TTC Wayfinding Strategy

A roadmap for effortless journeys

September 2025

Table of contents

Executive summary

This wayfinding strategy redefines how customers navigate Toronto's transit system by transforming the TTC's wayfinding from a static signage approach into a dynamic, multi-sensory, and integrated experience. Rooted in customer-centric design, the Strategy aims to eliminate barriers to navigation – ensuring that every rider, regardless of familiarity or ability, can travel with confidence and ease.

This comprehensive strategy addresses long-standing fragmentation in signage and guidance systems across the network, replacing ad hoc efforts with a unified, organization-wide approach. It will introduce updated standards, governance structures, and implementation plans that prioritize clarity, consistency, and accessibility across all physical and digital touchpoints.

Key principles of the Strategy include:

Customer Experience: Seamless, intuitive navigation from trip planning to destination.

Integration: Harmonization across TTC modes and with regional partners like Metrolinx.

Equity and Inclusion: Ongoing consultation with diverse user groups to ensure accessibility and relevance.

Digital Transformation: Enhanced digital tools, real-time information, and user-friendly interfaces.

Implementation Priorities: Focused upgrades at high-impact stations, including those supporting the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Investment in Sustainable Wayfinding: Backed by extensive research, stakeholder engagement, and international benchmarking, the strategy outlines a phased implementation plan supported by a $145M capital investment. It also identifies critical staffing and organizational capacity needs to ensure sustainable delivery.

The role of wayfinding in public transit: Strengthening the customer experience

Wayfinding in transit systems is about more than signage – it is the strategic orchestration of information, space and sensory cues, that help people understand where they are, where they are going and how to get there confidently and independently. Effective wayfinding transforms complex environments into navigable journeys, guiding customers across multiple modes and providers. At its core, wayfinding is about removing barriers to movement – whether cognitive, physical, linguistic or emotional, and enhancing the overall transit experience for everyone, regardless of familiarity with the system or the city.

As technology evolves and customer expectations continue to grow, wayfinding has transformed from existing as static set of signs to becoming a dynamic, multi-platform experience. Today, effective wayfinding is no longer confined to physical environments alone – it is the integration of physical and digital tools, encompassing personal devices,

printed sign faces, architectural design and audio cues. In this context, wayfinding evolves into a coordinated system of guidance, shared across platforms and agencies, designed to deliver a seamless and consistent experience for all users – whether they are navigating the underground PATH to the subway, transferring between the streetcar to the bus or planning a multi-modal journey on the go.

The complexity of our current environments (rapidly advancing digital expectations, regional interchanges, budget constraints, etc.) surpasses any scope previously envisioned, and current structures do not propel us towards our vision. This Strategy is designed to address this situation.

Wayfinding as a brand: Global and North American best practices

The TTC's brand is one of the most recognizable in Toronto due to its presence across stations, stops and vehicles. An application of this brand however is not just a matter of appearance – it acts as a critical functional tool that supports customer navigation, system trust and public confidence.

Maintaining and enhancing the iconic presence of the TTC through strong, consistent wayfinding helps:

- Reinforce brand familiarity and reliability for daily riders;
- Provide intuitive visual cues for new users, tourists and newcomers;
- Create a cohesive identity across multiple service modes (subway, streetcar, bus, Wheel-Trans);
- Establish clarity at intermodal connections to partner agencies.

Wayfinding is one of the most visible expressions of a transit brand – it's how people understand and interact with the system every day. When wayfinding is clear, consistent and visually aligned, it strengthens the perception of the TTC as a reliable, customer-focused service provider.

Cities around the world have shown how strong wayfinding systems can become part of an agency's and city's identity, supporting both user experience and brand strength:

The iconic TfL (London) "roundel" and Johnston typeface are deeply integrated into London's culture and instantly communicate trust, clarity and coherence. Wayfinding in London is a key branding asset – guiding people while reinforcing pride in the network.

With its art nouveau station signs and unified signage system, the Paris Metro has both charm and functionality. The visual consistency of its static and digital systems contributes to a seamless customer experience while expressing the brand of the city's transit authority (RATP).

MRT (Singapore) integrates physical signage with multilingual information, tactile surfaces and real-time digital displays – all under the cohesive brand system that reinforces the perception of speed, order and accessibility.

TransLink (Vancouver) has developed a system-wide wayfinding and signage strategy that emphasizes intermodal consistency, accessible design and a unified customer experience across SkyTrain, SeaBus and West Coast Express. The use of standardized icons, colour and typography reinforces the brand and makes switching between services intuitive.

SEPTA (Philadelphia) is undergoing a system-wide signage overhaul, including the Metro Wayfinding Program, to simplify its network and introduce a clearer visual language. SEPTA aims to strengthen its identity and improve navigation especially for new and infrequent users.

TfL (London)

MRT (Singapore)

TransLink (Vancouver)

Like these peer systems, the TTC has an opportunity to strengthen its brand through wayfinding – not just by improving signage clarity but by reinforcing a consistent, professional and people-first identity across all customer touchpoints.

Ultimately, wayfinding doesn't just help people get from point A to point B – it reminds them they are part of a system designed for them. It is one of the most powerful ways to visibly demonstrate the TTC's values and is a critical part of delivering a future-ready, people-centered transit experience for Toronto.

