than anticipated. Extending the pilot for an additional year will allow for a full school year of data collection, and modifications to the pilot program based on lessons learned from the 2024-2025 school year.

The following three key objectives were used to evaluate the impacts of the pilot program:

1. Access – increase in field trips and increase in youth ridership.
2. Education – number of classes and students reached.
3. Practicality – pilot is easy and simple to use and administer.

Data Collection and Reporting

To support program monitoring and evaluation, school boards submitted detailed data for each participating field trip. This included the school origin, number, and identifying data of Youth PRESTO Tickets used, time of day, routes travelled, and field trip

destination. TTC staff used this information to validate that the field trips occurred within the program's defined eligibility parameters and to support reporting on quantitative outcomes.

In addition, TTC staff developed and distributed an online survey through the school boards to teachers, classroom support staff, office administration staff, school administration, and school board representatives. The survey aimed to gather qualitative feedback on the pilot program's effectiveness in meeting its objectives. The survey was open from June 1 to June 25, 2025, and received 84 responses.

Objectives

Access

During the 2024-2025 school year, 28 of 531 eligible schools (5%) participated in the pilot program for free transit for Grade 7 to 12 field trips. Of these, 10 schools were in NIAs (36%). Notably, more than half of the eligible field trips recorded during the pilot originated from schools in NIAs (53%). Further details on participating schools are outlined in Table 2 below:

Table 2: School Board Participation in the Pilot Program

School board	Eligible schools	Participating schools	Schools in NIAs	Total field trips
Toronto District School Board	324	18	5	61
Toronto Catholic District School Board	200	11	5	16
Csc MonAvenir*	3	0	0	0
CS Viamonde**	4	0	0	0
Total	531	28	10	77

* Toronto French language Catholic school board.

** Toronto French language Public school board.

More than 80% of surveyed teachers who participated in the pilot agreed that the pilot program incentivized taking a field trip. Half of school administration and office staff agreed that the pilot program helped reduce financial constraints for organizing field trips, although they generally did not believe it resulted in a greater number of field trips at their schools.

Education

As part of the pilot, participating teachers were required to provide classroom training on transit topics before students embarked on their field trip. To support this, TTC staff supplied communication materials, including checklists, worksheets, and a slide deck presentation. Nearly half (40%) of surveyed teachers agreed that the educational materials were easy to share, engaging for students, and helped prepare students to use the TTC. Broader access to and promotion of these materials to teachers beyond the pilot program may encourage transit education and increase youth ridership.

Practicality

The evaluation also assessed the clarity of program eligibility requirements and the ease of the reimbursement process to the TTC and the school boards.

Survey results revealed that more than half of the teachers were not aware of the pilot. Among teachers who did participate, most teachers found the eligibility requirements clear (65%), and they also understood the process for submitting field trip data to their school board representative for reimbursement (54%). However, surveyed school administration and office staff disagreed with the same statements: 75% of respondents found the instructions for accessing and using Youth PRESTO Tickets for eligible field trips were unclear, 50% did not understand the eligibility requirements for the pilot program, and 63% reported the process for submitting field trips was not straightforward.

Lessons Learned

There were lessons learned from pilot program uptake during the 2024-2025 school year that can inform improvements to the pilot should the Board approve continuing it for the 2025-2026 school year.

More education is required on the pilot itself and how to use and pay for transit when travelling as a group.

One-third of tickets purchased were not eligible for reimbursement because they were not used within the eligibility parameters. It is possible that students used the tickets for other trips or forgot to tap their ticket during field trips. Educational materials for students and teachers could include more specific information on how and when to use the Youth PRESTO Tickets for field trips.

Since the pilot uptake is much lower than anticipated, it could be possible to explore expanding the parameters to accommodate more field trips, considering the potential impacts to service.

Teachers and school administration staff commented that the program service parameters were too stringent to be advantageous. For many schools, free transit was not enough of an incentive to schedule field trips for Mondays and Fridays between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. The pilot program's service parameters were established to make use of excess transit capacity and ensure that there were no service or operational increases required to deliver the program. Upon review of the service parameters, it may not be possible to further expand the permitted days, times, and routes without additional resources due to impacts on ridership, crowding, and resource requirements.

Working with school boards to more broadly advertise and promote the field trip pilot could help increase program usage.

More than two-thirds of teachers surveyed were not aware of the pilot program, which may be a reason for the low uptake. However, of the teachers who knew about the program, more than half of these teachers participated in the pilot.

The reimbursement submission process needs to be simplified to improve data quality and reduce resource requirements for school boards and TTC staff.

Initial administration requirements were intensive for schools, school board representatives, and TTC staff. School staff were required to list all PRESTO ticket serial numbers used to receive a reimbursement. TTC staff needed to validate that each PRESTO ticket was used within the eligibility parameters. A standardized form that school staff use to enter Youth PRESTO Ticket serial numbers is in place, and TTC

staff will collaborate with school board staff to explore opportunities to simplify the submission process.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Matters

A measure of success of this pilot program is its ability to improve access to educational opportunities for Grade 7 to 12 students across the city, including those from diverse socioeconomic groups. By removing the cost barrier associated with transit for field trips, the program aimed to ensure more equitable participation in experiential learning outside the classroom.

