

Thursday, September 17, 2020

Ministry of Transportation

5th Floor

777 Bay St.

Toronto, ON M7A 1Z8

Dear Minister Mulroney,

We, the undersigned, are writing to you today on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of young people, including 140,000+ post-secondary students, that we collectively represent. These students live, work, and commute within this city, and are an integral part of the communities in which they are a part of.

On a typical school day, approximately 8 to 9% of TTC users are elementary or high school students.¹ In 2016, 50% of youth ages 13-25 across Toronto relied on the TTC.² Students commuting to schools and campuses across the city overwhelmingly use the TTC, as they often have limited access to a car, and Toronto's cycling infrastructure is insufficient and incomplete. As school resumes across the city this month, the need for adequate physical distancing on the TTC is critical to keeping students and countless others safe, while in the midst of a global pandemic.

Prior to COVID-19, students across the city faced significant overcrowding on the TTC. Students have numerous accounts of being pushed off crowded buses, waiting for up to ten minutes or more for a subway train, and being stuffed into a crowded streetcar. While students have tolerated these conditions in the past, overcrowding was not adequately addressed before the pandemic, and as we start a new school year, these conditions will continue to persist as a result. This will likely cause a spike in COVID-19 cases, putting students, their families, and members of vulnerable communities at a higher risk of contracting the virus. This might also lead to students losing family and community members that support them with their education. The TTC is not safe for students, and this needs to change as soon as possible.

As you read this letter, buses throughout the city remain crowded, especially in low-income and racialized communities. The TTC must resume providing 100% service levels and work to implement more service if possible. Earlier in the pandemic, TTC staff reported that once ridership reached 30% of normal levels, the TTC would need to run at 100% service levels to maintain physical distancing. Ridership is now approaching 50%, but the TTC continues to run less than 100% of service capacity. This means that physical distancing is not guaranteed on the TTC.

Despite being the third busiest transit system on the continent, the TTC receives very little operational subsidies from the provincial or federal government, and relies heavily on fare revenue for almost two-thirds of its funding.³ While the provincial government recently announced \$400 million in emergency funding for the TTC, the TTC is projecting a \$700 million budget shortfall by the end of the year, and the province has indicated that the TTC must assess the feasibility of implementing micro-transit options" in

¹ Spurr, B. (2020, Aug. 25). When back to school means back to the TTC. *Toronto Star*. Retrieved from: <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/08/25/when-back-to-school-means-back-to-the-ttc-toronto-parents-see-another-cause-for-concern-19-worry.html>

² TTS Travel Summaries – City of Toronto – Wards. March 2018. http://dmg.utoronto.ca/pdf/tts/2016/2016TTS_Summaries_Toronto_Wards.pdf

³ 2020 Toronto Transit Commission and Wheel-Trans Operating Budgets <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2020/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-145792.pdf>

order to receive additional emergency funding.⁴ Implementing micro-transit options would see low-performing routes replaced with private companies. This will negatively impact racialized and low-income communities, as these routes are often vital connections for these communities, and provide an affordable means of access to the city. Students in particular would be disproportionately affected by the implementation of micro-transit options, as students and their families have faced significant economic impact as a result of the pandemic, and are now struggling to pay rent, groceries, childcare, and tuition fees for those in post-secondary. Providing emergency funding also fails to address the long-term problem facing the TTC: a lack of government subsidization and an over-reliance on fare revenues. Permanent funding without conditions is what riders need to ensure a safe September, and to future-proof our city's transit system throughout the pandemic and beyond.

To address these concerns, we urge the Government of Ontario to provide permanent transit operations funding without conditions, to enable the TTC and other transit agencies to increase service capacity immediately on buses, streetcars and subways. We further encourage the Government of Ontario to support new vehicle needs of the TTC and other transit agencies, so that service capacity can increase in the future.

As we reopen, we risk a disastrous second wave, as seen in Australia and the United States, and potentially seeing more of our loved ones succumb to the disease. Student safety must be ensured, for the sake of us, our families, and our communities. Public transit is and has always been a necessity. As we return back to school this month, we urge the provincial government to properly fund the TTC and other transit agencies, to ensure we can have a safe commute as we return to campus.

Signed,

University of Toronto Students' Union Executive Committee

Continuing Education Students' Association of Ryerson (CESAR)

Toronto Youth Cabinet

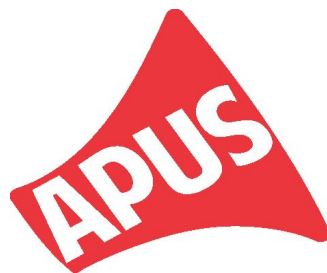
Scarborough Campus Students' Union Executive Committee

University of Toronto Mississauga Students' Union (UTMSU)

Association of Part-Time Undergraduate Students, University of Toronto (APUS)

York Federation of Students

⁴ McGillivray, K. (2020, August 18). Province tells Toronto to consider replacing low-performing bus routes with 'microtransit'. *CBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/microtransit-toronto-bus-routes-1.5691286>



CC:

Toronto Transit Commission Board of Directors

John Tory, Mayor of Toronto

Doug Ford, MPP & Premier of Ontario

Kinga Surma, MPP & Associate Minister of Transportation

Vijay Thanigasalam, MPP & Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Transportation

Andrea Horwath, MPP & Leader of the Official Opposition

Jessica Bell, MPP & New Democratic Party Critic for Transit

John Fraser, MPP & Parliamentary Leader of the Liberal Party

Stephen Blais, MPP & Liberal Party Critic for Transportation and Infrastructure

Mike Schreiner, MPP & Leader of the Green Party