Making the system easier to navigate, especially for new, occasional or anxious riders, can improve ridership. When all digital and physical touchpoints – signage, apps, announcements – are consistent and intuitive, the journey feels more seamless and approachable. A strong example of this is Transport for London where wayfinding and branding are treated as integral parts of the city's identity. This consistency signals trust, ease and reliability, making public transport a default and attractive choice. Building a similarly unified system can help elevate transit visibility and build rider confidence, thus encouraging more people to choose transit.

Acknowledging the current state

Wayfinding throughout the TTC is the product of years of attempts to incorporate ideas and suggestions from a variety of sources, outside of a cohesive strategy. Attempts were often "pilots" applied in a few locations without a larger vision, resources or schedule for completion across assets. In addition, the responsibility and accountability for the implementation was never centralized.

The narrative across Toronto's media and social channels makes it clear that wayfinding in transit has been a significant focus for many years, through advocacy and public and political critique. Fragmented signage from different eras of development and utilizing different styles confuses customers. The current situation is a result of a lack of intention and focus over decades.

A new wayfinding standard was developed in 2013, but an implementation plan was not developed. The absence of clarity across the organization in terms

of roles and responsibilities, poor integration into state-of-good repair projects and capital initiatives, a lack of internal training on the standard and inadequate operating and capital plans to resource wayfinding initiatives have resulted in the current state.

The research and preparation of this Strategy was undertaken to set us on a new path towards world-class transit experiences.

The vision

Wayfinding for a TTC customer will be an easy and intuitive multi-sensory experience. Customer options will be created following a clear guideline that enables all customer personas the ease and ability to plan trips ahead of their journey, easily navigate while in the system and feel safe and independent while doing so. A customer's experience will be effortlessly guided through all the stages of their journey, from the kitchen table to their destination.

For TTC staff, consistency between customer touchpoints will be thoroughly adhered to by all teams/departments. Decisions impacting design, placement and implementation follow this Strategy and its supporting documents. For the TTC, there will be clarity on how standards are applied, with respect for, and prioritizing, the customer experience above all else. The result will be a customer experience that is seamless across transit services.

Imagine a rider waiting at the bus stop: the iconography and information they see on their personal device matches what they see at the stop itself, reinforcing confidence through consistency. As they board the vehicle, clear audio announcements help guide them – ensuring that wayfinding is not just visual, but something experienced through sight, sound and even touch.

This multi-sensory approach to navigation is at the heart of our vision as it will meet the diverse needs of all our customers. Wayfinding is a lever that can make transit a first choice, not a backup plan. When people feel confident, they are more likely to continue making transit their preferred travel mode.

Customer-Centric
Toronto is a global city at the heart of a broader region, home to many cultures and a diversity of people. Everyday millions of trips are taken by long-time residents, new citizens, students and visitors from far and wide, all having an array of needs. The overall principle is to ensure that the TTC wayfinding meets the customer experience needs of all groups.

Clear
Keep information simple, concise and easy to understand using plan language and intuitive iconography. Leverage the hundred years of brand equity as a cornerstone of wayfinding, providing confidence for navigating the system. Avoid the use of operational and planning terminology and ensure messaging meets or exceeds accessibility/AODA requirements.

Consistent and Predictable
Use the same terminology, symbols, colours, fonts, spacing and layout across all applications. Wayfinding should be as easy for customers to navigate below ground as above, with clear spatial location information and direction of travel, as well as an understanding of what's at street level.

Integrated
Toronto is geographically the centre of the GTHA, encircled by Peel, York and Durham Regions, and drawing daily ridership from regions beyond. Additionally, GO Transit and UP Express provide cross-regional services that interconnect with the TTC. An integrated customer experience means that a customer should notice little difference migrating between systems. A guiding principle will be to continue to build cohesion between the iconic TTC brand, regional partners and Metrolinx.

Start with the journey

Why does TTC care about wayfinding? Every single day, people in Toronto leave their homes with a destination in mind and the TTC becomes how they reach that destination. Whether it's getting to work, visiting family or just making it to a doctor's appointment – transit isn't just about moving through the city; it's about moving through life.

The Strategy is grounded in one essential principle: the customer journey must lead the design. Through extensive consultation with both customers and front-line employees, the TTC gathered hundreds of stories, complaints, observations and lived experiences. These inputs were mapped into a detailed customer journey framework – not as an abstract diagram but a living tool that shows how riders move through the system from their front door to their final destination. This journey map now functions as a diagnostic and design tool, helping us understand not just where signage or information is needed, but why it's needed and when during the journey it makes the most impact.

Take for example a family in Riverside, starting their morning at the kitchen table. Before they even step outside, their transit experience has already begun – they've checked a trip planning app, visited the TTC website and scanned for service alerts. This digital front-end is their first wayfinding touchpoint. It needs to be intuitive, reliable and clearly connected to the physical network.

Now imagine they step outside and walk to Broadview Avenue and Dundas Street. A notification at the stop informs them that the 504 King streetcar is being diverted. Instead of going to Broadview Station, they replan their trip and reroute to TMU Station via the 505 Dundas streetcar.

The information at the stop must be immediate, trustworthy and easy to understand – including shelter signage, service alerts and visual look and feel that affirms they are still within the TTC network. The shelter's layout, the presence of a stop marker pylon, next vehicle arrival screen and tactile elements all support reassurance and decision-making.