A key consideration of the pilot program was increasing field trips from schools located within NIAs, where access to no-cost transportation is of greater importance. All schools in NIAs were eligible to participate, and notably, around one-third of the schools that participated in the program were in NIAs.

Several participating schools made repeated use of the program: nine schools used the program for multiple field trips, and two schools located in NIAs used the program for more than 10 field trips each. Additionally, survey results indicated that two-thirds of teachers from participating schools responded that the pilot program enabled a field trip that otherwise would not have occurred.

Corporate Plan Alignment

- Strategic Direction 2: Attract New Riders, Retain Customer Loyalty, by encouraging students to take transit for both academic and personal uses.
 - Action 2.1.1 Launch the TTC's Next 5-Year Service Plan for 2024 to 2028.
- Strategic Direction 5: Address the Structural Fiscal Imbalance
 - Action 5.2.1 Advance Fare Policy Innovation
 - Action 5.2.2 Protect Revenue by Building a Culture of Fare Payment Compliance

Financial Impact

On May 16, 2024, the TTC Board approved an adjustment to the 2024 Operating Budget to reduce 2024 fare revenue by \$500,000 to reimburse eligible field trips during the 2024-2025 school year. The Board also approved an increase in the ancillary revenue budget of \$500,000, to be funded from the proceeds received from the sale of the decommissioned Scarborough Rapid Transit fleet, to offset the revenue impact anticipated from the implementation of the pilot program.

The \$500,000 program budget was reflective of the potential foregone revenue if all existing field trips were eligible for reimbursements through the pilot program. There were no additional costs to add additional transit service for this program, as field trips were eligible for reimbursement only at specified days, times, and locations on the system where there is excess capacity. Program implementation and administration were accommodated through existing staffing levels. However, the pilot program was prioritized.

Approximately \$6,000¹ in eligible field trips in the 2024-2025 school year were taken and reimbursed to Toronto school boards. If the pilot program were to be extended to the 2025-2026 school year, the estimated financial impact in terms of foregone revenue is approximately \$25,000, subject to program uptake.

The Executive Director – Finance has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

Contact

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Attachments

Attachment 1 – Decision History
Attachment 2 – List of Participating Schools and Number of Field Trips Taken

Attachment 1 – Decision History

At its [September 14, 2023 meeting](#), the TTC Board adopted a motion directing staff to assess two proposals to take a step toward free transit for middle and high school students for school trips outside peak hours and to distribute a limited quantity of free youth passes to charities.

At its [February 22, 2024 meeting](#), the TTC Board received a report outlining opportunities to provide free transit to middle school and secondary school groups making field trips during off-peak hours. At the same meeting, the TTC Board adopted a motion requesting staff to report on the scope of a pilot program to provide free transit using spare capacity and to develop an education module to share with students.

At its [May 16, 2024 meeting](#), the TTC Board received the scope of a pilot to provide free transit for Grade 7 to 12 student field trips, which set eligibility requirements for receiving reimbursements for field trips taken. The TTC Board adopted a motion to approve the pilot for Free Transit for Grade 7 to 12 Student Field Trips for the 2024-2025 school year and requested TTC staff to report back to the Board at the conclusion of the pilot program on the results of the pilot's outcomes.

Attachment 2 – List of Participating Schools and Number of Field Trips Taken

	School	# Field Trips	NIA
	Toronto Catholic District School Board	16	5
1	Cardinal Carter Academy for the Arts	4	
2	Dante Alighieri Academy Catholic Secondary School	1	✓
3	Holy Family Catholic School	1	✓
4	Monsignor Fraser College (Midland Campus)	2	
5	Neil McNeil High School	2	
6	St Nicholas of Bari Catholic School*	1	✓
7	St. Alphonsus Catholic School	1	
8	St. Joan of Arc Catholic Academy	2	✓
9	St. Oscar Romero Catholic Secondary School	1	✓
10	St. Rose of Lima Catholic High School	1	✓
	TDSB	61	5
11	Central Technical School	3	
12	Don Mills Collegiate Institute	1	
13	Downsview Secondary School	2	✓
14	Fisherville Senior Public School	1	
15	Georges Vanier Secondary School	4	
16	Greenholme Junior Middle School	1	✓
17	Greenwood Secondary School	2	
18	Heydon Park Secondary School	7	
19	Inglenook Community School	1	
20	Jarvis Collegiate Institute	2	
21	Karen Kain School of The Arts	1	
22	North East Secondary Alternative School	1	
23	Northern Secondary School	1	
24	Oasis Alternative Secondary School	1	
25	St Andrews Public School*	1	
26	Westview Centennial Secondary School	1	✓
27	Woburn Collegiate Institute	18	✓
28	York Humber High School	13	✓
	Total	77	10

**School is located outside of NIA, but catchment intersects with NIA*