When the streetcar arrives, clear vehicle livery design and consistent on-board wayfinding elements – such as passenger information screens, audio announcements and system maps – ensure that the rider's confidence continues uninterrupted. As the family approaches TMU Station, a new set of cues come into play. How do they know this is a subway connection point? Is there a visible TTC beacon or monument sign? How is the building integrated into the surrounding environment especially in a mixed development context?

Inside the station, a new layer of wayfinding takes over; vertical and horizontal circulation signage, tactile walking surface indicators, and station specific information all guide the customer intuitively from the fare line to the subway platform. Each of these wayfinding elements exists not in isolation but as a thread in the full journey – anchored in the lived experiences mapped out through consultation and designed to provide seamless, confident navigation every step of the way.

Research, consultations and stakeholders

To improve the customer journey, the TTC conducted extensive consultation to identify key gaps and asked customers, stakeholders and international experts for their input.

Engagement interactions were facilitated with TTC customers, front-line employees and transit advocates – throughout the fall and winter of 2024.

Employee Survey
In October 2024, TTC launched an employee wayfinding survey to all TTC frontline staff (union and non-union) to gather feedback about what they hear regarding wayfinding from customers. An employee communications plan supported awareness of the survey so that TTC could reach out to staff whose regular workplace is remote. Survey results included information about specific surface routes and stations where immediate action is required as well key areas for improvement (in-vehicle announcements, closures and diversions and real-time digital information). Over 100 surveys were completed by frontline staff.

Customer Surveys
TTC customers participated in our Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) as well as an independent wayfinding survey deployed online with Forum Research. The CSS survey targeted questions for specific user groups such as nighttime travellers, families, mobility users, those making cross-boundary trips, visitors/tourists and customers with english as a second language.

The *Customer Wayfinding Strategy Survey* ran for two months in the fall of 2024 which asked detailed questions about how people navigate the system which informed our customer journey maps.

The responses from all surveys uncovered common themes, challenges and opportunities for improvement. TTC also engaged with our Advisory Committee on Accessible Transit (ACAT) members to ensure diverse voices and accessibility needs shaped our direction. The results of this feedback is integrated throughout the Strategy.

Cross-Departmental Working Group
A wide range of initiatives throughout the organization involve wayfinding. To embrace that the definition of wayfinding has changed over the years to include increasingly more touchpoints, a cross-departmental working group was created to establish collective ownership of wayfinding as an organization-wide responsibility. Through collaborative consultations, operational expertise and customer insight collaborated and have initiated alignment on how and what is needed to support a system that helps people move through it with clarity and ease.

International best practices

Externally, the TTC looked beyond Toronto to learn from global leaders – consulting and collaborating with in-house teams at other transit agencies to gain insight and learn from their experiences. The TTC participated in the Wayfinding and Placemaking Conference hosted by the Society for Experiential Graphic Design (April 2025). The UK based Sign Design Society also hosted sessions attended by wayfinding leaders where staff engaged with peers, learning innovative solutions which are incorporated into this document and workplans.

Consultations were held with peer transit systems to understand their approach, wayfinding scope and governance. Discussions included Metrolinx (Ontario), York Region Transit (York Region), MiWay (Mississauga), Hamilton Transit, Durham Region Transit, LA Metro (Los Angeles), OC Transpo (Ottawa), MTA (New York), SEPTA (Philadelphia), TMB (Barcelona), STM (Montreal), TransLink (Vancouver), WMATA (Washington) and TfL (London). Insights and recommendations from these conversations are included throughout the strategy.

Through conversations with national and international transit agencies, the TTC gained valuable insights into how wayfinding standards are developed, implemented and maintained across a range of systems:

SEPTA (Philadelphia)
We learned the critical importance of robust, well-documented standards, particularly as they transition to a new, unified signage system.

MTA (New York)
Discussions provided insight into their internal team structure and how wayfinding is operationalized across a large, complex network.

RATP (Paris)
Their system demonstrated a strong model of integrating digital and static signage in a consistent and coordinated manner across their system.

MRT (Singapore)
In discussions with their transit designers, we explored how standards can be selectively applied – not through full-system overhauls but by targeting specific sign types and key locations.

LA Metro (Los Angeles)
We examined their approach to rapid implementation, including their use of temporary materials like vinyl overlays to quickly support new infrastructure projects such as the Regional Connector.

Canadian Agencies
Through conversations with TransLink (Vancouver), STM (Montreal), OC Transpo (Ottawa), and others, we gained a deeper understanding of how organizational structures support wayfinding and how their teams are actively rolling out standards in phased and strategic ways.

Within Toronto, Union Station has been a topic critical to discussions around FIFA World Cup signage. Ongoing meetings with the City of Toronto and Metrolinx will ensure alignment between spaces owned by various operators, and a working group has been formed to ensure signage and other touchpoints are addressed consistently by agencies serving the station.

These engagements affirmed that while every transit system is unique, shared challenges and lessons can inform a more resilient, adaptable and effective Strategy for the TTC.

Canadian Standards Association

The CSA (Canadian Standards Association) is actively working on a new wayfinding standard for transit facilities and the TTC is an active participating member in the working group. The group's primary goal is to create standards that address the challenges of wayfinding in transit systems. This includes for ensuring clear and consistent signage, clearly communicating accessible paths of travel, and the effective use of wayfinding cues.

The standards reviewed by the group consider the following themes:

- Embracing universal design

- Mandating consistency

- Prioritizing digital accessibility

- Championing open data standards

- Integrating accessibility beyond compliance

- Acknowledging context and place

- Embedding process for auditing and state of good repair

- Addressing critical gaps

The timeliness of this work is indicative of the larger conversation happening across major cities. The TTC will continue to actively participate in discussions and adapt our wayfinding standard to align with evolving industry standards, which is critical to success.

Equity and Inclusion Considerations

Consultation will continue with key stakeholder groups including cross-boundary customers, nighttime travellers, customers with language and literacy requirements, customers with special needs, those travelling with a mobility device, and newcomers – ensuring that new innovations at the TTC are grounded in real-world needs and perspectives.

The feedback provided by stakeholder groups *TTC Riders* and *Women Transit Riders* have also proved invaluable when reviewing current practices. By engaging with these groups early and continuously, we build equity, trust and identify challenges we may not otherwise see, to co-create solutions that are inclusive, practical and effective.

As the TTC trials new wayfinding products and solutions, consulting with these stakeholder groups will be essential to delivering services that are not only innovative but equitable and responsive to the diversity of our customers.

Wayfinding audit and gap analysis

Current Guiding Documents: Assessment

An assessment of relevant documents and current tactics/channels was undertaken to determine where TTC is aligned and where inconsistencies exist that manifest in disjointed wayfinding across the system. Materials reviewed included existing standards, documents from contiguous partners, and internal guidelines currently in use by various departments.

Our findings included the following:

- Wayfinding should address more than signs.

- Human-centered design requires that TTC think about a customer's level of effort and confidence as markers of success when evaluating wayfinding.

- "Look and feel" of TTC-owned digital assets compared to those of others is inconsistent, causing customer confusion which can lead to traffic flow issues, anxiety and stress.

- A catalogue of sign types and designs (the primary contents of the TTC's current wayfinding standards) is not sufficient, and a traditional signage manual does not meet modern needs.

- Formalized governance/processes within the TTC outlining RACI (Responsibility, Accountability, Consulted, Informed) related to wayfinding decisions during any development to a physical or digital asset is missing.

- The common level of knowledge amongst staff about wayfinding, standards and how to implement is low.

- Internal capabilities for digital user experience (UX) and digital interface (UI) design are low and require resourcing. Oversight to ensure that in-house development, partnerships and out-sourced work are designed to be coherent is needed.

- Audio guidance is inconsistent across generations of rolling stock and recordings/ announcements require further auditing and consultation.

- Audio guidance for unplanned disruptions is critical to customer confidence.

- Technical feeds to digital information at some locations are caught between generations of technology, such that installed signs from varying procurements do not receive the same information and display contradictory information.

- Legislation for other systems (GO/UP) requires english and french translation to be prominent in the wayfinding experience. At interchange stations, the static, digital and auditory presence of two languages is inconsistent with the experience provided by the TTC and its regional partners. The TTC is not staffed to provide services in both official languages, and there is hesitancy to commit to this; there is even further hesitancy to extend that commitment to regional partners who have significantly fewer resources than Metrolinx.

- The Canadian Standards Association working group will implement new standards that the TTC will need to integrate into its guidelines.

- Non-fare revenue opportunities require consideration when implementing wayfinding as outlined in that parallel strategy.

- Current standards will require refinements and additions to incorporate requirements of the Ontario Building Code and AODA standards.

While many of our transit partners focus primarily on static signage within their wayfinding standards, TTC will need to understand how these existing standards could integrate with the TTC's new approach – especially at intermodal stations where agencies connect – to create a more seamless and consistent customer experience. Beyond signage, the TTC will continue to engage in conversations with our partners to explore whether they have established audio or digital standards that TTC could learn from or build upon. By identifying transferable best practices, TTC aims to strengthen our own standards and make them more comprehensive, inclusive and future-ready.

Asset Audit: Current State

Baselines are critical to making informed, reality-based decisions. To prepare for the writing of this Strategy, staff completed an audit cataloguing assets across four categories:

Stations
A listing of all assets (static, digital, architectural) and their vintage. A procurement is underway to partner with a vendor that uses AI/photography to capture these assets, and catalogue and update as changes are made. With so many teams working in the same spaces, TTC needs regular updates to accessible current state, information to increase the efficiency of staff. Currently, staff are required to plan frequent trips to sites to gather information, take measurements, images, etc, which are stored in various locations. The vision is to have one system, with reliable, current information so that decisions can be made efficiently without the time-drain of site visits multiple times per week.

Surface Stops
Site visits to each type of stop coupled with a review of existing data were used to complete an assessment of surface routes. With 10,000+ locations, a full assessment would require resources not currently available. Surface route markers, shelter assets, pedestrian amenities, etc. were catalogued for the purposes of evaluating the costing of enhancements.

Digital Customer Experience
The digital customer experience focuses on use of personal handheld devices for navigation of customers. Wayfinding on your personal device could include trip planners such as Transit, Google Maps, Apple Maps or Moovit and/or navigation aids for both indoor and outdoor spaces such as Waze, Pointr, and BlindSquare. The way TTC services appear in these applications must be compared against a set of common criteria, in consultation with ACAT and TTC customers. This review has begun, and further work is required to ensure that TTC GTFS-RT feeds provide third-party developers with well-structured data that includes the content required for a seamless experience across digital and physical spaces.

Vehicles
The Wayfinding team is accountable for the design and management of livery and customer messaging on all vehicles, for interior and exterior applications. The governance and implementation of a standard process requires improvement, however, much

progress has been made in recent years. The consistency of information displayed on vehicles, particularly regarding bylaw enforcement and fare payment augment the scope of wayfinding.

Results: Physical Wayfinding

As part of the audit, upcoming capital projects were reviewed to identify where wayfinding upgrades could be aligned with existing work. This step was used in the financial modelling to help determine where funding could be leveraged and where new capital investment would be required.

Today, the TTC's system includes a wide range of physical and static signage – some signs dating back to the original opening of a station, with others introduced more recently through capital projects such as Easier Access or Second Exit initiatives. The current station assessment revealed that 39% of signage reflects current standards and the remaining 61% still follows legacy formats.

No single station is 100% complete to the current standard.

Over the years, projects were designed and rolled out by need, often one sign at a time, rather than through upgrading an entire station. This highlights the significant work ahead to achieve consistency system-wide and bring all stations, loops and surface network to 100% alignment with updated standards. The interim report presented on January 27, 2025 identified the need for $140M in funding to fix the current situation. That figure was based on the static sign audit only and does not include costing for the expanded definition of wayfinding

Traditionally, audits focused solely on station signage. For the first time, this audit expanded to include signage across our surface network as well as digital wayfinding tools – providing a more holistic view of the system and helping to better identify gaps and opportunities for future funding and resourcing. The broader financial impacts of this improvement are listed in the financial section.

Results: Digital Wayfinding

The TTC needs to decide the direction it will take on digital wayfinding for customers. A number of reviews are currently underway to assess:

ttc.ca

A review and assessment of the User Experience (UX) and User Interface (UI) of ttc.ca is currently in market with a request for vendors. This work will inform staff of where TTC is aligned with current best practices in web design, and where improvement is required to facilitate ease of navigation by TTC customers on our website. The last comprehensive review of our primary source for digital information was conducted more than ten years ago.

Mobile App

The value of partnering with established wayfinding apps vs. developing an in-house product is currently in review in response to recent Board motions. The primary question is whether the functionality and digital experience desired by customers of all types can be delivered cost-effectively and nimbly. The second critical consideration is the ability to upgrade functionality to stay current and ahead of tech innovations in the personal digital space vs. the cost/ability to present that experience either in house or with a partner. A further report will be brought back to the Board on this item.

Digital Signage Installations at Stations and Surface Stops

Arrival information screens, next bus information, bus bay/platform assignments, subway information screens, street-level bus information screens have involved multiple business owners and processes over the years, resulting in the procurement of a variety of systems. This is being reviewed by joint working groups involving Customer Experience, Planning, Customer Communications, Wayfinding, ITS, Transit Control and infrastructure teams.

Procurement and installation cycles have taken so long that by the time the purchases are installed, they are already out of date. TTC are currently "living between two systems", beholden to decisions made up to a decade ago and implementing infrastructure that sources its information feed from out-of-date systems. Staff will recommend that while still not completely installed, the older, limited legacy system be removed and replaced with a system able to universally accept data feeds on high-resolution screens.

Text to Mobile Options

Stop-specific arrival texts are a popular option, but these cost the TTC more than $360k/yr in service fees alone. There are limitations to the experience for a customer, as each "ping" to request information comes with a monetary change. To manage the budget, limits were set at 10 requests per day, but were recently changed to 20 due to customer feedback.

Each of these items have been carefully considered and costed to determine how best to improve the overall wayfinding experience.

Capabilities audit

Today, the TTC's wayfinding work is performed by the Design and Wayfinding section, within the Marketing and Customer Experience Department. The current structure of the Design and Wayfinding team includes:

- 1 Manager
- 1 Assistant Manager of Design overseeing 2 Graphic Designers
- 1 Supervisor overseeing 2 Print and Digital Information Designers and 1 Graphic Designer
- 4 Wayfinding Coordinators

In 2024 the TTC's Design and Wayfinding team supported wayfinding and operational needs through numerous activities, including but not limited to:

- Review, design and consult on dozens of third-party development connections
- Review, design and consult on Eglinton Line, Finch West Line, Ontario Line, Yonge-University Line Extension, Bloor-Danforth Line Extension and resulting construction impacts
- Oversight on construction and renewal projects, ensuring that signage is compliant and consistent with the rest of the system
- Design and production of all back of house and safety signage for TTC facilities
- Creation of livery standards for new vehicles procured by the commission (revenue and non-revenue)
- Review and support of state-of-good-repair, easier access/second exit projects
- Design, production and deployment of 9,158 stop marker signs for service disruptions and changes
- Creation of 333 operational maps
- Design of 465 unique wayfinding notices for 92 supported subway closures
- 410 bus destination sign changes programmed
- Signage support on 17 major construction projects (hoarding, directional signage, etc)
- Design and coordination of 226 individual design projects (annual reports, presentations, events, marketing and communications supports)

Volume of work vs resources

Beyond the responsibilities listed above, the TTC's Design and Wayfinding group is heavily immersed in preparations for the openings of Lines 5 Eglinton and 6 Finch West, supporting in-house requests, participation in regional working groups and involvement in discussions related to large scale events that require wayfinding and communications support for patrons. The workload requires overtime from staff on a regular basis, predictably causing the same individuals to repeatedly upset their work-life balance. There is need for additional expertise, volume management and diversity of skills within the group.

Digital expertise: missing

Expertise in digital customer experience and user experience design is not present within the TTC, whether on the Design and Wayfinding team or others. This is needed to ensure that static design principles translate to digital media, adequate oversight is provided on decisions made by other teams and quality control is maintained.

Quality assurance for work done by third-party partners leveraging the TTC brand or using TTC information through GTFS-RT feeds also requires monitoring for adherence to TTC standards. Resources are needed to bring these ambitious projects to life.

Technical expertise: market availability

Wayfinding design is a unique skillset that is often difficult to recruit for as the number of places an employee could gain the integrated experience required at the TTC is limited in the GTHA. While experience gained through consulting firms is desirable on our team, the salary differential and perks enjoyed at private firms make drawing these individuals to our organization a barrier. There are few accredited educational programs focused solely on transit wayfinding design and individuals with the capacity and skills required often need to be recruited from similarly-sized systems and/or also developed in-house. Wayfinding design roles require the ability to assess wayfinding needs in physical spaces, as well as the ability to read, interpret and provide commentary on architectural drawings, review engineering designs and work with internal tradespeople to ensure that fabrication and installation is completed properly. This includes overseeing the work of unionized staff, with unique reporting structures, on site where projects are happening.

The organizational design and job descriptions on the Design and Wayfinding team have not been reviewed comprehensively in over ten years. The complexity of required skills sets has grown exponentially over the years and an organizational review is in progress to match the marketplace and vision of this Strategy.

At present, 25% of the team is able to retire within 36 months and up to 40% could retire in 5 years. Institutional knowledge needs to be codified, passed on and retained. Additional staff need to be onboarded quickly enough that the transfer of knowledge and skills can be completed to avoid gaps in productivity.

Design and Wayfinding at a Glance

11 Designers

MANAGEMENT **17%**

DESIGN **42%**

WAYFINDING **33%**

1 Manager
1 Assistant Manager
1 Supervisor
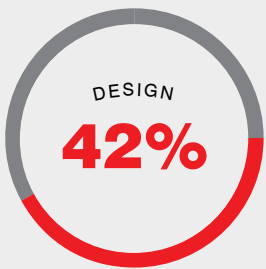
5 Graphic Designers

4 Wayfinding Coordinators

2024

333 operational maps, **465** unique wayfinding notices, **410** bus destination signs, **17** construction projects, **9158** stop marker changes, **226** design projects

Another way to support the development of potential team members is to expand positions for students through co-op opportunities or targeted post-graduate contract opportunities, to allow the TTC to ramp up bench strength when needed and provide exposure to passionate transit advocates.

Design expertise:

Currently, the Design and Wayfinding team divides its responsibilities between wayfinding planning and corporate design support. While the team contributes to select marketing and communication initiatives, there is limited in-house creative capacity, with most complex or high-volume marketing work being outsourced to external agencies. Given the scale of work outlined in this Strategy – including the development of new wayfinding principles, digital interfaces and documentation of audio – there is a clear case for investing in in-house creative competencies to ensure consistency, efficiency and brand control across all deliverables. In addition, the customer communications placed on closure notices and digital communications are supported by the Customer Communications team which is also facing a challenge with volume and could use additional support to tackle the volume of work proposed in the Strategy.

In addition to the capital costs, the successful delivery of the Strategy depends on having the right organizational capacity and expertise in place. The TTC is currently undergoing an internal organizational review with Design and Wayfinding to assess:

- Current roles and responsibilities
- Staff proficiency and training needs
- Capacity gaps in planning, implementation and oversight of wayfinding initiatives

- As part of this review, we are identifying areas where:
- Existing staff can be upskilled through targeted training programs to build internal expertise
- Cross-functional roles (e.g. in digital experience, accessibility or project delivery) can better support the Strategy
- New hires may be needed to ensure we have the resources to manage increased volume and scope across stations, surface network, vehicles and digital platforms

A full staff analysis and re-organization is required further to the preliminary analysis done. A combination of operating and capital positions are being proposed to meet the needs for the next two years to kick start the program, with further assessment to determine ongoing needs at the 18-month mark.

A right-sizing of staff resources to meet current volumes and manage expansion programs, capital projects and state of good repair in addition to the scope of this Strategy is presented as a minimum request.

Framework

There are three elements that are needed to realize the TTC's wayfinding vision: an updated and expanded wayfinding standard that supports the new definition of wayfinding, guidelines that determine where and how wayfinding elements are to appear and be implemented, and brand guidelines that comprehensively explain to both internal TTC staff and external consultants how the TTC communicates to its customers, through colours, fonts, sizing, placement rules, vehicle livery, terminology, planning principles, etc.

Wayfinding Standard

To supersede the existing standard, the findings accumulated through research need to be compiled into a detailed document including:

- Revised planning principles that guide how wayfinding is integrated into new builds and retrofits

- The optimal physical location of signage throughout the system and on vehicles

- Specifications and processes related to diversions and closures

- Updated static signage specifications to include gaps that were identified in customer consultations

- Audio and written messaging guidelines

- Increased attention to accessibility and AODA needs

- Updates to current standards to incorporate customer feedback and integration with regional and local partners, creating third-party and multi-modal signage standards

- Third-party and multi-modal signage standards

- Scope surrounding personal digital wayfinding tools/partnerships

Wayfinding guidelines

Guidelines play a critical role by providing detailed direction on asset placement, information hierarchy and consistency across modes and environments. These rules of wayfinding inform decision making at the design and development stages for new projects and clarify any discussions for repairs/retrofits. The key to successful adherence is awareness and training to convey the purpose and intent, from Chiefs to front-line staff. When everyone in the continuum who can decide where and how something is placed is aware and trained in the standards, personal preferences will not fill the vacuum of decision making.

Brand guidelines

TTC brand guidelines will define our visual, written and spoken language through the use of colours, icons, typography, terminology, tone and criteria for clarity (written, audio, etc.) Everyone in the organization has access to rudimentary design tools and in an honest effort to support, can create information pieces which are "off-brand" and confusing at best, or look hodge-podge, unprofessional and like an after-thought. The Brand Standards document will provide a toolkit to avoid this and will work in lock-step with other marketing branding and branding rules, so that there is a singular voice, imagery and look for the TTC, that when applied consistently over time, will develop recognition and trust in the system.

Implementation hierarchy

The implementation of the updated wayfinding standards will be guided by three key factors: corporate strategies, system-wide priorities and customer feedback.

Corporate Strategy

1. Is the station/location/project identified in a Corporate Plan approved by the Board?

2. Is the station/location/project identified in a Strategy approved by the Board?

System-Wide Priorities

3. Has this station/location/project been identified through leadership tables as a high-priority due to concurrent projects happening in this location?

4. Has this station/project been identified as a high-priority because of TTC/City commitments?

5. Has this project been elevated due to opportunity/synergy with other funding?

6. Does this project support a large-scale or important city event (i.e. FIFA World Cup, Pan Am Games)

Customer Feedback

7. Has Customer Service Comments (CSC) analysis elevated this concern as a critical touchpoint for customers?

8. Have stakeholders identified a customer experience issue that requires review?

All of these criteria and evaluations are then subject to resourcing, budget and timelines.

Our immediate focus will be subway stations and streetcar stops identified as high-impact supporting the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Stations have been prioritized due to their visibility, expectations around tourist traffic and the need to support seamless navigation for visitors unfamiliar with the TTC. Half of these stations happen to be the top stations noted in our customer feedback. Enhancing the wayfinding experience at these locations will help ensure a welcoming, intuitive transit experience for both new and existing riders during a globally significant event. At this juncture, the following stations are being proposed to support FIFA World Cup in Toronto: Union, St Andrew, Bathurst, Dufferin, Kipling, Bloor-Yonge stations, Dufferin Gate Loop and the Fleet Street streetcar platform.

Another major focus will be interchange stations – the highest-volume points in the network, where customers transfers between subway lines and often surface routes. These locations are critical for demonstrating the full effectiveness of the new standards, as they require clear, consistent and accessible information to support complex transfer and high passenger flow.

For 2025–2026, the key stations will be Eglinton, Cedarvale and Kennedy stations on Line 5 Eglinton and Finch West Station on Line 6 Finch West. As the TTC was not able to gain full access to stations to immediately understand the full needs of customers transitioning between the new infrastructure and legacy stations, staff will immediately focus on gaps in wayfinding. By focusing first on these key locations, the TTC can showcase the impact of the updated standards while addressing areas with the greatest customer benefit.

Hierarchy by customer touchpoint: Need or want?

There is a plethora of ideas out there to improve customer experience and the full scope of wayfinding. Every system in the world has something new or different that the TTC does not have, yet this fact in itself does not mean that TTC is deficient for not having that touchpoint within the design of our customer journey. This Strategy, and the customer experience work in general, is designed to instill discipline and promote collaboration with colleagues across the organization, especially in areas such as the finance team's business transformation unit, to assess and quantify the customer benefit, the budget stress and overall value for investment made into any of the ideas presented.

During our reviews of options, the team will work with our business analyst partners to assess aspects of each idea before it is implemented.

Questions to ask ourselves:

1. Is a proprietary or partnership model better?

2. What current capabilities provided by the private sector are already included in mobile devices?

3. How might we expand current "free offerings" such as Google Streetview, to extend that inside stations/d third party access, to facilitate trip planning?

4. How are diverse groups impacted by the addition/ deletion of touchpoints? e.g. tourists, seniors, non-digital users, non-english speakers, students, those new to Toronto.

5. How are we achieving consistency between touchpoints, e.g. analysis of Wayfinding Standards vs. Marketing and Customer Communications guidelines?

Implementation plan

As TTC moves forward with implementation, the TTC is focusing on several key areas: station completion, digital customer experience, vehicles, innovation and updates to our surface network.

Station Completion:

1. Complete 3 stations completely to serve as "comprehensive pilots/showcases"

2. Phasing and prioritization

3. Review roles and responsibilities within teams and process map for cross-commission understanding

Within the station completion stream, our goal is to fully upgrade three stations as comprehensive pilots and showcase the new wayfinding standard. These stations were selected to represent different parts of the network and different wayfinding challenges.

Dundas Station (future TMU Station): This downtown station presents a unique opportunity to demonstrate how TTC handles name changes, communicate points of interest and improve navigational clarity through a complex urban environment. It will be a key test case for wayfinding in a high-density area with heavy foot traffic through a PATH network connection.

St George Station: As a major interchange, St George will showcase how the new standard transforms legacy signage and improves navigation between lines, modes and destinations. It will illustrate how clear, consistent signage can enhance transfers between Line 1 and Line 2 and improve access to nearby landmarks such as the Royal Ontario Museum and the Bata Shoe Museum.

Finch West Station: As the connection point between the TTC's Line 1 and the new Line 6 (delivered by Metrolinx), this station provides a prime opportunity to demonstrate coordination between two agencies. It will highlight how shared visual language – terminology, pictograms and branding – can create a unified experience, ensuring that whether the customer is entering the existing TTC fareline or the newly constructed fareline, it feels like one cohesive system. The station will serve as a model for inter-agency collaboration and brand consistency at newly built or retrofitted stations.

By completing these stations as early implementations, TTC can test, consult with focused customer and employee groups, refine and demonstrate the full potential of the Strategy before scaling across the network.

Digital Customer Experience:

1. Research and decide on direction: development of internal app or partnering with qualified, industry leading providers

2. Develop digital CX capabilities in house through additional talent acquisition and training/development

Performance measurement and evaluation

Key Performance Indicators

1. **Customer satisfaction** (survey results)

2. **Customer Service Comments** (sentiment analysis, frequency, volume)

3. **Workplan completion**

To ensure the success of the Wayfinding Strategy, TTC will track and evaluate our progress through a defined set of key performance indicators (KPIs) focusing on both customer experience and implementation progress:

Customer satisfaction and experience
TTC will use insights from the Customer Satisfaction Survey to measure overall user perception of wayfinding improvements. This includes tracking sentiment, ease of navigation, and confidence while using the system.

Customer feedback and comments
An analysis of Customer Service Comments (CSCs) will help us understand shifts in sentiment and identify any recurring wayfinding-related issues. A reduction in the frequency and volume of complaints over time will signal improved customer experience.

Workplan completion
TTC will monitor the progress of implementation across four major areas and this KPI will track milestones, completion percentages and overall adherence to the timelines in our wayfinding workplan:

- Station upgrades
- Digital experience enhancements
- Surface network enhancements
- Vehicle livery updates

Feedback Loops

- User testing
- Survey development
- Stakeholder walkthroughs to gather feedback
- Assessing experiences of target groups

To ensure our wayfinding solutions meet the needs of all riders, TTC will conduct targeted user testing with a broad range of customer groups including:

- Cross-boundary travellers (connecting with other transit agencies)
- Nighttime travellers
- Customers with language and literacy barriers
- People with disabilities or using mobility devices
- Newcomers to Toronto or unfamiliar with the TTC system

This testing focuses on real-world navigation challenges and identifies design improvements that enhance accessibility, clarity and ease of use for all.

As part of the piloted station rollouts, TTC will create opportunities for real-time customer feedback by enabling riders to share their experiences while navigating the updated spaces. This may include on-site QR codes and digital surveys to capture impressions directly from the station environment.

In addition, TTC will host user information sessions at each pilot station, giving customers the opportunity to ask questions, learn about changes and share insights on what's working and where improvements can be made.

TTC will also conduct stakeholder walkthroughs, allowing internal teams, partner agencies, accessibility advocates and other key stakeholders to experience the new standards first-hand. These sessions will build understanding of the updated system, help identify operational or user challenges and create a shared vision for future implementation across the network.

Risk analysis and mitigation

The total estimated costs for bringing 61% of signage in stations up to updated wayfinding standards is $145 million. This figure includes the physical costs of replacing and upgrading existing signage. However, additional costs must also be considered for:

- Planning and design work, especially for complex station environments
- Net-new wayfinding solutions, including innovative or first-time installations
- Integration of digital, audio and accessibility-focused enhancements, which may not yet be fully costed but are critical to meeting modern standards

To mitigate financial risks, the TTC will:

- Build a comprehensive capital plan that include contingency for innovation and unforeseen design complexity
- Phase implementation strategically to align with other capital projects and reduce standalone costs
- Explore cost-sharing opportunities with partner agencies, especially in intermodal or shared stations
- Monitor and refine unit cost benchmarks throughout early pilot station implementations to improve cost forecasting for future phases

All emerging innovations or new sign types introduced through pilots or evolving technology will be assessed for cost, operational impact and value to the customer before being added to the system-wide budget plan.

- Consultation Costs: UX, UI best practices design for digital CX
- Staffing Resources: Organization Review and Roles/Responsibilities

Staffing Resources and Organizational Capacity

A detailed summary of the staffing resources and organization capacity is outlined under capability audit.

Iconic Presence

- Protecting the brand and iconography of the TTC as a wayfinding tools
- Strengthening the brand